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معالي / صلاح الدين مزور
وزير الشؤون الخارجية والتعاون - المملكة المغربية

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ،،،

يطيب لي أن أستهل خطابي بأسمى آيات التحية والتقدير، متمنياً لكم دوام السداد والتوفيق. ويسرني دعوتكم لحضور اللقاء الخامس لمنتدى صير بني ياس والذي سيعقد خلال الفترة من 14 إلى 16 نوفمبر 2014. إن مشاركتكم ستثري هذا المنتدى بتجاربكم ورؤيتكم والتي من شأنها أن تقدم بعداً هاماً للمناقشات بشأن الأمن والسلام في الشرق الأوسط.

يضم هذا اللقاء الذي تستضيفه وزارة خارجية الإمارات العربية المتحدة نخبة من الضيوف الذين تم دعوتهم شخصياً، منهم وزراء خارجية وكبار صانعي السياسات وقادة أعمال وخبراء أكاديميين. ولقد تميز المنتدى خلال الأربعة أعوام الماضية بخلق مساحة للحوار وتبادل الأفكار حول القضايا والتحديات الأكثر إلحاحاً في المنطقة في مواكبة للأحداث وتداعياتها بمنهجية ديناميكية وفي جو تسوده الأريحية بعيداً عن الأطر الرسمية.

ويشمل المنتدى عروض يقدمها خبراء وجلسات حوار بين المشاركين وحلقات نقاشية لتعزيز فهم آخر تطورات القضايا السياسية والأمنية والاجتماعية في منطقة الشرق الأوسط، ويتميز المنتدى بحوارات تفاعلية غير معلنة. ولتحقيق ذلك، لن يكون هناك أي تواجد للصحافة أو أية أجهزة إعلامية أخرى.

ختاماً، يسرني أن أرفق لكم ملخص فعاليات المنتدى للعام 2013، مع الإشارة بأن هذه الورقة وعملاً بقواعد مؤسسة تشاتم هاوس، لا تحدد أسماء المتحدثين أو المشاركين، ولكنها تعرض الأفكار الرئيسية التي تم طرحها خلال منتدى صير بني ياس لعام 2013، ومن ضمن المواضيع التي تم استعراضها عملية السلام في الشرق الأوسط، والتأثير الإقليمي للصراع في سوريا، والأفاق المصرية، ومستقبل السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية في المنطقة، وعدد من المواضيع الأخرى. وأشير هنا إلى أن هذه الورقة لا تمثل المواقف الرسمية لوزارة الخارجية لدولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة.

وتفضلوا بقبول هذه الدعوة الشخصية لحضور اللقاء الخامس لمنتدى صير بني ياس وإنني لأتطلع لرؤيتكم في الإمارات العربية المتحدة في شهر نوفمبر.

وتقبلوا معاليكم فائق الاحترام والتقدير ،،،

عبدالله بن زايد آل نهيان
وزير الخارجية



SIR BANI YAS FORUM

Logistical Information

Date

14-16 November 2014

RSVP

We would appreciate if you could indicate your ability to participate in the 2014 Sir Bani Yas Forum by 1 September 2014, by contacting Eleanor Pitt at e.pitt@mofa.gov.ae

Please note that invitations are not transferable. For foreign ministers, we can accommodate one advisor, though advisors are not guaranteed access to the plenary sessions.

Travel and Accommodation

Flights, airport transfers in the UAE, and hotel accommodation will be arranged by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates. Details will be provided upon RSVP.

Agenda and Programme details

The formal agenda will be provided closer to the date, but for planning purposes please note that the Forum will commence in the afternoon of Friday 14 November, and conclude at lunch on Sunday 16 November.

Due to the remote location the venue, we advise guests to arrive to the UAE no later than Friday morning, and depart no earlier than Sunday night.



CHATHAM HOUSE

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Conference Summary

The Sir Bani Yas Forum 2013

November 2013

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THE SIR BANI YAS FORUM

The United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with Chatham House, convened the fourth annual Sir Bani Yas forum at the Qasr al-Sarab Desert Resort at the Liwa Oasis in Abu Dhabi from 15 to 17 November 2013. During the two-and-a-half-day interactive discussion, participants debated the changing strategic landscape in the Middle East and beyond.

Some of the main findings of the meeting include:

- The current US-brokered talks to achieve a solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict have the potential to succeed, but significant challenges include Gaza, distraction by the Iranian nuclear negotiations and a concern that Israeli and Palestinian leaders will be unable to gain sufficient domestic support for any agreement that is reached.
- The United States' traditional allies in the Middle East are deeply concerned by its perceived withdrawal from the region and focus on domestic policies. It needs to counter these perceptions and rebuild its credibility.
- Despite cuts in its defence budget and increased focus on domestic politics, the United States maintains vital interests in the Middle East and will remain the dominant external power. Emerging countries such as Russia and China are unlikely to challenge its political or military role in the region.
- Political divisions in the UN Security Council are hampering the agreement of a humanitarian resolution on Syria, which is urgently needed to ensure humanitarian access to vulnerable civilian populations. Furthermore the proposed 'Geneva II' negotiations are unlikely to bring an end to the fighting soon.
- Major challenges shared by countries across the region include addressing the need for economic reform and job creation, adapting to environmental problems and responding to the new generation of 'empowered emergent citizens'.

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- Egypt's path in the coming years will have ramifications across the entire region, although the country and its allies are divided over whether it can achieve political and economic stability without greater democratic consolidation.
- The election of Hassan Rouhani as Iran's president and a potential agreement on the country's nuclear file could be the first steps towards its reintegration into the international community, though a generational change in the clerical establishment may still be required before meaningful political reform can happen.

The meeting was held under the **Chatham House Rule** and the views expressed are those of the participants. The following summary is intended to serve as an *aide-mémoire* to those who took part and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not. For the avoidance of doubt, the comments and analysis recorded in this document **do not represent any institutional position of Chatham House or the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs**.

The Chatham House Rule

'When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.'

Session 1: Oslo at 20

During the first session participants discussed the legacy of the Oslo Agreement 20 years on and prospects for the current round of negotiations to end the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Key findings were presented from polls conducted with Israelis and Palestinians on their views regarding Oslo, the two-state solution and prospects for peace. It was noted that both Israelis and Palestinians consider the two-state solution to be desirable, although they have doubts about its feasibility, with only around 35% of those polled believing it to be feasible. One legacy of the Oslo Agreement has been disillusionment, with respondents reporting that they had mostly been hopeful at its signing but with few now believing that it was a positive development. Key obstacles remain lack of trust on each side in the other's commitment to peace, and limited confidence in the leaderships. A significant number of Israelis see some of their leaders, in particular Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak, as having played destructive roles, though Palestinians were more positive about their own leaders.

While participants agreed that Oslo had been an act of political courage, assessments of its legacy were mixed. While some participants were positive about the progress made towards building the infrastructure for a future Palestinian state and the creation of 'a partner for peace', others highlighted the failure to follow the agreed timeline for reaching a final status agreement and continuing occupation and settlement-building.

Discussion of the newest round of negotiations focused on the urgency of achieving a final status agreement, given the increasing complexity of the conflict and consequent difficulty of enacting a 'divorce' to create two states. The negotiations are aiming to reach a framework agreement in 9 months, followed by phased implementation. It was emphasized that all of the key issues such as borders, settlements, security arrangements, Jerusalem, water and refugees have been negotiated ad nauseam and that both parties are aware of the zone of possible agreement; decisions are now needed.

Some participants noted that there were factors in favour of the success of the negotiations. Low public expectations will allow more space for the negotiators to proceed. Jerusalem, an issue which was too sensitive in the 1990s, is now on the table.

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However, significant challenges remain. While low expectations give the negotiations space, it is questionable whether the leaderships will be able to sell any agreement that is reached to the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. It was argued that Israeli and Palestinian leaders are still not sufficiently acknowledging the existential issues their counterparts face – for Israelis, security, and for Palestinians, territory and occupation. Iran is a distraction, with one participant noting that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu is spending much more time on the Iranian nuclear negotiations than on the peace process.

Gaza is a major challenge and point of disagreement. Some participants emphasized that ending the divisions between Gaza and the West Bank would be necessary before an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians can be reached. Others argued that Israel needed to adopt a more pragmatic policy towards Gaza and to end what they perceived to be a continuing occupation.

A show of hands indicated that only around 20% of participants believed an agreement would be reached within a year. While participants agreed on the importance and urgency of a comprehensive framework agreement – including the significant regional benefits it would bring – it was also argued that there needs to be a 'Plan B'.

Session 2: US Foreign Policy in a Changing Region

The second session focused on US foreign policy in the Middle East. The debate was framed by the negative perceptions of the current role of the United States held by its traditional allies in the region, in particular the Gulf States.

Governments in the region have become increasingly concerned that the United States is withdrawing from its historically dominant role in the Middle East. As one participant argued, 'the USA's credibility has not gone – but it is a big disappointment'. It was also pointed out that the Gulf States may now share more analysis and approach on the region's problems with Israel than with the United States.

These negative perceptions have been precipitated by factors including the ambiguous American response to the chemical weapons attack in Syria on 21 August; nervousness about a deal with Iran on the nuclear issue; the

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administration's strategic 'pivot to Asia'; the perception that the United States has fewer vital interests in the region, as it is developing energy self-sufficiency and may no longer be needed as a security guarantor for Israel; and the feeling that US foreign policy decisions are being informed increasingly by domestic politics, with less consultation of the country's allies.

While the idea that the United States is withdrawing from the region was strongly contested by some participants, there was consensus that such negative perceptions exist and need to be countered. It was also noted that it is in the interest of regional powers for the United States to maintain a credible role. However, as a global superpower, it finds it hard to appear continually committed to every region.

Several participants argued that the United States still holds vital interests in the region and will continue to be engaged there as part of its global responsibilities. It was noted that President Obama outlined these interests forcefully in his September 2013 speech to the UN General Assembly, in which he stated that America will confront aggression, ensure the free flow of energy and confront terrorism, that it will not tolerate the development or use of weapons of mass destruction, and that it will support democracy, human rights and open markets. The centrality of these interests is reflected in the amount of time that Obama spends focusing on events in the Middle East during policy and security meetings.

US priorities in the region for the remainder of the Obama administration were said to be dealing with the Iranian nuclear programme and advancing the Middle East peace process.

On Iranian nuclear negotiations, the administration sees a diplomatic resolution as more effective than military force, which would only be able to set back Iranian nuclear weapons development rather than end it. However, there were concerns expressed that the United States was not including the region sufficiently in the formulation of its thinking and positions.

On Syria, it was noted that US policy is focused on three areas: eliminating chemical weapons, humanitarian action and reaching a political solution to the conflict. While some US participants acknowledged that the response to the chemical weapons attack was confusing, it was also argued that the ultimate outcome of disarming the Syrian chemical weapons capability was a success. President Obama believes that any non-urgent military actions – i.e. actions which do not need to be carried out immediately to be successful –

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should be taken to Congress, as in this case when the military could have carried out the required strike at any time.

On Egypt, the view was expressed that the United States is focused on supporting the building of inclusive democratic institutions, consistent with previous advice to successive Egyptian administrations to protect free speech and conduct free elections. It was stated that while the US position is to work with whichever government in place, it views the use of force in bringing down Mohammed Morsi's government as problematic given American assistance to the Egyptian army; and it also has a prevailing concern for the future based on the need for political inclusion and for the economy to be re-started. However, other participants argued that suspending even a limited amount of aid was not the best way to support Egypt.

Session 3: The Syrian Tragedy – Geneva and Beyond

This session focused on the latest developments in the Syrian conflict. Points of particular concern included the increased commitment of Hezbollah forces to fighting in Syria, the alleged involvement of Iranian Revolutionary Guards on the ground, the growing influence of extremist jihadi militias and the staggering humanitarian crisis. The regime was said to be gaining ground, although the situation was described as 'an evolving stalemate' as regime gains in some areas were counterbalanced by losses in other areas. One participant also suggested that some members of the regime are beginning to realize that President Bashar al-Assad has nothing to offer for the future.

The extent of the humanitarian crisis was emphasized. It was said that nine million Syrians need help, with over six million internally displaced and over two million registered as refugees. It was argued that the regime is deliberately cutting off food supplies to the 300,000 people in besieged areas. Frustration was expressed that while chemical weapons inspectors could get in, aid convoys could not, and it was argued that quiet diplomacy was not enough to make progress on the humanitarian issue. The existing UN Security Council (UNSC) presidential statement on the humanitarian situation was insufficient to have effect on the ground, and a UNSC resolution was urgently needed.

The blockages to such a resolution were said to be the problem of aid convoys needing to be escorted, and a lack of trust among UNSC members, leading Russia to believe such a resolution to be politicized. However, it was

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argued that decisions on such a humanitarian resolution should start from **principles rather than from the problems of implementation.**

Additionally, it was said that the chemical weapons deal has meant Russia is **building a new relationship** with the United States, although it still believes that **there are too many contradictions** in US statements that Assad must **leave while asking him to negotiate** with the opposition. Assad needs an **exit strategy, though it was said** that he would not be offered asylum in Russia. **Particular Russian concerns** regarding Syria were the numbers of jihadis who **have flooded in, the position of minorities and the possibility of sectarian overspill to Russia.**

Several **criticisms were made** of the US position on the Syrian conflict, with some participants **arguing that it is now ambiguous** and that there is a **discrepancy between Washington's stated objectives and its actions.** It was **also argued** that the chemical weapons deal has served to make Assad a **legitimate partner.** There is no prospect or appetite for US military intervention, although there continues to be a perception in the region of US **responsibility.** One participant also said that there has not yet been an **honest debate** about what America's interests are, while the view was also expressed that it should be committing more resources to arming and supporting the **'moderate' Syrian opposition.**

Participants explored the prospects for 'Geneva II', the proposed round of negotiations **that may bring together the opposition and the regime along with key external actors.** The opposition Syrian National Coalition (SNC) has agreed in **principle to take part,** although participants disagreed as to whether this would benefit or harm the group's legitimacy. While one participant argued that **attending would demonstrate to the regime that the opposition has a constituency in Syria,** others believed that little would be achieved through the talks **without gains being made on the ground first.** Several participants **expressed the view that there is 'only a military solution to the military conflict'. Nevertheless** one participant noted that even if Geneva II did not **end the fighting, it would influence events as a political framework.**

Participants were asked to vote on whether Assad would still be in power in a year's time. A small majority believed that he would not.

Session 4: Regional Developments in 2013: Cross-currents in the Struggle for Power

In the fourth session participants discussed what trends are shaping the region and what challenges it faces.

There was agreement that new technology leading to citizen empowerment is having a huge effect. With hundreds of people potentially blogging about every national leader, a very different political environment has been created. It was agreed that the region will be unable to 'go back to business as usual', and honesty will be much more strongly demanded of leaders. It was also noted that it is youth who will continue to drive this demand for change.

Participants returned to the topic of the changing role of the United States in the region, further exploring the question of its withdrawal and interests. In 2015 America will be the world's largest oil producer and the US public is war-weary. This will lead, if not to a full withdrawal, at least to a relative change in focus and effort. Stabilizing Egypt and addressing the Iranian nuclear issue were identified as US interests, but it was noted that there was less interest than among others in the region in keeping the Muslim Brotherhood out of power or in taking sides in a Sunni-Shi'a conflict. These factors are also leading to a change in tactics, with military action more likely to involve drones and special operations rather than boots on the ground.

The question of democracy and political reform across the region was a key discussion point, with contrasting views expressed by participants. One participant remarked that it had not been so much an 'Arab Spring' as an 'Arab destruction', meaning that the region was likely to be subject to instability and conflict over several decades. A number of participants saw the Gulf countries as beacons of stability and symbols of the 'triumph of moderation', and it was said that they had remained unscathed by turmoil owing to their tradition of accessible leaderships and lack of violent opposition. Several participants asserted that security and stability should be the priority in Egypt and elsewhere to allow economies to be regenerated and meet people's material needs.

Others argued that there was still a generation which believed in the 'Arab Spring' revolutions, and that these revolutions would be carried through. Several participants returned to the question of political inclusion, emphasizing its importance for achieving political stability. Some described

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the predicament of the region as excessive centralization in governments, combined with a lack of trust in people and institutions.

Participants also expressed the view that the role of nationalism was changing, with the nation-state threatened by fragmentation and needing support through regional cooperation. However, it was noted by a participant that the push for regional cooperation amongst the Gulf States is hampered by a reluctance to give up any real measure of their sovereignty.

Another major challenge for the region will be economic development and responding to global economic changes, in particular the issue of job creation. Western countries are seeing the end of many white-collar jobs, and it is not clear what is going to replace them. Regions such as the Middle East and Africa are facing a demographic challenge, with huge numbers of youth seeking employment. Participants agreed that education reform will be crucial, to ensure graduates have appropriate skills. It was also argued that in Egypt privatization of land will be needed, alongside decentralization; currently 93% of the land is still owned by the state. However, it was recognized that, overall, economies in the region have been hit hard by the wars and instability of the past decades and will take time to recover.

The environment was also highlighted as a challenge: Yemen is running out of water and the Syrian drought of 2006–10 may have been one of the causes of unrest.

A concluding statement by a participant warned that regional upheavals have not reached their apex either geographically or in intensity, or their endgame in terms of winners and losers.

Session 5: International Developments and Regional Implications

The fifth session took an in-depth look at the interests and roles of world powers in the Middle East region, and asked whether US withdrawal would lead to a strategic vacuum.

Participants explored what the growing importance of China might mean for the Middle East. It was said that China has three key interests: domestic economic reform, to move from export-driven growth to consumption-driven growth; tapping into global drivers of growth; and the relationship with the United States. Its foreign policy is traditionally based on mutual non-

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interference, although as an emerging power it is now under more pressure to take positions; a recent example was its changing stance on North Korea.

China is thinking long-term about how it will work within, or try to change, the global model, but for now it is unlikely to play a political role in the Middle East. In particular, it is unlikely to be inclined to take responsibility for securing energy exports. It will look to diversify its energy sources and reduce carbon emissions. It also has significant shale gas potential. It is unlikely to see the Middle East as a significant potential market, looking instead to Asia, Africa and Latin America. One participant also questioned whether China would necessarily be such a significant economic power in future, asking whether it would meet its demographic challenges and be able to 'get rich before it gets old'.

Similarly, Russian foreign policy was said to be driven by the principle of non-interference and the preservation of sovereign rights so as to encourage responsible global governance. It was argued that the Syrian chemical weapons deal was an example of this aspect of Russian foreign policy at its best. The Russian need for trust over the agreement of a humanitarian resolution on Syria was emphasized; Russia was said to want reassurances that humanitarian corridors will only be used for humanitarian aid. Overall, while Russia is already a player in the Middle East region, it was considered unlikely to become as dominant as the United States or the former USSR had been.

In discussing the role of the EU, participants saw EU countries as preoccupied by domestic affairs and the Eurozone problems in particular. It was noted that, unlike the United States, Europe had fully internalised the urgent need to adapt to its changing global economic circumstances, and one participant commented that Europe wants to be a 'player not a payer' in the Middle East. This has been reflected in its focus on commercial diplomacy as expressed, for example, by British Prime Minister David Cameron.

Europe has not been as strategically focused on the Middle East as on Eastern Europe, and much of its policy towards the region has been shaped by fear factors: the desire to avoid excessive migration, curb agricultural exports to the EU or minimize the repercussions of instability. Europe is keenly aware that the Middle East needs to create 40 million jobs, and it is in its interest to support that. While member states of the EU are often divided and competitive about foreign policy towards the region, this has also allowed

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space for successful quiet diplomacy, as was recently achieved with regard to Egypt. It was argued that as Europe is adjacent to the region, cooperation in the southern Mediterranean should be a bigger focus for European policy. The significant European markets offer real benefits to the region, and trade agreements will be important.

Participants again discussed the role of the United States, focusing on its defence policy and priorities. Its defence priorities were said to be the rise of China, containment of Iran, capacity for military response in the Middle East, and investing in NATO. However, domestic political problems are driving significant cuts in the defence budget, and it was argued that the 'pivot to Asia' was in fact a strategic justification for these budget cuts. The cuts are likely to continue, meaning the United States will have to adapt to constrained budgets and rely on more intimate relationships with other countries, perhaps through shared or federated defence. Despite several participants expressing the view that America is focusing increasingly on its domestic priorities, it was also countered that it has a strong consensus on foreign policy and that any challenge to vital US interests would provoke a swift response.

The effects of recent events on international institutions were also explored. Participants agreed that the UNSC is still an important provider of legitimacy for international action. Participants also agreed on the importance of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Chemical Weapons Convention, and it was said that commitment to these treaties needed to be reaffirmed. The outcome of the Iranian nuclear negotiations will have a significant effect on the NPT. The current state of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (R2P) was considered; one participant argued that the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan had been 'over-learned' with regard to continuing military presence in a country after an intervention.

Overall it was considered that there is unlikely to be a major shift in the main players in the Middle East. Emerging powers would achieve growing economic significance, but this would not be matched by an increased political role. The United States still maintains sufficient vital security interests in the region to want to remain actively engaged. Several participants emphasized the need for deeper regional and sub-regional cooperation in the economic, political and security spheres, pointing to the benefits Asia has gained from such cooperation. This would help the region to overcome sectarianism and other splits.

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Session 6: Egypt Three Years On

Egypt was a key topic for discussion throughout the conference, and the sixth session focused on its prospects and challenges. Participants were agreed on the importance of Egypt to the whole region.

Polling outcomes were presented which showed that Egyptians remained optimistic, with 60% remaining hopeful for the country's future. Perhaps contrary to expectations, support for former President Mohammed Morsi remains significant. His ratings were on a par with those for General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The majority of Egyptians still blame former President Hosni Mubarak for the country's problems, with a lesser number blaming Morsi.

Participants agreed that there has been a significant change in Egypt, which cannot be reversed. This includes citizen empowerment driven by access to information technology (with the mobile phone penetration rate running at 110%) and a new generation who are more sceptical, more confident and less deferent. These changes will require increased accountability from government.

However, participants disagreed on whether Egypt should be focusing more on democracy or meritocracy. Several argued that it urgently needed to restore security and stability, and that the Egyptian people's demands would be satisfied above all by efficiency and good governance. This would be achieved by following the roadmap put forward by Adly Mansour's government. Other participants saw the events of 30 June as undemocratic in spirit, and argued that, while the process was messy, Egyptians must persevere with democratic consolidation. They argued that, historically, military security establishments could not succeed, and governance in countries like Egypt must be democratic – Egypt could not model itself on Dubai. It should be working to rebuild people's trust in democratic dynamics.

Views also diverged on the question of polarization and identity politics in Egypt. One view was that Egyptians were being presented with only two choices – the Muslim Brotherhood or the military – both of which belonged to the past, and that they needed a third alternative. Other participants held that Islamists such as the Brotherhood belonged to a pre-modern era, and could not be reconciled with or included in the modern political process.

It was agreed that policy debates were being held up because of these political struggles. Nevertheless, several participants were optimistic that

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Egyptians are learning politics and compromise, becoming more confident in their opinions, and will soon move from focusing on big existential discussions to policy issues such as whether governors should be elected.

It was also clear that Egypt faces significant and urgent challenges. These include difficult political decisions such as subsidy reform – which no political party has yet advocated – and the huge need for job and wealth creation. Foreign direct investment is needed and it was highlighted that, while for Egyptians the security situation is relatively bad, compared with other countries in the region Egypt is still a safe place to invest. Participants also agreed on the need to transform political institutions so that Egyptians feel they can express their views without having to take to the streets.

It was emphasized that whatever direction Egypt takes will have ramifications for the region and that regional actors have significant interests in Egypt's development. In particular, concerns were shared regarding instability and extremism in Sinai.

Session 7: Iran: Issues Beyond the Nuclear File

The final session entailed a broad discussion on political trends in Iran, and returned to the question of nuclear negotiations and Iranian foreign policy behaviour in the region.

Polling outcomes on Iranian attitudes were presented indicating that Iranians are slightly more optimistic about the future since the election of Hassan Rouhani as president in June. Priorities among the general population have been stable since 2011: employment is highest, followed by political issues including democracy, personal rights and women's rights. The prominence of political issues is in contrast to the situation elsewhere in the region. Foreign policy is a low priority, although very high numbers of Iranians support the development of nuclear weapons, and 96% agreed that maintaining the right to a nuclear programme was worth the price in sanctions.

Participants discussed the state of Iran today. It was pointed out that support for the current theocratic regime was very limited, at perhaps 10%, mostly loyalty bought through distribution of rents. Iran is experiencing significant economic problems as economic development has not been prioritized, and infrastructure, education, environment and other aspects of the country have suffered. It was said that there is pervasive corruption at the top, and a lack of

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wealth distribution throughout the country. Oil income has been spent on security rather than development. Meanwhile, the population itself has become very secular, probably more secular than Turkey, for example.

It is unclear what Rouhani's election will mean for Iran in the long term. He and his cabinet belong to a liberal camp that wants change – including privatization and economic integration into the international community – but it is not certain that he can deliver. He has a mandate to focus on the nuclear issue to end sanctions, but does not have authority to undertake any further rapprochement with the United States or change the broader direction of Iranian foreign policy.

The Iranian elite was said to be divided into two camps: pragmatists and hardliners. The pragmatists, led by former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, believe in putting economic expediency before revolutionary ideology. The hardliners, however, believe that compromising on ideals will lead to the unravelling of the regime. It was stated that these hardliners in the elite need enmity with America and Israel to maintain their positions, as authoritarianism may be swept aside if the country opens up. Iranian foreign policy, which reaches out into the region, is designed to maintain the security of the mainland.

Participants discussed the nuclear negotiations [**Note:** The Forum was held one week prior to the official announcement of the agreement between Iran and the P5+1 in Geneva]. The United States is trying to negotiate an interim deal to put the Iranian nuclear programme on hold for six months, with an increased inspections regime, in exchange for limited sanctions relief. The US administration believes that sanctions have succeeded in bringing the Iranians back to the negotiating table, and that criticisms of the potential deal are unrealistic – the terms have not yet been agreed, but Washington will aim for the best deal possible. Force is not seen as an option for resolving the situation.

The sanctions were intended only to resolve the nuclear issue, not to achieve regime change or alter Iranian foreign policy in the region (although some participants argued that the negotiations should be tied to Iran's foreign policy stance). However, a deal on the nuclear issue was said to have other potential positive outcomes, including a rapprochement between Iran and the West, the possibility of tackling issues such as human rights, and opening up avenues for the creation of a future regional security architecture.

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Nevertheless Iran's neighbours remain strongly concerned on several points. They have not been involved in the negotiations, and they are afraid that the United States will withdraw from the region once a nuclear deal is reached, allowing Iranian interference across the region to go unchecked. They are also concerned that Iran will be able to hide some uranium enrichment locations.

It was argued that while the clerical establishment may require a generational change before there is a real opening up of Iran, the outside world can use Rouhani to put pressure on the hardliners. Furthermore several participants argued that it will be easier to persuade Iran to put its national interest before revolutionary ideology if the international community tries to engage and include Iran rather than isolating it.

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