

Leadership and the Legacies of the Arab Spring

Panel: Session 4 (Grand Ballroom)

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Organizing Institution: The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Speakers: Clement Henry, American University in Cairo
Diederik Vandewalle, Dartmouth College
Michael Hudson, National University of Singapore
Jang Ji-Hyang, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies (moderator)

Panel Short Summary

Daniel Katz, Center for a New American Security
Rancy Kim, Ewha Womans University

Dr. Jang Ji-Hyang framed the structure of the discussion. The first major issue is the diverse leadership transitions unfolding in Middle East countries. This would be divided by speaker into Tunisia and Egypt, Libya, emerging transitions in countries such as Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain, as well as regional power configurations involving Turkey and Iran. The second significant issue is the urgency of the state-building agenda in the post-Arab Spring Middle East.

Professor Clement Henry focused his remarks on Tunisia and Egypt, in particular the contrast between the revolutions that unfolded in each country. Both countries had long histories as states and were police states with a developed security apparatus. The two revolutions shared the elements of social media and Arab awakening. In Tunisia, there was a “textbook transition to democracy,” whereas the Egyptians are still unsure about the proper sequencing of democratic processes. A transition period is unstable because the transitional authority lacks legitimacy. Tunisia resolved this challenge by utilizing the existing constitution. The Tunisian Constituent Assembly, which held elections on October 2011, has met regularly. Egypt, whose army is not politically neutral, has presidential elections slated for May 2012. Though the army is supposed to withdraw from politics, there are doubts about whether they will do so.

Professor Diederik Vandewalle highlighted the difference between popular depictions of Libya as chaotic and the positive reality on the ground, where there has been steady

progress in creation of national institutions. The Libyan Transitional National Council (TNC), an unelected provisional body, systematically thought about how to prevent through checks and balances a recurrence of dictatorship similar to that which prevailed under Muammar Gaddafi. The main lesson of the TNC experience for other Arab countries undergoing transition is that since many issues need to be addressed simultaneously, governments need to set priorities. Constructive communication among relevant parties is essential during a transition. Good leadership without good institutions is meaningless.

Professor Michael Hudson focused on the unfinished cases of Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria, where there has been a leadership deficit by incumbent leaders and the opposition movements. Although previous Yemeni leader Ali Abdullah Saleh has resigned, his relatives figure prominently in the army and security services. The opposition lacks leadership. The current Yemeni president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Al-Hadi, has not demonstrated leadership in difficult circumstances. Bahrain, a traditional Gulf monarchy, has displayed deficient leadership and high levels of corruption. The ongoing crackdown on protesters has been bloody and sparked international outrage.

Jang asserted that while Turkey may show regional leadership, Iran is unlikely to exercise similar influence. Turkey has grown its economy, forged a foreign policy of better ties with neighbors, and successfully combined Islam with Western-style representative democracy. Iran, which is now seen as a bully country, was unable to compete for regional leadership after the Revolutionary Guard crushed opposition protestors following the rigged 2009 presidential election.

Regarding the state-building agenda, Henry said the Tunisians are proceeding well. Although Tunisia and Egypt have open economies and need tourists, much additional progress is required in Egypt. Vandewalle claimed that state building is related to institution building. While Libya has a history of destroying state institutions, many Arab countries need institution building. Hudson thought the ideal is an organic model that grows over time. Most importantly, Arab publics will reject arbitrary authoritarian rule.

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