

CIRS BRIEF

*Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar
Center for International and Regional Studies*

America, the Middle East, and the Gulf: An Arab View of Challenges Facing the Next U.S. Administration

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About the Speaker

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On August 24, 2008, Khouri was invited to Doha by CIRS to give a Distinguished Lecture entitled “America, the Middle East, and the Gulf: An Arab View of the Challenges Facing the Next U.S. Administration.” This Brief is an edited transcript of that lecture.

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About CIRS

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America, the Middle East, and the Gulf: An Arab View of Challenges Facing the Next U.S. Administration

There are a number of challenges that will face the next American administration in relation to the Middle East, but I want to zero in on a couple of areas that capture the core issues that not only challenge the next American administration, but challenge the people of the Middle East, and particularly, the people of the Arab world. This is a moment of tremendous potential change in regional relationships among people in the Middle East, and in relationships between the region and the western world—the United States in particular—but the western world in general. These changes are happening because of several things that are converging. This is a potentially historic moment of change equivalent to the moment after World War I, the moment after 1967, and the moment after 1948. These were really pivotal historical moments when the entire region of the Middle East was transformed.

Unfortunately, in the past, most of these transformations were in problematic directions, but we may possibly be on the verge of another one of these moments, as we see short term and long term dynamics converge. The short term dynamics revolve around the election of a new American president, the likelihood of the U.S. starting to withdraw from Iraq and the aftershocks of the situation there, the possible resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue, and movement on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Recently, we have seen the Syrians and the Israelis doing indirect negotiations, we have seen Israel sign cease fires with Hezbollah and Hamas, or agree to cease fires, and we have seen a heightened United Nations presence in the region. There are also global energy shifts with the likely increasing role of Russia in the Middle East - China's increasing engagement is also another factor - and the obvious need to do better at dealing with the problem of terrorism, which has not been dealt with very well by the people of the region, by the western powers, or the world as a whole. These are some of the key issues that strike me as suggesting that we may be seeing change coming in a big way. It is important to acknowledge that we are actually in the midst of a period of momentous change all around the Arab world in particular, but also in Turkey and in Iran.

Currently, we see change underway, but the real turning point that we need to recognize happened around 1990 with the end of the Cold War. It was not 9/11, as many people in the U.S. or the West like to say, but it was really 1990 and the end of the Cold War, which took off the lids that had kept this region essentially frozen in ideological terms, for about half a century. Other than the Iranian revolution, there was no real momentous ideological change in the Middle East because the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict were keeping the region static.

When the Cold War ended, there was revival of political currents, identities, movements, and forces. There was new dynamism throughout the region; new players emerged onto the scene and new relationships were forged within countries, between countries, and between the region and foreign countries as well. If we are to address future challenges and opportunities in a coherent and rational way, and if we are to find out how to make the Middle East a more stable, rational, and prosperous region that engages more intelligently and peacefully with the rest of the world, it is very

important to start by acknowledging and understanding what is actually happening on the ground. Therefore, I will give you a view: one view of one Arab person about what these events are and what they tell us about the challenges and the opportunities facing the people of this region and the next American administration.

We have had other moments of change in recent years, all of which were badly missed because of political incompetence by the Arab world, by Israel, by the United States, by Europe, and by Iran. There is plenty of incompetence to go around for the missed opportunities. These were opportunities like the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, the Oslo Israeli-Palestinian Process, the Camp David peace process, the Syria, U.S., and Israel talks in 2000, the post 9/11 response to the 9/11 terror attacks, and the Arab Peace Plan in the year 2002. These were all enormous opportunities that could have been capitalized on if there had been better leadership in this region as well as in Israel and the western world. There was no good leadership among the principal players, and therefore, all of these opportunities were missed and the region spun into a cycle of increasing turbulence, violence, fanaticism, occupations, resistances, threats, sanctions, and different kinds of stresses and tensions that have made the region much more difficult to deal with. But what happened in the last eighteen years, from 1990 up to today, has been quite historic in terms of revealing the state of play in this region.

The Five Crises Defining the Arab World

Why are there so many different things happening? Why is there so much violence, turbulence, tension, occupying foreign armies? Why is all of this happening here, and not in Argentina, or India? There you have tensions, but you do not have this incredible range of political stress, violence, militarism, and confrontation within the region and with foreign powers. The answer is to first of all understand that over the last thirty or forty years, really since 1967, there have been five major crises that have defined the Arab world. They have not defined all of the Arab countries because the Arab world is not homogenous, and the Gulf region is largely distinct from the rest of the Arab world in the nature of the stresses or tensions that I am describing. There is within the Gulf various pockets of tension, political and ideological acts of terrorism, extravagance, and corruption. These issues occur everywhere in the region, but the Gulf is different because the configuration of statehood, the amount of money, the nature of the population, and the developmental stage that these countries are in, are completely different to Syria, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. So what I am referring to applies mostly to the regions outside of the Gulf, but affects it to some extent.

The first of these five crises is the modern crisis of a stable and secure statehood, and the configuration of statehoods in most of the Arab world. Almost every Arab country has a border problem and most Arab countries have had major internal rebellions and insurrections. Some countries have had civil wars and a few have completely fallen apart and have seen their central governments disappear. The second is a crisis in citizen/state relationships as it is not clear to citizens in most Arab countries what their rights and obligations are. It is not clear where the power of the state ends and the power of the individual asserts itself. The relationship between individual groups and the state are not fully articulated either in the legal system, or the political relationships that define these societies. A third crisis that became clear in the mid-1980s after the

effects of the first oil boom faded away, is a crisis in basic human needs and sustainable socioeconomic development. As population growth increased faster than economic growth, there was a period of stress in many Arab countries, including recessions in many of the oil producing countries. The modern state was unable to keep delivering to its people better living standards, improved social services, and welfare benefits. Since the 1930s or 1940s, much of the Arab world was developing in a relatively sustained manner; life was getting better, and there were more hospitals, schools, roads, and telephones. Life was improving at the material level for many people in the Arab world for about half a century, until the mid-1980s. This process began to stall because economic growth and oil prices were low and population growth rates continued to be very high.

The fourth crisis is the crisis of identity at the personal, the individual, the community, and the collective national level. By “crisis” I mean that many people in the Arab world did not feel that they could express their identities fully, openly, and freely, in countries like Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Morocco, or places in the Gulf like Kuwait, and Bahrain. There were political tensions and stresses, and identities were not always freely expressed, whether it was political, ideological, tribal, or religious identities. There were tensions for people who felt that their national identity was not allowed to be expressed in their own country, and collective group identities were also often suppressed. This created tensions that built up and finally, these people began expressing themselves in a variety of different ways.

The Arab world is the only region in the entire world, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, that did not democratize at a major level.

The fifth crisis has been a crisis of relations with the non-Arab world. We still do not know if the majority of people in the Arab world want to make peace with Israel, or want to make war with Israel. We honestly do not have a clear idea, and this is quite astounding. We do not know if the majority of people in the Arab world are friends with the United States, or if they fear the United States. There are many different signs that we get from polls, from newspapers, and from the media, but we do not have a clear idea about the state of relations with non-Arab countries. We do not know how many people in the Arab world fear Iran, or like what Iran is doing. There is such confusion, or at least imprecision, about the most important strategic relationships with non-Arab players. This is a crisis of severe proportions which has built up in much of the modern Arab world.

In 1990, many young people in the Arab world were addressing the same unresolved issues that their grandparents had addressed in 1920. Four generations of Arabs had passed between World War I and the end of the Cold War, and it is still not clear whether secularism, or religiosity that is the driving force of the Arab world. Between 1910 and 1990, tense relationships between citizens and their state, between Arabism and Zionism, between the Arab world and the western world, and between the central state and the provincial regions, had been largely unresolved in the Arab world. Also unaddressed and not seriously dealt with, were issues such as identifying the limits on exercising state and national power, and attending to the most fundamental, basic elements of personal identity, state configuration, regional relationships, and

international dynamics. This is why when the lids came off in 1990, the pressures containing personal expression, political activism, and ideological activity, were released. This was followed by a very turbulent period, which we are still going through and which this region is still making-up for. The Arab world is making up for three generations of missed political activism and missed political state and nation-building opportunities, and this is one reason why this region is so turbulent.

The Ten Challenges Facing the Middle East

There is a tremendous variety of political and ideological activities taking place throughout the Arab world. The processes currently underway throughout the region are terrorism, democratic elections, semi-democratic elections, civil society developments, increases in security systems, and changing relations with other powers. It is important to step back from this maelstrom and ask, “What are the major issues? What is actually going on? What are the positive and negative things that are happening? What is a threat and what is an opportunity, and how should we deal with either?” These questions affect the people of the region and the external powers, such as Israel, Iran, Turkey, the U.S., Europe, Russia, and others further afield.

Smaller countries have a greater sense of cohesion, which gives a greater sense of legitimacy and stability, and allows people to experiment with change more easily. We will continue to see major changes coming from smaller Arab countries like Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon.

There are ten issues that really define the contemporary forces of change in the Middle East and capture the challenges that we, and our foreign friends and partners, face in this region. The first important issue is the demographic and urban nature of the Arab world. From 1930 to the present day, the Arab world has been transformed from a region that was predominantly middle-aged or old, uneducated and rural, to the situation today, where the Arab world is predominantly young, urban, and educated, and has its most basic needs met. The fundamental life-sustaining needs of the majority of young people in the Arab world, most of whom live in cities, are reasonably well met. The vast majority of these young and educated people are however, politically frustrated and do not find outlets for their personal or political ideologies or identities. This has been the source of tremendous pressure within these societies, especially when coupled with the problems of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the new problems of foreign armies and occupations in the Middle East, the global war on terror, the response to the U.S. and others fighting the war on terror, and the tensions in Arab, Islamic, and Asian sentiments towards America and the West. When all these factors are put together, you see a young and urban population that is already frustrated, and is a source of tremendous volatility and danger.

The second issue became a very clear trend in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Essentially, with the rise of the current Islamist wave, and with changes in the economic trends related to oil, we have seen a contraction in the control, credibility, impact, and

legitimacy of the central nation-state and central government in the Arab world. The Gulf is an exception in this case, because this type of state is very strong, very rich, and serves its people. Among the indigenous populations in the Gulf, these kinds of stresses are marginal, but in the rest of the Arab world, the state is very slowly retreating from certain areas of society such as the rural areas, dense urban areas, and poor urban poverty belts. There are many areas in the Arab world where the central government has no control and is not represented, and the spaces where the central government used to be, have been filled by Islamist groups, tribal groups, private sector groups, non-governmental organizations, foreign donors, and all kinds of different militias and neighborhood gangs. The rise of non-governmental organizations and non-state actors, whether they are small local charity societies, private sector development groups, militias, or large and well-armed resistance groups like Hezbollah, are growing forces in the region.

Hamas and Hezbollah are part of the government; they are playing the democratic game and they are prepared to share power in the state's structures.

These groups should not be classified as non-state actors; they are actually parallel-state actors. In the past, such groups challenged Arab states directly—like in Egypt in the 1970s, for instance—and the state fought back ferociously and defeated them. The difference today is that most of these groups ignore the state. The latest tactic in many Arab countries is for non-state actors to actually exist parallel to the state, and to work in society, mostly peacefully, doing what they feel they should do to serve their people. There is now a parallel structure of state services and non-state services, and some of the non-state actors like Hezbollah in Lebanon, for instance, are more powerful than the state in military terms. If one looks back over the last few years and asks, “Who has the United States been fighting recently?” The answer is that it has been fighting Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and Hezbollah, indirectly, as well as Al Sadr’s Mahdi army, narcotics groups, terrorist groups, and freelance gangsters. The U.S. is not fighting governments in the Middle East, and it is not confronting very many governments. Most of the governments in the Middle East are on quite good terms with the United States, so these non-state actors are an important new force that has to be addressed, not simply as threats, but as indigenous, credible, and often legitimate challenges to the governments of this region that have not been able to fulfill the needs of their populations, and to respond to the five crises mentioned earlier.

The third major issue that everybody has to deal with, and which is particularly important for the Israelis, is the end of docility and the end of acquiescence. If you look around the Arab world, you will not see, like you did in the 1960s and the 1970s, groups of Arab men and women taking a petition to the local U.N. office. What you see is a lot of people organizing themselves politically. If there is a foreign military presence in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, South Lebanon, or in Iraq, they organize themselves militarily and fight back. The fourth generation of sovereign Arab people after World War I, emerged as the first generation of non-docile Arabs who do not plead for their rights and who do not go to the U.N., or Washington, or London and say, “We have rights. Our rights need to be respected.” They have learned that this tactic has not worked very well. People have taken things into their own hands and they fight back,

and they resist, and they are defiant, and this is exhibited in movements like Hamas, Hezbollah, the Muslim Brothers, tribal groups, nationalist groups, and in some of the democracy groups. All kinds of different people fight back against what they find to be unacceptable policies by foreign governments, by their own governments, by Israel, or other neighboring governments. They are no longer docile, and this end of docility marks a tremendously important turning point in the dynamics of this region. Most of this is a nonviolent process where people stand up and say, "I will not be abused anymore. I will not be subjugated to a double standard. I will not be mistreated by hypocritical foreign powers, and I will not accept the consequences of my own corrupt and inefficient government."

There are many wealthy people in the Arab world, and not just in the Gulf, but in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, and Syria. There is tremendous wealth spreading across the Arab world, but it is not spreading very equitably, and this is creating new tensions that will have to be dealt with. People in the region are raising these issues, and it is one of the reasons why Islamist movements are spreading.

In Jordan in the late 1970s, the first wave of the contemporary Islamist movements started. Their main criticism was not about Israel, and it was not about western imperialism or Zionism; it was about domestic corruption, abuse of power, inequality, economic disparity, denial of human rights, and abuses by the security services. These domestic indignities were the driving forces behind the birth of modern Islamist movements.

The targets of people's activism and self-assertion are their own governments, elites and power structures, as well as Israel, and the western world. These three are, simultaneously, the targets of people's renewed activism. This occurs at the state level as well, like the Syrian and Iranian governments' response to western threats, sanctions, and pressures, even after the Iraqi regime had been overthrown, and when there was concern that there would be other regime changes. Syria and Iran, in particular, stood their ground, and groups like Hamas and Hezbollah in Lebanon and Palestine, did the same thing vis-à-vis the Israelis and stood their ground. This kind of approach may work in the short run, as the Israelis were forced to agree to two cease fires with Hezbollah and Hamas. They did not sign, but they agreed to two cease fires and U.N. resolutions.

The fourth trend is the intrusive nature of some American and western policies in the region. There has been a qualitative change in the way that the U.S. does foreign policy in the Middle East. In the past, western foreign policy was predominantly designed to protect national or oil interests, but in recent years, the Europeans to a certain extent, but especially the Americans, have been trying to change the value systems of many Arab countries. This of course, was largely a reaction to 9/11, but some policies started even before that. Currently, there is a tremendously intrusive U.S. foreign policy dimension in the Middle East. The U.S. wants to change the education system, the political system, the economic system, and many social values, and is

actively promoting moderate Islam. There is a wholesale attempt to remake the Arab world because the U.S. feels that the region, or parts of it, has generated the terrorism which attacked Americans.

The fifth issue revolves around the whole phenomenon of terrorism – the Al Qaeda type of terrorism – and the reaction to it in the form of the American-led global war on terror. The United States, Britain, and others in the West, severely misdiagnosed the terror phenomenon and the terror problem. A criminal act, or a series of inhuman criminal acts, committed by a relatively small number of people in the Al Qaeda network and their affiliates, triggered a massive response from the U.S., who joined by the Israeli government and some Arab governments. This created a much wider series of tensions and stresses between the Arab-Islamic region, the U.S., and others in the West, to the point where three out of four Arab-Muslims feel that Islam itself is under threat, which is not actually the case. The United States does not threaten Islam. The United States does not have a problem with Islam other than it does not understand how religion, nationalism, politics, and resistance fit into each other. There was a massive misdiagnosis in the United States about what it is that causes people to become terrorists, and there was a cumulative misdiagnosis which created failed policies by the United States. These were policies that did not differentiate between the small, cult-like group of Al Qaeda terrorists, Islamist movements anchored in nationalism and resistance like Hamas and Hezbollah fighting Israeli occupation and foreign threats, and the mainstream peaceful Islamists who were simply trying to remake their societies into a more responsive image and to have less corrupt, more orderly and equitable societies that reflect their own values.

Much of the Arab World's afflictions are man-made problems that can be solved by human beings, but there needs to be much more honest and courageous leadership. The single biggest problem within the Arab world is the question of a lack of good governance. The tremendous human and natural resources of this region are largely untapped because the nature of the political systems promote a huge outflow of the most talented young Arabs; tens of thousands of engineers, scientists, and creative people have emigrated all over the world. In many cases, the people who remain in the Arab world are not given an opportunity to make creative contributions to economic growth and social development. Good governance is probably the single biggest way to start resolving some of these stresses.

The United States badly confused all of these things with each other and still has a problem differentiating between religion, nationalism, good governance, and resistance to occupation. The consequence is that we now have a widespread problem with small terrorist groups proliferating throughout the region. For example, in Lebanon, we see that Fatah Islam, and other smaller groups have emerged. Whether these groups are being helped by some states or not, nobody really knows. There are a lot of accusations, but the overall point is that there is a growing problem with the terror phenomenon that is becoming more diffuse and difficult to fight. Conflicts like the Iraq war are recruiting new terrorists as well as killing them. Afghanistan is a very good example of the revival of these movements; some of which are terrorist, some of which are nationalistic,

and some of which are resistance oriented. They paint themselves in different colors because they are actually varied and many different groups will use Islam and religion as a motivating and legitimizing force, but they are actually driven by different reasons. By failing to understand these nuances and differences, the United States and its allies promote a situation where terrorism becomes a bigger problem and more difficult to fight.

You cannot promote democracy in one country and boycott democratically elected governments in another. You have to be consistent and deal with the people of the region as people with equal rights. The Arabs, the Palestinians, and the Israelis have absolutely equal, simultaneous, and mutual rights. Our rights are not sequentially based so that we get our rights only after Israel's security is guaranteed. The U.S. has tried that approach and it does not work. People will fight back. Equal rights must be simultaneously applied.

You must also engage all legitimate actors. If you deal with North Korea, with the Libyan government, and with the IRA for peace talks, then you have to deal with people in the Middle East, even if it is Hamas, or Hezbollah. If they are legitimate, you deal with them, and you deal with them the same way that the IRA were dealt with in Northern Ireland. You get them to stop the violence and the terrorism, and to achieve their goals politically. The reason it worked in Northern Ireland is because the two sides were treated as equals whose rights were equally met.

The sixth issue is the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict and the continuing American tilt towards Israel rather than trying to play an impartial mediating role to give Israelis and Arabs equal rights. The obvious American tilt towards Israel has had severe consequences. This has allowed the Arab-Israeli conflict to be the single most radicalizing and destabilizing force in the Arab world over the last sixty years. It has continued to be the single biggest reason why American credibility is declining throughout the region. Not only is American credibility declining, but American influence is also declining throughout the region. This conflict is one of the reasons why people are willing to stand up to, defy, and challenge the United States. Solving the Arab-Israeli conflict is not just an American responsibility; it is our responsibility and Arabs have put forward a peace plan. We have made it clear that we are prepared to coexist with Israel according to international legitimacy and U.N. resolutions, and in a negotiated way that is acceptable to both sides. The Arabs have gone a long way to meeting Israeli and international legal demands. The lack of a response from the U.S., Israel, and others has let the situation fester, and has had tremendously negative consequences for the U.S. bilateral relations in the region, and for the region itself.

The seventh major issue that the new American president will have to look at very quickly and try to understand, is that thirty years ago, the Arab world and the Middle East as a whole, was an area that was dominated essentially by one conflict: the Arab-Israeli conflict, but was additionally influenced by the Cold War. Today, the Middle East is a region that is defined by multiple conflicts and several active wars, and is troubled by several countries that are increasingly brittle and in some cases, falling

apart. In the eyes of the people of the region, many issues like terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and problems in Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, are increasingly linked by a single dynamic. There are obvious linkages at the operational level between people fighting in these different conflicts.

Hamas is becoming increasingly proficient at fighting against Israel and showing a greater will to do so, as Hezbollah has done before. This is one of the reasons why the Israelis agreed to cease fires with them, because they realized that there was no military answer to this situation. The reason that Hamas, Hezbollah, and others have been able to do what they are doing, is because there is greater regional cooperation. Thus, the region now has multiple conflicts that are all plugged into a single dynamic.

The eighth issue is that in several conflicts in the region, the United States has actively taken sides in a country's internal political, ideological, or active civil wars. The two most dramatic examples are Lebanon and Palestine, where the United States sided with one group against the other within these countries. In both cases, the United States did not do very well, because the side they supported lost. This indicates that in the Arab world, there are a variety of single sovereignties that have two credible and legitimate governing authorities. In Palestine there is Fatah and Hamas, and in Lebanon there was the March 14th alliance and the Hezbollah-led March 8th alliance. All were legitimate within a single sovereignty, and this is something that is happening in Iraq, in Somalia, and in Sudan. If the U.S. intervenes in these situations and actively sides with one group against the other by providing money, arms, and training, it seems to make the problem worse.

It is the right and the obligation of all citizens in the Arab world to demand that their political order be pluralistic, participatory, accountable, and non-corrupt. People can achieve this through a council of tribal elders, through regional councils, or through the Emir or Sheikh having an open Diwan every Friday.

They can do this any way they want to; through Sharia law, the Arab League Charter, or by copying the Swiss Constitution. I think people can do whatever they want as long as they have efficient and accountable governments. If there is one issue that is absolutely critical, it is accountability. This is a very powerful value in Islam, and an extremely strong tradition in Arab tribal and village societies. These are not alien concepts. These are concepts that emerged out of this region many years ago.

The ninth issue that can be seen more clearly now than at any other point over the last thirty years, is that the Middle East security balance, or security architecture, has been transformed from one that was a balance between two great powers – the Soviets and the Americans with their local proxies and allies – into the situation today, where the security architecture of the Arab world is defined by a balance among four powers. These powers being Turkey, Iran, Israel, and the United States; none of whom are Arabs. The Arab world has largely written itself out of its own security architecture, which is completely unsustainable and completely unacceptable to any person or state, but is the unfortunate reality of the region. This is one of the reasons why many other

groups are emerging to play a role, and why Syria and Iran are forging close strategic relationships. This situation is untenable and needs to be addressed by people in the region as well as those abroad.

The tenth and last challenge is that in the entire Middle East, including the Gulf countries, the dominant trend is “polarization.” There is a clear polarization of societies being pulled into opposite directions but coexisting, more or less, peacefully with each other. There is poverty living with great wealth, the rule of law coexisting with lawlessness, and dynamism, productivity, and global connectivity living side by side with stagnant quarters of society who are either standing still or going backwards. There are very extreme polarized sections of societies emerging, and this is occurring at the regional level as well as at the ideological level. There are countries, leaders, and movements who are close to the United States, and there are others who are against the United States and who side with Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah. This is a situation that is problematic in the short run but may generate a new balance of power allowing this region to address some of its conflict situations in a more rational and diplomatic way, and maybe move on to a better future.

The most noteworthy diplomatic reality of the region is that several mediated diplomatic processes have occurred in the last few years in which the United States had not been present. Different groups within the Arab world have had their conflicts mediated by Qatar, by Saudi Arabia, by Turkey, by the U.N., and by the Arab League. Just as the Arabs have written themselves out of their own security architecture, the Americans have written themselves - through their own incompetence - out of their diplomatic role as a trusted mediator in the region. This is probably a good thing in the short run because it allows other people to try their hand at conflict resolution, and if there is a fairer mediator that looks at Israeli and Syrian interests as being equal, there might be a better chance of achieving them.

These ten issues are a broad description of what I consider the main challenges that face the people of the region and that will challenge the next American president. Apart from these issues, there are many positive things happening in the region such as young people plugging into the global economy, and the growth of private sectors, non-governmental organizations, democracy activists, environmental movements, women’s movements, youth movements, entrepreneurship, ingenuity, and artistic creativity. There is a tremendous amount of goodwill and constructivism going on in the Arab world, and this should be the norm. What should be abnormal are the problems, threats, and challenges taking place in the region. When one sees all these occurrences happening simultaneously, one sees a region that is trying to redefine itself and reconfigure itself according to goals that are more in keeping with the values of the people living in the region.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we are seeing the fraying at the edges and the slow disintegration of three major historical trends. The first is the dysfunction of the post World War I modern Arab state order that was created by the French and the British. The second is that the post World War II global economic order is not working very well for the vast

majority of people in the Arab world. Apart from wealthy people in the Gulf and the small percentage of wealthy people and political elites in some other Arab countries, the vast majority of Arabs' lives have not improved in any real way over the last fifteen years. The third trend is that people are no longer afraid to challenge their own states or the foreign patrons that support them.

These three major historical trends are fraying at the edges simultaneously, and people in the Arab world are looking for new ways to reconfigure and redefine themselves according to their own wishes. One of the things that becomes clear in this kind of analysis is that there are hundreds of millions of people who feel they have not been given a chance to define themselves, and have not been given a chance to reconfigure their states along with the operating systems of their government, the values of their society, and their relations with non-Arabs. This is especially clear to those of us who live and travel around the Arab world and around the large populated states like Morocco, Egypt, and Syria where it is more visible than it is in the Gulf.

There is tremendous frustration felt by people who have not been able to really define and validate their own statehood and sovereignty. Non-governmental movements, political groups, youth groups, tribal groups, and the private sector are all a means of self-determination coming from a grassroots process rather than from a top down one.

The final points I will make is to ask, "What are the issues that Arab people say are important to them?" and "What are the issues that foreign people – Israelis, Europeans, Russians, Chinese, Americans, and the next American administration – should be looking at that matter to the people of this region?"

First of all, it is the need for a stable statehood, secure societies, and security at the level of the individual. Groups do not want to be ethnically cleansed and there is ethnic cleansing happening in many places. Groups also do not want to be discriminated against and yet, there is discrimination occurring everywhere in the Arab world. People want security at the level of the person, the group, and the state itself. People also want to validate their own states; they want to define them and give them the strength, the durability, the sustainability, the security, and the prosperity that comes from self-validation, which is another way of talking about legitimacy. Legitimacy matters a lot, and legitimacy comes from two norms: from your own people validating you and from your government and your society adhering to international norms such as the global United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. This is where legitimacy comes from, and the Arab world is very deficient on both counts. People want to express their identity as individuals, as groups, and as political parties. There needs to be freedom for people to express their identity, and to have peaceful pluralism and fundamental sovereignty. Many people in the Arab world do not feel that they really have sovereignty; they have independence, but they are not sovereign. People feel that they do not make their own choices and decisions; they feel that somebody else is telling them what to do.

Finally, people in the Arab region want good and accountable governance, whether it is democracy, human rights, *Sharia* law, tribal Arab values, constitutionalism, republicanism, or transparency. It is the same thing in any language, in any religion, and in any place around the world. People want to be treated decently by their own power structures; they do not want to be discriminated against, they do not want to be humiliated, they do not want to be occupied, they do not want to be threatened, they do not want to be sanctioned, and they do not want to be treated according to different criteria by armies halfway around the world. They want to be treated as

decent human beings, and they want to have their dignity, their citizenship, and their humanity affirmed, first of all by their own power structures and secondly by people further afield. These are the challenges that face the next American administration and more importantly, that face us in the Arab world.

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SCHOOL OF FOREIGN SERVICE IN QATAR

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