



# The Perch Pod Episode 42

## The Future of the Middle East with Caroline Rose

**Jacob Shapiro:**

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**Jacob Shapiro:**

Hello listeners and welcome to another episode of the Perch Pod. As usual, I'm your host, I'm Jacob Shapiro. I'm also the founder and chief strategist of Perch Perspectives, which is a human centric business and political consulting firm. Joining us on the podcast today is Caroline Rose. Caroline is a senior analyst and head of the Power Vacuums program in the Human Security unit at the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy. Before that, she was at Geopolitical Futures. She and I actually never crossed paths at GPF. She got there after I had already left, but was happy to get a chance to invite her on the program. Not only happy, extremely appreciative, because we had a whole other episode planned and then our guest had some technical difficulties and Caroline despite having an international flight later in the day of this recording, was good enough to pinch hit and come in and talk about some of the work that she's been doing on the Middle East at Newlines on relatively short notice.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

So Caroline, thank you so much for making some time for me and for our listeners. It's greatly appreciated and we hope to have you back on soon. Listeners, that episode that I talked about it will be coming soon and I'm really excited about it, but I won't say anything else about it for now. Otherwise, before we get to Caroline, just your usual reminders to share, rate the podcast, all that kind of good stuff. Check us out at [perchperspectives.com](http://perchperspectives.com). You can find our free newsletter or the Latampolitic newsletter if you're interested in that. You can also write to us at [info@perchperspectives.com](mailto:info@perchperspectives.com) if you would like to hear more about the services that we offer, if you have any comments about this, I'm reading everything that's coming through, or if you just have any thoughts on your mind that you want to share and want someone to listen to.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

Other than that, it's beautiful October weather here in the United States. I hope that all of you are staying safe and staying well. And we'll see you out there. Cheers. All right, Caroline. I have no idea if this is going to record. Listeners, if it does, it's a minor miracle we've been troubleshooting now for almost as long as we're probably going to talk. Thank you for your stamina and sticking with us, Caroline. It's good to have you here.



**Caroline Rose:**

Thanks so much for having me, Jacob. I appreciate it. And sorry about the audio issues.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

It's all good. It's not your fault. Zencaster, this is on you guys. Need to figure some stuff out. So let's talk about the most stable region in the world with Caroline. The Middle East of course, is what I'm speaking about. Caroline, you look at the Middle East from a lot of different levels, and I know that you have some things that you've been focusing on in particular. But before we get to them, I just wanted to ask, what do you think is the most important thing happening in the Middle East right now that people are talking about or not talking about? Sort of when you're looking at it from a macro perspective, what is the most important thing moving things on the ground throughout the region today on Friday, October the eighth?

**Caroline Rose:**

So the Middle East right now is a really fascinating region to watch just because we're starting to see this really interesting transition from a dependency on US security and military assistance in the region to this very interesting dynamic and coalition that is emerging in the region between both the former rivals and adversaries and then existing partners there. And so the United States has started the withdrawal process in Iraq. It has indicated or signaled draw down in Syria. And we've already started to see the removal of Patriot defense missile systems in the Gulf, which is quite interesting. And while this has been happening, an interesting shifting alliance system in the Middle East to serve as kind of an alternative defacto security framework to stave Iran and stave other threats in the region.

**Caroline Rose:**

So I think that definitely is the most interesting and the biggest shift I'm starting to see in the region. And then of course with that, it comes with a lot of subtopics and sub issues that the United States and other countries should be concerned about. For example, normalization with the Assad regime, this re-proachment with Turkey and kind of the undertones of the Arab and Israeli peace accords, the Abram agreement. So I think that, that all ties into this new security framework that is emerging in the Middle East, which has great some benefits, but then also some really troubling aspects to it as well.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

Remarkable that it's 2021 and we're still talking about Bashar al-Assad. I did not have that on my bingo card in 2011 when things went crazy there.

**Caroline Rose:**

Absolutely.

**Jacob Shapiro:**



Before we dive into some of the specific stuff, do you feel that, or I shouldn't say, do you feel, do you assess that anyone is moving into the vacuum? You talked about the United States withdrawing from the region. I think that's in part strategic, in part it's just the United States doesn't need the energy from the region as much as it used to. Do you see the region balancing against itself and regional powers sort of carving out a space for their own regional influence or do you think that the Asian powers that are becoming more and more dependent on Middle Eastern oil and Middle Eastern natural gas increasingly, so I'm thinking about China, Japan, even India, South Korea, all of them are running around there and all of them have interest there. Do you see them replacing some of that US influence or it's really just the Middle East is finally being left to stew in its own juices?

**Caroline Rose:**

Great question. And this is a real interesting topic, and I think a lot of policy makers and analysts have thought about this. And I think it's important to think of the Middle East so-called vacuum as a series of different ungoverned spaces and spaces to be contested between regional and great powers. Not just one. Just because the United States so far has filled a number of gaps, the security gap, of course, military assistance, security assistance, a degree of advisory capacity, operational assistance. Aid, humanitarian aid, education. And then of course guidance in terms of judicial systems governance and human rights. Things like that. And so there are these different spaces. And of course, I can't forget this, the economic assistance as well. So knowing that there are number of different spaces for influence, I think that, yes, you're going to see a degree of great power interest.

**Caroline Rose:**

Russia's already active in Syria. Russia, of course, wants to increase its influence in the Mediterranean, but at the same time, it has a number of constraints, which is why I think that there when we talk about kind of security landscape in the Middle East after US withdrawal, everyone loves to jump to Russia and China whereas I think it's far more complicated than that. There are a lot of nuances here. And the first thing is that Russia has a lot of constraints in Syria already. There is a degree of domestic backlash against some of these foreign commitments, especially in conflict zones like Syria. And let's be honest, the immediate vacuums that will exist after US withdrawal, it's going to be Iraq. It's going to be Northeast Syria and it's going to be various areas in the Levant, such as Lebanon also and some places in the Gulf. Russia has no strategic into inheriting those conflict zones.

**Caroline Rose:**

It's for example, the same reason why in Afghanistan, certainly they want leverage and certainly they want influence, but Russia's not invading Afghanistan right now to inherit the mess and chaos that is persisting there. It's the same thing in a number of these spaces in the Middle East. In Syria, of course it's different dynamic because they already have troops there. They already have this advisory capacity and as well as a security guarantor for the Assad regime, but it's different. And the same thing, the same case applies for China and even more so in the security realm. China will be certainly seeking spaces for economic influence and for spaces to of course expand its Belt and Road initiative, I think. Particularly with the building off of its existing relationship and past deal that was arranged with Iran this past year.



But at the same time, the Middle East also, there's a lot of great potential and risk for insecurity. It's why that they are reevaluating their current corridor with Pakistan with a lot of insurgent activity.

**Caroline Rose:**

So I try and think people love to jump to, will China want to build a BRI corridor through the Middle East? No, probably not just because of the risk of instability and insurgent groups and failed economic projects that the region could introduce. But certainly they will seek economic influence. They will seek engagement. They will seek leverage and clout. But on, I think, a more limited level. We will not see the levels of engagement, the levels of presence with both Russia and China to the degree that we saw with the United States, especially during the years of its counter terrorism missions in the region. Now with regional powers, Iran, that's one of the main actors I see kind of filling this vacuum, especially in the security realm and the political realm. And I think Turkey will certainly try and compete, but Turkey of course has a lot of economic constraints. And right now there's this kind of, this wave of re-proachment that I think that might compel it to ally against Iran, along with some of its former adversaries.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

Makes sense. And I want to dig down into both of those. But before we leave sort of the macro situation, I wonder if the recent rise in oil prices, which JPM, somebody just sent me a report that has them saying that it's even low now and it might go higher. It's quite a change from the past couple of years when oil prices seemed to be low. And that's affected everything from Iran's willingness to negotiate the nuclear deal, from Saudi Arabia's willingness to fund their campaign in Yemen.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

And Turkey's more of an importer, but they've got gas interests in the Eastern Med. It seems to me that these energy price fluctuations are kind of a big deal. And if we're going through this sustained maybe longer period of higher oil prices, higher LNG prices, all that kind of stuff, does that change the calculus at all? I should have also mentioned Libya's in there as well, and they're hurdling towards maybe elections in December, hopefully that stuff stays together. So how do you think about how oil prices and energy prices globally in general are affecting some of the dynamics that you just traced out?

**Caroline Rose:**

Well, certainly. I think that when you have these higher LNG prices and the industry, in some cases a bit, I don't want to say more stable because I think this still is a sector that can vary, especially as with the past year, it's really exposed how vulnerable and volatile it can be. So on the same framework, I think that it has emboldened a lot of authoritarian behavior because it has made a lot of these countries recognize that economic alternatives in alternative industries, they don't have to rely on them just as much. But I also think that it's important to look at oil prices in conjunction with a lot of other factors that also embolden these countries, embolden their defense behavior. They embolden their regional and political behavior. And I think that it's also, for example, it's deals like the JCPOA, it's defense build up, its militarization.



**Caroline Rose:**

A lot of these other factors are also influencing how these countries are trying to reshape the security landscape of the Middle East in the wake of US draw down and withdrawal. But certainly oil prices, at least in the short term, will be heavily influencing how these alliances are shaped and informed, how they come together. And then also what kind of leverage these actors have at the negotiating table. I think that's a huge thing. And like you mentioned with Iran, that's why we have seen talks in Vienna stall significantly. Also, the fact that Iran feels a bit more emboldened to engage with new actors and new clients with their oil industry. It's why we've seen shipments to the Mediterranean. It's why we've seen Iranian tankers essentially venture beyond the Atlantic. And we've also seen them engage Afghanistan as a potential client for oil, Iranian oil exports as well. So it's an interesting framework to see how this affects behavior.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

And, I mean, with Iran, I could argue it both ways. I could see the increase in oil prices being a reason to get the JCPOA done so that they can get back into the game economically. Because, yes, they've been able to export in some ways, but the industry is crippled in Iran unless they have access to Western markets. That's just a fact. So maybe this moves it along for them. On the flip side, maybe they're getting a higher price for the stuff that they're getting through otherwise. So maybe it makes them a little calmer. The Saudis are super interesting from this perspective. I think one of the reasons they've pulled back is because they realize they were burning through cash. They're suddenly not burning through cash. And it's petro dollars again, maybe I don't know.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

I have to think about that a little bit more, but let's put a pin in that. Let's move a little bit more to the west and talk about Turkey, because I know you've been thinking a lot about Turkey and doing a lot about Turkey. It was great reading some of your recent stuff and we'll put a link to, listeners, in the podcast description because you're really looking at it from a security perspective and a political perspective, especially in the Eastern Med. I could tell you that I've been looking at it more from an economic perspective and watching in particular what Erdoğan is doing at the monetary level. And I have to confess to you, I'm somebody who doesn't talk about world leaders as if they're stupid or as if they're crazy. That usually means I'm not understanding what they're doing. But Erdoğan seems like he's lost his mind to me.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

I don't get what he's doing with interest rates. I don't get how it serves him. I don't understand at all how it's good politically. If anything, it seems to me like he's taking a bazooka to his own political support and firing. So I wanted to say from that perspective, I'm confused about Turkey at the domestic level. Is there more logic in their security affairs? Is it also kind of crazy in their security affairs? And how do you think the and the international stuff is talking to each other? I'd love to get your perspective on that.



**Caroline Rose:**

Great question. I also join you in the confusion over how Erdoğan has approached the very accelerating economic collapse within Turkey, especially too over the fact that there were reports that he received advice over, for example, management with the central bank, currency and whatnot and he refused that advice. And then also there were reports that a lot of this advice was not even relayed to him in the first place. That came out in recent months. And then of course, he's purged a lot of these top financial positions and there still not necessarily been a lot of change economically in Turkey because of this. So that's something certainly to watch. And it's had an impact on the indigenous defense industry, for sure. And as we've seen too, and I don't want to go as far as saying that Turkey has moderated its behavior entirely, but the summer of 2021 looks very different than the summer of 2020 where you saw a lot of these Turkish vessels and tankers and frigates, essentially harassing a lot of these Greek vessels in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean and then-

**Jacob Shapiro:**

Not just Greek vessels. They were locking onto French frigates.

**Caroline Rose:**

Exactly, exactly. And so there was that high level of tension in the region in the summer of 2020. And it was fascinating and very concerning to watch as well just because of the complications and consequences that it would have on the NATO Alliance and for the United States even. And then of course that high risk of direct conflict. Now you're not seeing that as much. And certainly it's due to some economic constraints. It's also due, I think, in part to the fact that Turkey identified the Tuna zone-1 discovery of natural gas in the Black Sea. Not to say that, that necessarily satisfies their energy demand until the end of time. But I think that definitely bolstered their confidence levels in the fact that they could, of course, reduce dependency on Russian gas imports. And so the Eastern Mediterranean still while incredibly important ideologically and from a defense perspective, I think for the time being, that definitely boosted confidence levels.

**Caroline Rose:**

And then, of course, it's the fact that the economy has been in such dire straits and a lot of these 2023 reforms that were promised by Erdoğan, you haven't seen a lot of progress on them. While of course the defense industry, it's indigenous defense industry has mushroomed in the past few years, a lot of these reforms have not necessarily been delivered and in part that's due to political constraints and then of course economic constraints. But at the same time, I still see a lot of lingering tensions, which is why I especially very recently have been very vocal about, we really do need to observe some of these undertones in the Mediterranean right now, particularly this recent Greek, French defense deal. Just because while Erdoğan may not necessarily be very vocal about his opposition to this deal, we haven't really heard the kind of rhetoric, again, that we've heard in summer of 2020, in the spring of 2020. But still this is not being digested in Ankara very well. And certainly could always be used as an element to escalate tensions and bring us back to where we were last year, certainly.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

Where does that play out? Does that play out in Libya? Does that play out with brinksmanship in the Mediterranean in general? Kind of talk target for me where we're going to see the manifestation of those tensions you described them.

**Caroline Rose:**

So in trying to game out how tensions and the Mediterranean would play out in 2021, I think that... I don't want to be boring and say, it'll be the same kind of pathway that we saw in 2020. But I think that for both Greece and for Turkey, they understand that there are many consequences to direct conflict in the Aegean. So for that reason, you saw a lot of the brinksmanship policy, the harassment in many ways, it was sometimes just trailing behind vessels, getting very incredibly close. Trying to step into exclusive economic zones for a few days and then leave. Make these big announcements about how they were sending new hydrocarbon drilling vessels into contested waters, redrawing the lines of contested exclusive economic zones, the EZs in the Mediterranean. Things like that where you push each other's buttons.

**Caroline Rose:**

And of course, on the flip side, you see the militarization, you see defense build up, you see more frigates being constructed, you see these bilateral defense agreements. And you're raising the temperature and technically you're lowering threshold for conflict. But still you do have that major constraint of what will NATO do. And I think Turkey understands. It's just the reality that while they are a member of NATO and while the process of militarization and direct conflict could very well paralyze NATO, the United States and especially the EU, they would side with Greece. It would be a very difficult gamble. But at this point, especially after the S-400 issue, if the United States were to take a side, it would be with Greece. And the EU, I think that it is even more set in stone, although that there is some elements of German resistance.

**Caroline Rose:**

So I think that Turkey understands that. I think also Greece while certainly, while they may have a bit more pack to their punch, so to speak, I think that they also, of course, are hesitant of direct conflict because that's just not necessarily in their interest. But still it's worth looking at these events with concern, just because a clash could easily escalate into direct conflict unintentionally. So I think we were very close to seeing that in the summer of 2020.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

I hope you're right about that. I'm not sure that the EU would do very much more than issue a very, I'm sure, very, very strongly worded, but a strongly worded statement. So I'm not sure if I'm an Ankara I'm thinking that way. But you raise a... I mean, the first question that comes to my mind after you say that is to put you on the spot and ask is Turkey in NATO in 2030? Let's just pick a year out of a hat.

**Caroline Rose:**





So there are two ways this could go, unless NATO carries out a very thorough institutional review and reform process where they reform their membership requirements, Turkey is in. They don't have any formal expulsion process in NATO. They have a way to, in many cases, silence their members, or in some cases apply punitive action, but there's no way to expel members in NATO. There's no formal process. And that is certainly a major flaw for NATO going back to when it was created and when it was established. The founders didn't necessarily think about how to expel these members, especially when they don't not only abide by democratic values set by the alliance, but then also of the fact that their relationships with NATO adversaries such as Russia, that is certainly a point of contention when it comes to Turkey over the S-400 issue.

**Caroline Rose:**

And so I think that if NATO is not able to reform and amend this, Turkey's in which in some cases I think is a benefit here. And I do want to put this out there, I don't think that that should be the desired outcome here. Because the fact that Turkey is a NATO member, while it poses many problems for the alliance and has paralyzed the alliance on issues regarding Eastern European security, even things like annual exercises. I remember that there was an exercise in Poland that was put on pause when they were deliberating this at a NATO summit in 2019, I believe. In December of 2019. NATO, because of the ongoing issue with Turkey, that was stalled. It was paralyzed because of this issue in the Mediterranean. So I think that while that's certainly bad, I think the fact that Turkey being in NATO does give the United States leverage. And there is that dynamic, at least, of trying to balance out Turkey and, of course, moderate its behavior.

**Caroline Rose:**

The United States just needs to be aware of these tools and use these correctly to ensure that they can moderate Turkish behavior. Because as soon as you have Turkey out of the alliance that could isolate Ankara further and of course push it closer to Russia. And of course this emerging Chinese and Russian partnership. So I think that having them in this organization still is to US interest and to US benefit, we just need to properly use this leverage. We just cannot allow Ankara to paralyze these institutions and then, of course, then EU countries and look to alternative sources of defensive protection, for example, like the Collective European Defense Community. So lots of different dynamics that relate to this, of course. It's a really complex issue.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

I mean, it sounds like it's headed that direction to me. I'd push back a little bit on the notion that Turkey and Russia are going to make common cause, or even that Russia and China are on the same page there. I think that's that's a little beyond the pale for me. But I do think the Turkey, China relationship is real and there are some mutual interests there. And if you're Turkey, China's far enough away and has enough to offer that you might really want to solidify that relationship. Goes to show you how much the Uighurs and how much Islam doesn't actually matter to Erdoğan at a foreign policy level. It's all just... If it happens to be useful for him at a particular moment in time, he uses it. If not, he doesn't use it. And I know you've done some work on that as well.





**Jacob Shapiro:**

I'm pretty pessimistic about... I think there's a lot of moral grandstanding and self-righteous indignation there about the Uighurs and what's happening to them. And for the record, listeners, it's reprehensible. I'm a little too cynical. Of course this is happening. And all these people who are saying they're doing things and we need to change things, nobody's actually doing anything. There was just something this week that a US company, I forget the name of the company was cooperating with the Chinese government to send Uighurs into south China to make their stuff in their plants there. So that's depressing, isn't it?

**Caroline Rose:**

Oh my gosh, absolutely. My colleagues at Newlines Institute, they came up with a report earlier this year that explored the legal definition of genocide and applied it to what is going on of course, in the Uighur community. And it's an exceptional report and it was conducted by an array of scholars and legal experts on this issue. And even after that came out while we have seen some limited progress, there's just so much more to be done. And yes, especially by leaders in the Muslim community and the lack of action and accountability on this issue is incredibly concerning. And you're absolutely right, it's just... Turkey certainly applies in this case.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

No, let's not go down that rabbit hole. Cameron and I think talked about this on a previous podcast and if we can go back to that one. Because you were mentioning Pakistan, Imran Khan is at the top of the hypocrisy list there. But let's not go there, let's stick on to more uplifting things, Syria. Caroline, I have to confess am I'm going to say this partly tongue and cheek because I obviously care about all this stuff be because I'm a nerd, but for listeners who have been hearing about, reading about Syria for over 10 years now, we're talking about since the Arab spring and the civil war broke out there, why should they care?

**Jacob Shapiro:**

I mean, ISIS is gone. ISIS doesn't have their Emirate in Syria and maybe you need to make sure that it never comes back and you can do that in certain ways. But what is left there to be done besides rebuild or let the system work itself back together? Is there even anything the West can or should be doing at this point in regards to Syria? Convince me that my Syria fatigue here is the wrong headed position or surprise me and tell me that I'm right to not care because it's fundamentally, there's nothing to be done. And this is just what happens when you have the deterioration of a state to this extent.

**Caroline Rose:**

So it's a great question. I want to put out two different thoughts. I approach Syria understanding that the withdrawal is inevitable. The United States, especially with this administration, there is not a lot of energy and attention allocated to Syria and that's just a reality just because it contradicts the broader goal of committing to the national defense strategy of 2018 pivoting to Russia, China, Eastern Europe, Asia Pacific. And so of course greater engagement in Syria introduces complications into that strategy.



Why did we withdraw from eight bases in Iraq if we're also calling for increased commitment in Northeast Syria? I understand how that contradicts that strategy. So I operate with that understanding in mind. But at the same time, that really does not mean that the United States should not have grave concern with what is going on in Syria.

**Caroline Rose:**

And that doesn't necessarily mean that the United States shouldn't watch and be very careful with its existing operation, inherent resolve mission in the Northeast. Just because Syria right now, to put simply right now, is kind of the witches brew of all the malign geopolitical developments in the Middle East. You not only have a regime that has killed hundreds, thousands of its people in the most horrific and ferocious way possible, which is of course then a human rights concern for the Biden administration and for the United States as a whole based on its principles based and morale based foreign policy agenda. But then on top of that, you of course have of Russian forces competing there and then the wave of Iran aligned militias that are now operating in the space. And I think at this point, the fate of Syria is sealed in favor of the Assad regime, particularly in the west.

**Caroline Rose:**

The Northeast certainly still is kind of that last fashion, but really I don't have a lot of hope unfortunately for its survival or at least survival without having to at least cooperate and engage with the Assad regime which is a very unfortunate reality. Because I do think that eventual withdrawal of operation, inherent resolve, it's imminent although I think that there still is a bit more work to be done. So that being said, I think that, that's why we should still care about Syria. Because in the wake of US withdrawal from the region that is going to be not only an governed space, but a potential power vacuum that will be governed by the Assad regime. But if you look at, for example, it'll be a hub for illicit economies. Right now Syria is a huge, huge center for narcotics production of amphetamine, drugs such as Captagon. I expect that other drug trades, other illicit trades will thrive there.

**Caroline Rose:**

And because of that, there's going to be over spill of violence, insecurity and these illicit economies from the region that will affect not only the Levant, not only Jordan, Lebanon, but of course the Mediterranean, EU countries to an extent, Northern Africa and the Gulf. And so I think that's why Syria, we really need to keep an eye on it and monitor what is going on. Try and promote accountability where we can and also be very, very, very careful about the withdrawal process in the Northeast. I think at this point we've made some decisions that we cannot necessarily reverse. In 2019, in 2020, the withdrawals of US forces there and also the narrowed anti ISIS mission in the Northeast, I don't think we can reverse that. So knowing that that is a reality in the Northeast, but I still think that the United States should be very careful and not withdraw all of its forces at once. And of course keep its policy on the Assad side regime ironclad and oppose this normalization trend between Syria and a lot of these Arab countries.

**Jacob Shapiro:**



This development of lawlessness is... I mean, I assume that the Assad regime is not cool with that. And the kind of heartless question to ask is wouldn't it just be better for Syria if the Assad regime or any regime reasserted control? I mean, it seems to me that Assad has no interest in the country containing to descend into that kind of level of lawlessness. And yes, Assad has done terrible things and he's a noxious political leader. We can talk about his record. But he wasn't ISIS, he wasn't beheading people in the streets. And if things have gotten this bad, isn't a modicum of stability a little bit better than what's coming before or am I being too cynical?

**Caroline Rose:**

I think that rationale certainly is pushing some of its Arab neighbors closer to Syria, certainly. And I think that there's ironically a degree of economic opportunity for some of these countries or at least they perceive it. I don't think, I'm not rationalizing it, but I think for some they're perceiving the reconstruction processes in economic gain. But no, I don't think that, that's a reason to say that control from the regime is better for Syria because the regime only benefits from stability when it's in its favor and same goes for instability in ungoverned spaces. For example, there is limited that the regime is involved in the Captagon trade in terms of production. Not only just waving it off and allowing it to flow through its borders, they're actively involved in this.

**Caroline Rose:**

And so also looking at just of course their track record of how they relate to democratic reform, electoral integrity, the basic safety of their citizens outside of just the Alawite community. I don't think that that is a good thing for Syrians, no. And I think that because the war has persisted over 10 years, certainly there are contested areas, but there are also areas that have been cut off were quite some time. For example, the Northeast, where that they have established this different modus vivendi and this different system of governance and rule that I think will pose problems for national union in the end. And I think that places like that certainly deserve to be supported by the United States government as kind of these last fashions of relative freedom, relative security from the Assad regime's activities.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

By the Northeast, you mean the Syria and Kurds is who you're talking about?

**Caroline Rose:**

Correct. Yeah.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

I mean, the US already sold them up the river. And it's not Assad so they have to be afraid about it's the Turks are probably coming for them one way or another, and that geography's just not very good unless we've got an emerging Kurdish national consciousness that I missed developing. Their territory is just not particularly defensible. It's not a great position to be in kind of long term. But maybe, I don't know, maybe the Kurdish national consciousness will finally emerge. I have my doubt.



**Caroline Rose:**

No, I completely agree. And also, not to bring Turkey back into this, but that's another element too that the United States has not really accounted for in this policy as well. So, which has, because of it, also pushed some really interesting relationships between our adversaries in Syria, just because I don't think that we've had really much of a game plan other than the anti ISIS coalition, which is very much on us, very much on us for not visualizing how this would affect security relationships.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

I think you're a little too kind when you say the US didn't know. I'm pretty sure the US knew exactly what it was doing at the time. And I got in trouble for saying and so at the time, but let's not go down that rabbit hole. I know that you've got an international flight to catch and I don't want to keep you too long, so what have I not asked you about that I should asked you about that is important right now, or that's interesting to you?

**Caroline Rose:**

That's a good question. On the subject of normalization with the Assad regime, I think that it's, it's pretty clear where some states are, their positions on this. For example, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq in some cases, they've all demonstrated some interest in engaging with the Assad regime, which is, I think very clear what the United States should do with this, which of course is to oppose this trend emerging here. But I think that there are other processes of normalization between Middle Eastern countries, for example, Turkey, Egypt, the UAE. That's been really interesting. There have been some initial discussions. And I mean, nothing is really taken off in terms of any kind of formal agreement or deal, but that's something definitely worth watching and somewhere I think that the United States would be interested in seeing how this would unfold.

**Caroline Rose:**

First of course it would take effect in perhaps some commercial and economic deals. Very limited actions made on for example coordinating with trade, coordinating with commerce, but I... And investment opportunities as well all. But I think that there is a potential for a security dynamic which could help the emerging coalition against Iran in the wake of US withdrawal. And I think that that's something worth exploring for the United States and kind of mapping out different scenarios of how... Would it be in their interest to have a broad, informal coalition that would oppose a lot of these proxies and these militias that are aligned with Iran in their interest? And would it be a good thing to have Turkey on board because certainly the Turkish, Iranian relationship is very fraught and very interesting to see.

**Caroline Rose:**

And certainly Turkey cannot be counted as a very warm friend of Tehran. I also think that it's interesting to see the Israel, Arab Gulf relation. It seems to me that there's a bit more progress lately in the last few months. Things paused, of course, after tensions in Gaza. And that will be very important to watch as well. So lots shifting right now politically in terms of new aligned systems, old friends trying to gauge



shared interests, see if there are any constraints to this. And I think that the United States should definitely watch this to see if anything will serve their interests, particularly their security interests, as they look to draw down their presence.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

One can hope. It's funny you mentioned the Iran Turkey thing. I said to an Iranian friend of mine, I guess months ago, now that I thought that Turkey and Iran were sort of on a collision course and he slapped me on the wrist and said, "No, no, no, no. Iran and Turkey we're good. We're friends." I don't know if that's actually true or not, but it's something I think about. Before I let you go, just three quick hitters. Short questions, short answers sort of things. Number one, is Erdoğan president of Turkey in 2025?

**Caroline Rose:**

No. I don't think he's well enough right now. I've heard that he's had some health issues recently.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

Spicy. Okay.

**Caroline Rose:**

Not to say that I'm the inside scoop to Erdoğan's health.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

You heard it here first. Exclusive reporting on the Perch Perspective podcast. That's spicy. Is AKP power in 2025?

**Caroline Rose:**

That's a good question. I think that still certainly they'll have parliamentary seats if anything. But it seems like a lot of Erdoğan rivals are also making some gains in rival parties such as the CHP and whatnot. But I can't really give a definitive answer because it's very close.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

That's why they pay us the big bucks. Good. Spicy take. Second question, are Iran and the US back in the JCPOA away by the end of 2022?

**Caroline Rose:**

I say yes. By the end of 2022-

**Jacob Shapiro:**

End of next year.



**Caroline Rose:**

I say yes, but it would be a very different JCPOA. I don't see any kind of re-visitation of the current JCPOA right now, especially with the game that Iran's playing right now in Vienna.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

So there's going to be some kind of deal, but you don't think it's... So basically we have to renegotiate an entire deal here in the next year and a half sort of thing?

**Caroline Rose:**

I think so.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

Okay. And then last but not least our friend, Mr. Assad, is he in power in 2025 or is he gone by then?

**Caroline Rose:**

Yes. He'll be in power and I think after 2025. I think that's fate is very much sealed.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

Great. So Bashar al-Assad will be here probably as president of Syria longer than any of us will be alive at this rate. Sounds cool. Caroline, thanks so much for making the time. I know that you're in a rush and we had some technical difficulties, but we appreciate it and we'll have to have you back on soon. We only just dipped our toes into the region. So thanks so much.

**Caroline Rose:**

Thank you so much. Thanks so much, Jacob. I really appreciate it.

**Jacob Shapiro:**

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**Jacob Shapiro:**

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