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# ‘Egypt’s growth key to stability in region’

Mustafa Al Zarooni (City Editor) / 21 October 2014

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Abu Dhabi: Speakers at the Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate 2014 on Monday stressed the importance of Egypt’s economic development as a driver of stability in the region.

Speakers at a session themed ‘The Impact of Political Developments in Egypt on Regional Geopolitical Projects’, however, underscored that stability should not come at the expense of freedom and justice. The three-day debate was held by the Emirates Policy Centre in Abu Dhabi.

The session was moderated by David Ignatius, Associate Editor and columnist of The Washington Post. Ignatius addressed a question to Nabil Fahmy, Founding Dean of the School of Public Affairs at the American University in Cairo and former Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, about the impact that Egypt may have on the Middle East and North Africa (Mena) region.

Fahmy said: “Egypt has a quarter of the Mena region’s population. Any change in Egypt may affect the entire Mena countries.”

Replying to a question on the US intervention in the Egyptian affairs when Egypt’s then Minister of Defence Abdulfattah Al Sisi led the alleged coup overthrowing the Mursi regime from power, Fahmy said: “As an Egyptian, I do not care about others’ points of view, but I take them into account. Al Sisi is a patriot man and came to office through free presidential elections.”

Al Sisi, Fahmi added, believes that Egypt should return to its golden age in a modernised style, but to do that, Egypt’s economic status has to be revived, he said.

He said the financial support Egypt had received from the GCC states and the UAE, in particular, was very important, yet “it was not a surprise to us”.

He also said Egypt is facing and fighting terrorism, but not the terrorism as defined under the US concept.

The present problem is to determine and shape the new identity of the Egyptian society following two key revolutions that uprooted two different regimes — January 25, 2011 and June 30, 2013.

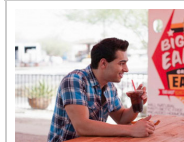
“We are continuing to carry out a roadmap and a future vision, yet we do not know how much challenges we shall be facing?”

Regarding the closure of the Carter Center, Fahmy referred to a new Egyptian law that would lay down fresh criteria to streamline and govern the work of non-governmental organisations.

He said Egyptians currently prefer stability to any democratic demands. “We will build the democracy for the sake of Egypt... Not for the West.”

Intervening in the debate, Mohamed Anis Salem, Director of Development Works, Cairo, said the Egyptian economy had been moving on the right track over five years before the first revolution happened, setting the economy back, but it has started bouncing back again.

“Crucial decisions have been taken, which had not been touched on before, including a decision on



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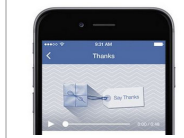
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government subsidy given to Egyptian citizens. A qualitative change in the government subsidy has been made. Also, the investments by GCC states in Egypt helped provide us with cash liquidity, which made us review the conditions set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) when we applied for a loan,” Salem said.

On his part, Ayman Al-Sayyad, Editor-in-Chief of Points of View magazine, Egypt, raised the question — “To what extent will the economic growth and stability in Egypt make up for freedom and justice?”

“We have to deal with all Egyptians as being Egyptians. The ruling regime must apply law and principles of justice on all. The only way for a de facto stability is freedom, justice, and that the ruler (president) should respect his subjects, and whoever (Egyptian citizens) has a contradicting point of view must not be dealt as a member of the outcast Muslim Brotherhood,” Al-Sayyad added.

“The Muslim Brotherhood failed to contain and accommodate other parties and factions — one of their fatal mistakes. I fear the same mistake might be repeated by the incumbent regime,” he said.

Ebtisam Al Ketbi, chairwoman of the Emirates Policy Centre, said Egypt had two options: the first one was a destructive cross-border geo-religious project, while the second option was a successful national patriotic state that is consistent with the vision of the GCC states.

“Making Egypt succeed will help create a balance in the region,” Al Ketbi pointed out.

The Saudi and UAE’s financial support to Egypt does not mean that Egypt is a subordinate country, but an ally, through which Egypt could restore its powerful central role as a leading country in the region, she said.

She pointed out that what may concern Saudi Arabia and the UAE is that matters in Egypt may not have moved as planned. Elaborating, she said the two Gulf states fear that Egypt would not be able to get rid of the bureaucracy and eliminate poverty, border problems, and the dangers that may be caused by the Muslim Brotherhood.

She said the West failed to address the group in the region. “The Muslim Brotherhood is a group that puts aside and works against others,” she noted.

Khaled Almaeena, political and media analyst and Editor-in-Chief of Saudi Gazette, Riyadh, said Egyptian President Al Sisi should play a historic role, and advised him not to depend on media that focuses on flattering the president.

“We should not look at the GCC states as a petrol station or a money pump. The Egyptian government should act responsibly and should not sacrifice freedom for sake of security,” he said.

Brian Katulis, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress, Washington, said the US politicians did not understand well what happened in 2011, and failed to lay down a new strategy to deal with Egypt. He said US President Barack Obama’s meeting with Al Sisi has shaped a new epoch in the bilateral ties between the two countries.

“We, in the USA, do not play up the issue of the Muslim Brotherhood nor deposed president Mursi. What obsess us now is freedom and improvement of the situation in Egypt, no matter who rules,” said.

## Iran

In another panel session themed ‘The Geopolitical Impact of Regional Powers’ Projects on the Gulf — Iran’, Hasan Al Omari, Head of Iranian Studies, Emirates Policy Centre, Abu Dhabi, said the Iranian geo-political project is based on a desperate ideological vision which presents no development to the region.

He added that the Iranian intervention in Syria and Iraq is what stimulated the ISIS to come into being. “The existence of Shia ISIS people in the region has helped the ISIS to appear in Iraq and Syria.” He said.

Al Omari said the GCC states welcome the idea of setting up a regional cooperation system with Iran and Iraq, but they have preconditions that the Iranian regime must give up its dualism as a state and a revolution.

However, Dr Seyed Hossein Mousavian, Associate Research Scholar at the Programme on Science and Global Security at Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, US, called for exercising control over sectarianism. He made it plain that Shias account for not more than 20 per cent of the region’s population. “So, why we drive the sectarian turmoil forward,” he asked.

“We need to build positive relations with the Mena region, particularly the GCC states, and agree on regional security arrangements which could further maintain the region’s security, and guarantee ongoing energy supply flow which is a key economic nerve to the region’s countries,” Mousavian added.

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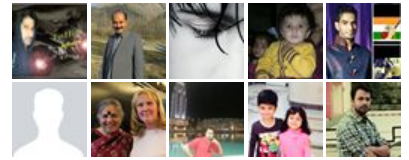
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In a third panel session on Monday themed ‘The Geopolitical Impact of Regional Powers’ Projects on the Gulf – Turkey’, Dr Jamal Khashoggi, journalist, columnist, author and general manager of Al Arab News Channel, Saudi Arabia, said the Turkish Islamists believed that the Arab Spring is a chance to begin a new historic stage, which would bring an end to the West’s exploitation of the Middle East, as they view it.

The Sunni Turkey is important to strike a balance with the Shia Iran, Khashoggi said. “We need to make relations with Turkey regarding the ISIS file, Iraq and Syria since Turkey has no militias on ground like that in Iran and Hezbollah of Lebanon. The only expansionism Turkey can take up is just economic. Then, we can discuss with Turkey about possible solutions in the region.”

### International actors

In another panel session dubbed ‘The Impact of Domestic Dynamics of Decision-making on Key International Actors’ Foreign Policies towards Gulf’, Richard Burt, managing director for Europe Russia and Eurasia at McLarty Associates, Washington D.C, called for rethinking over the relationship that links the USA to the Mena region.

He said the exporting of natural gas and oil will not have a significant role in shaping the policies between the USA with the Jewish lobby. “The USA will always in need of importing energy. Israel has turned away its friends and depends mainly on the USA.

“If I were an Israeli, I would be worried about a bank cheque Israel gets from the USA. Energy and US support to Israel will be always be a concern in Washington’s dealing with the region,” Burt said.

[malzarooni@khaleejtimes.com](mailto:malzarooni@khaleejtimes.com)

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