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REPORT: DAY 2

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FOURTH SESSION – DEMOCRACY: CHALLENGES FACING NEW DEMOCRACIES IN THE REGION

DOHA FORUM PANEL EXAMINES DANGER OF ARABS LOSING FAITH IN DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENTS

- *Discussion on “Challenges Facing New Democracies in the Region” points to need for financial support for Arab countries in transition and fear of regression to dictatorship –*

A panel of experts discussing challenges facing the new Arab democracies said on Tuesday that financial and other help could be needed to stop some countries descending into ungovernability or even a return to the one-party systems brought down by the Arab Spring uprisings.

“The region is poised before a momentous transformation and the peril of failed revolution,” said Mona Yacoubian, Middle East Project Director at the Stimson Center, at the seminar on the second day of the Doha Forum in the Qatari capital. “It’s fair to say that time is not on the side of the Arab transitions. The instability that brought about the Arab transition has exacerbated the social and economic ills that brought young people to the streets in the first place.”

Echoing views expressed on the first day of the Forum on Monday, Yacoubian suggested an “Arab Marshall Plan” along the lines of the strategy for reconstructing Europe after the Second World War. “There’s a lot we can learn from the Marshall Plan as a successful blueprint for regional transition,” she said, describing the Arab world as one of the least internally integrated regions of the world.

“Regional economic development was in many ways one of the hallmarks of the Marshall Plan that focussed on trade relations across the continent and that same logic, I would argue, applies to the Arab world,” Yacoubian said. “The Maghreb (North African) countries have intra-regional trade of under 3 percent and I think that represents a vast untapped potential. In fact regional economic integration could be a real game changer. It would coalesce a vast consumer market of 300-350 million people. It would attract investment, and allow smaller businesses in the region to expand... It would also promote stability across the region.”

But like other participants on Monday, she said the Gulf states would be the obvious candidates for putting up the cash for such a project. “The Marshall Plan was financed by massive flows of aid from the United States. In today’s world, we cannot expect that from the United States or Europe; the Gulf countries are in a position, however, to help – they command vast resources.”

Robin Wright, a scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center, agreed about the need for urgent action to ensure a democratic transition but said her fear was of the “Venezuelan model” of “democratic elections of strongmen to deal with critical problems”.

“The dirty little secret of the transitions is that corruption is deepening and spreading. A senior official in Libya said to me that in the Gaddafi era there was one Gaddafi, today there are 6.5 million,” she said. “There has been a proliferation of democracy beyond what is viable. In Libya there 200 seats in the Congress; 120 of those are allocated for individuals and over 3,000 ran for those; 80 seats are allocated to parties and over 130 parties ran for those seats. That is not viable in the long-term. There is a great danger of divisive forces – that (say) ‘I want to be leader, I want the privilege of power’ – that is going to backfire in the long-term.”

Abdul Aziz bin Othman Sager, the Saudi head of the Gulf Studies Center, agreed, saying there was a danger that the new post-Arab Spring elites would replicate the old regimes but in a democratic guise.

“The elite in power could try to introduce changes to the current democracy and change it gradually to totalitarian regimes. We need to remember that all the totalitarian regimes that were toppled in the region, like Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt, Gaddafi in Libya and Saleh in Yemen, had used democratic structures themselves, such as referendums, elections, parliaments.”

“This transformation was imposed by external pressures, it was the not the voluntary choice of the new leaders and powers like the Muslim Brotherhood (in Egypt). Western democracy is not their natural choice, in

fact their ideology has always talked of Islamic democracy and not Western standard democracy,” Sager said.

He rejected the idea that Gulf states opposed the Arab uprisings, saying they had been quick to offer financial help to Egypt and recognize the changes that took place.

But Mustafa Osman Ismail, former foreign minister in Sudan’s Islamist government, said some Arab countries had an exaggerated fear of Islamist movements, such as the Brotherhood in Egypt or Ennahda in Tunisia. “Certain Arab states fear an Islamist tsunami in the region,” he said. “What is the future of the Arab Spring regimes? It will depend on their ability to manage the state, achieve political participation and democracy, economic development and social justice, security, minimum standard of services, saying the truth. I am positive and hope that all these challenges will be met.”

Ambassador Cesario Melantonio Neto, Brazil’s Representative for Middle East Affairs, also sounded a positive note, saying people needed to be patient.

“Transition takes time. We had many dictatorships in South America. In Brazil it took us 3 years to draft the constitution from 1985-88, and it took ten years from 1985-95 to create a new ministry of defence with the military under civilian control of the state,” he said. “So what we need to do is give more chance to democracy and be more patient, even if there are huge economic and political challenges in the Arab world.”

- Mona Yacoubian calls for an Arab “Marshall Plan” funded by Gulf states to save the Arab Spring
- Abdul Aziz Sager says there is a danger Islamist governments will replicate the old regimes
- Brazilian official, former Sudanese FM say new governments need time to prove themselves

FIFTH SESSION – INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: PROSPETS FOR PARTNERSHIP, CHALLENGES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESS

DOHA FORUM PANEL ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION SAYS THERE IS SCOPE FOR INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO HELP ARAB COUNTRIES

- Panellists say intervention to prevent or end conflict is possible but has to be handled sensitively -

Doha Forum panellists, discussing the parameters of international cooperation and how that could help the Arab world, outlined avenues for helping countries in transition without interfering in the complex and often fragile processes of change.

“Transitions after conflict or democratic transitions whether gradual or revolutionary are essentially national processes and so actions of national figures are key to the success. International actors have to be modest,” said Sarah Cliffe, special adviser and assistant secretary-general for civilian capacities at the UN. “But that doesn't mean there's no role to play.”

“It's important to go back to the origin of the protests of the last three years. They were not taking place in classic development areas – Tunisia was highly praised for making the ‘millennium goals’ before the revolution. But Mohammed Bouazizi killed himself... because he felt he was harassed by police and had no recourse to justice or political participation to rectify that. It was a call for inclusion, justice, dignity and jobs,” Cliffe said, referring to the Tunisian fruit vendor whose death after setting himself alight in December 2010 unleashed an uprising in Tunisia and then other Arab countries.

Justice and jobs, she said, had been underplayed in the United Nations' original “millennium goals” for development according to which countries such as Tunisia or Egypt were judged by international organisations.

But she said now it was important for any aid to come via international institutions and to come quickly.

“We need to deliver fast because if countries are going through transitions involving building confidence between government and citizens then two-year projects are too long,” Cliffe said. “I was just in Yemen, where there have been enormous pledges for assistance, but many are for large infrastructure projects that won't deliver in the next 12 months, before the next election.”

Jim Marshall, a former U.S. Congressman and president of the United States Institute of Peace, said businesses had an interest in promoting peace since that was key to economic development on a regional and global scale.

“Peace is good for business and the pursuit of peace in the pursuit of profit probably makes a lot of sense. No individual government in the world has the capacity to bring peace to world (alone), it takes partnership,” he said. “Modern scholarship has shown time and time again that peace is good for business... I am here to encourage a new initiative for global business.”

Eugene Karpov, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, said that Moldova – which became independent in 1991 during the collapse of the former Soviet Union – had benefited enormously from international cooperation during its transition. “Foreign assistance was crucial in giving political support, loans and direct investment in the 10 years after communism fell,” he told the session.

Shahid Malik, a former UK minister for international development, said preventing conflict had a huge economic benefit but that governments often avoided reforms for fear of provoking strife.

“One conflict costs all of the world's annual development aid. Every pound spent on preventing violent conflict saves the international community four pounds,” he said, recalling his efforts to persuade ousted Yemeni leader Ali Abdullah Saleh to remove subsidies. “I gave him the IMF and World Bank line on subsidies... He said he had talked about that before and there were riots and people died.”

Turning to the Syrian conflict, which has raged over the last two years, Malik said it was a classic example of a conflict where there is reluctance to interfere but the costs of its continuation would be enormous. “Our inability to do the right thing for the people of Syria has been a key ingredient in getting to where we are today,” he said. “I am confident that the people here today are not the kind of people who are about doing nothing. I’m confident that slowly but surely we’ll start to move forward.”

- Sarah Cliffe, a UN special adviser: International actors should be modest but have a role to play.
- United States Institute of Peace head: Businessmen should pool efforts to invest in conflict resolution.
- Former UK International Development Minister: Still confident of efforts to end Syrian conflict.

SIXTH SESSION – DIGITAL MEDIA

GOVERNMENTS CANNOT CONTROL DIGITAL MEDIA, PANEL SAYS AT DOHA FORUM

- Panel of experts in Doha examines the role of social media in Arab uprisings, difficulties in verifying the authenticity of material generated in social media for news outlets, and the need for responsibility when using digital media -

Government efforts to control social media are doomed to fail as a dramatic changes in the world of news and communication create a new public sphere that forces governments to take heed of the views of ordinary people, panellists at the Doha Forum said on Tuesday.

But the participants in the 'Digital Media' seminar said explosion of new media presented challenges for traditional media outlets as well as for media ethics, with an explosion of information where it is often difficult to decide fact from fiction and inflammatory material can reach millions in no time.

"When we talk about social media we mean digital media and we come to the word 'empowerment'. The traditional gatekeepers, primarily governments, are being pushed out of the way," said Philip Seib, former U.S. ambassador and director of the Center for Public Diplomacy. "People expect a steady flow of information... and expect to participate in the conversation. The social contract as it relates to communication has been rewritten."

Created in 2006, the social networking site Twitter had over 500 million registered users in 2012, generating over 340 million tweets daily, while Facebook, set up in 2004, has 1.1 billion users. YouTube, a site where users can upload, view and share videos, does not even require registration.

Mobile phones are accelerating the new media revolution even further. "There are 7 billion people on the planet and 6 billion mobile phone users. Most are not like overpriced phones, they are simply for telephone conversation and text messaging. But by 2020 every mobile phone will be a smart phone," said Seib. "You can think of what that means in terms of people's ability to connect to the Internet throughout the world."

This media revolution played a role in enabling people to organise protests during the Arab Spring two years ago, Seib said. "We all know that social media was a factor in the uprisings of 2011. The one great example is the Facebook page 'We are all Khaled Said'," he said, referring to an Egyptian whose death at the hands of police in 2010 helped galvanize Egyptians to take to the streets. "It showed how you can expand the breadth of communication and construct networks, though it's important to recognize that digital media are only tools: there's no 'Facebook revolution' – it was the Egyptian revolution or the Tunisian revolution."

At the same time, violent anti-U.S. protests around the world last year over an anti-Islam film made by an Egyptian in the United States showed the dangerous power of new media. It went viral via YouTube and other media. "It showed the social media power of YouTube and word spread through Twitter and Facebook," Seib said. "Remember, that could not have happened 10 years ago, the avenues were not there. It's a very new phenomenon; if someone had made that video 10 years ago there would have been no way it could have got out."

This power was presenting challenges for traditional media, other participants said. "For us it's a big challenge. Your audience are mostly consuming content online," said Soud Haidar, senior analyst at the new media department of Qatar's Al Jazeera news network. He said it was often difficult to verify material provided to news outlets from YouTube, leading to difficult judgement calls, especially with regard to the Syrian conflict where each side often uses video clips captured on phones to publicize atrocities. "With the videos we see on YouTube, the quality isn't good," Haidar said.

Mahmoud Alam Eldin, Vice Dean of Cairo University's Mass Media College, said Egyptian authorities were alarmed recently by the role of Facebook in an attack by Islamists on the seat of the Coptic Christian Church in Cairo. "Sectarianism can spread from a word on Facebook, and the fear of social media is increasing (for government)," he said.

Mohamed Ahmed Fayyad, media consultant at the Bahrain Centre for Eastern Studies, also highlighted dangers, saying users of social media should try to act responsibly. “We all know that media was the other face of politics of the government, but today social and digital media are the other face of diplomacy, and it is popular diplomacy... Every citizen has become an ambassador for his country, even if they are not official ambassadors,” he said, noting that citizens now often found themselves talking directly to government officials online.

In Bahrain, where pro- and anti-government supporters took massively to Twitter after Arab Spring protests were crushed in 2011, opposition figures have engaged in public banter with officials such as the Bahraini foreign minister.

Fayyad also suggested that owners of social media platforms, such as websites with forums, could have ulterior motives. “Given financial gains of social media owners, they are part of a dangerous game. They are willing to change the rules of the game according to who pays more. Some use digital media to express opinions and could try to change public opinion for their interests,” he said. One audience member rejected this, saying this represented the old mentality of the regimes overthrown in Egypt and Tunisia.

Most panellists agreed that traditional media would adapt to new digital media and there was value in news being verified in known outlets after initially spreading on social media. Newsweek magazine last year ditched its print edition and went completely digital.

“The Wall Street Journal made its site pay only and then its number of subscribers rose because of the high level of content. Investigative journalism is one characteristic of traditional media that is lacking in new media,” said Atef Al-Saadawi, chief editor of Democracy magazine, published by the Al Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo.

- Former U.S. ambassador Seib: New media has “rewritten the social contract”
- Cairo University mas media specialist: Sectarianism can spread from a word on Facebook
- Al Jazeera online analyst: It’s a challenge to judge the authenticity of some YouTube material

SEVENTH SESSION – NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE SESSION: THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRISIS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

HUMAN RIGHTS HAVE SUFFERED BECAUSE OF THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS, PANELLISTS TELL DOHA FORUM

- Seminar on ‘the repercussions of the global economic and financial crisis on human rights’ with figures from international rights organisations in the Qatari capital -

The international financial crisis that erupted in 2008 has increased conflicts around the world and demonstrated the need to put human rights at the heart of a new global economic system, participants in the Doha Forum said on Tuesday.

“Globalisation has had its impact. Despite its benefits in terms of information exchange and access to new markets, it is also the source of major disturbances we have had and societies’ capacity to cope with tensions and crises,” said Peter Maurer, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), suggesting that the crisis likely played some role in provoking Arabs to protest during the uprisings of 2011.

“The financial crisis spilt over and has bad effects... No society is immune from violence but there are established solutions to contain its consequences. Each humanitarian and human rights law violation has individual and collective repercussions that could be so far reaching as to be detrimental to the economy, stability and reconciliation.”

Paolo Lembo, U.N. Resident Coordinator and UNDP representative in Abu Dhabi, put it in starker terms.

“Five years after the most dramatic and systemic financial crisis the world has ever known, (we can say) the principle cause has simply been a political system that has allowed the pursuit of short-term economic interest driven by the greed of limited economic groups, supported by corrupted elites or incapable governments,” he said. “This phenomenon has caused enormous waves of political processes... ultimately being one of the drivers of the Arab Spring; deepening the divide between rich and poor, it has contributed to the people’s revolt here and rightly so.”

Lembo said it was now necessary to rethink the “social contract”.

“If we want to understand what we need to do to tackle the fundamental cause of this process, we start by recognising that this is the result of economic actions – we are not suffering an obscure merciless force of destiny, so we can’t say market forces are not predictable, or it’s an upturn and then a downturn, that is wrong,” he said.

“We need to rethink our social contract... to understand that we have to rebuild our international system of global economic governance to define clearly what is the role of the state and its responsibility, the policy actions that government must assume responsibility for in order to redress the current crisis. We don’t want to limit freedom of markets. ... nevertheless the state is also responsible to regulate these forces... We must recognize that the state has responsibility to protect the right of the citizen here.”

Lembo said United Nations bodies would play their part by making sure that upcoming discussions of its “millennium goals” – eight international development goals established following the U.N. Millennium Summit in 2000 – would make sure that “fundamental rights” were clearer. He said the U.N. would be careful to make sure that the opinion of Gulf states was taken into consideration but – echoing speakers in Doha Forum sessions earlier on Monday and Tuesday – he said the U.N. may hope for extra funding to help with its new sustainable development goals.

In a similar vein, Michel Veuthey, president of University College Henry Dunant, said more efforts were needed to make sure globalisation was a positive process for all. “How can we ensure that globalisation becomes a positive force for everyone, how can we ensure inclusiveness and equity, how can we find

protection and remedies against the negative effects of globalisation?” the head of the Geneva human rights institution said.

He said countries should take more action to legislate against human trafficking and forced labour, proposing some practical means to improve rights in this field without a hefty cost, such as setting up online training and databases, providing migrant workers with USB sticks carrying basic information on their rights and where to get help, train opinion-makers to push the message further, encourage research on historical migration issues, and involve refugees and migrants in the programmes devised for their assistance and protection.

Khaled Al Qadi, head of the Arab Center for Law Awareness in Cairo, criticized Arab states though for failing to take migrant labour issues seriously, saying many had not signed up to the international agreement on migrant labour rights, a U.N. convention signed in 1990 that went into force in 2003. “Why have Arab states not signed the agreement? Because it imposes measures that cannot be achieved in Arab states,” he said. “I call on the Arab League to adopt the agreement.” Some Arab states are host to hundreds of thousands, if not millions of refugees, while affluent Gulf countries host large expatriate communities that took part in building and administering modern states.

But Zidane Zeraoui, dean of research at ITESM in Mexico, also faulted the United States over migrant rights because of its policies to stem the flow of people from Mexico. “Under President Obama 1.5 million migrants have been deported, and between 60 to 70 percent of those deported in recent years had no criminal record. In addition to deportation, the other drama is crossing the desert: in recent months 93 bodies have been found dead,” he said.

- Lembo: new social contract needed to ensure humanitarian needs feature in world economic system
- ICRC chief Maurer: Globalisation and finance crisis have helped provoked conflicts
- Arab rights official: Arab states have avoided signing international protections for migrant labour