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Panel: Back to Winter in the Middle East? (GB3)

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Talking Points for: Michael Hudson, National University of Singapore

Talking Points on “Egypt and the Levant” for ASAN Institute Conference Middle East Panel

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Egypt and the Levant are well into a very long “winter of discontent.” Conflict—from low to very high intensity—is the norm from the Nile Valley through the Fertile Crescent. No state or entity is immune. The popular military coup in Egypt was followed by a severe crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition elements, and in my view it is doubtful that the likely new President, Field Marshal Sisi, will stabilize the situation. He has a “honeymoon period” of perhaps less than a year to work an economic miracle, and miracles do not often happen.

The horrendous civil war in Syria—which is by no means just a Syrian affair—defies a diplomatic or political solution. A regime that survives only by the sword, but fortified by Iran, Russia and the Lebanese Hizballah, will fight to the death, while the incoherent opposition, itself enjoying significant outside support, especially for its dominant jihadi elements, is in no mood for a negotiated solution. The spillover to and from Iraq, meanwhile, only spreads the contagion of conflict Al-Maliki’s regime in Baghdad has a stake in Bashar al-Asad’s survival, while the largely Sunni opposition draws sustenance from the chaos next door in Syria.

Jordan, with nearly a million Syrian refugees, is in dire economic condition. The traditional support bases for the Hashemite monarchy have eroded, while the paralysis in Palestinian-Israeli diplomacy adds additional stress. Were a third Palestinian intifada to erupt it would

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TALKING POINTS

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throw the region into further turmoil. Lebanon, meanwhile, seems inexorably to be drawn into the Syrian swamp.

The old order in Egypt and the Masriq may be collapsing, but it is far from clear what will emerge from it.

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