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**Working Group 3 Report
Regional Security in the Middle East**

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Session 1: The Arab Spring and Egypt; Saturday, 2 November 2013, 14:30-16:00

Key points:

- President Mohammed Morsi did not follow through on his promise to serve as president of all Egyptians, failed to take steps to address Egypt's economic crisis, and was perceived as taking steps to put himself above the law. This contributed to the outpouring of public protest against him, which culminated in the coup of 3 July 2013.
- Many Egyptians see the July 2013 coup as a necessary corrective to the Muslim Brotherhood's effort to divert Egypt's political development.
- The Muslim Brotherhood perceives that they were unjustly ejected from power after winning democratic elections. They are now under serious pressure and question whether/how they will be able to re-engage in politics.

The revolution in 2011 was a time for Islamists to rise in Egypt -- not only the Muslim Brotherhood, but other groups, too. Many Egyptians feel that Islamists diverted the country from the effort to turn Egypt into a modern Islamic country.

Many Tahrir demonstrators resent what they perceive as Islamists' opportunism. They see the Islamists as only showing up on the streets when they see that there's something happening, in a decisive moment that they can exploit. But the Muslim Brotherhood seems to have overestimated Islamic power on the streets, leading to the miscalculation that they could ensconce themselves in power without any negative reaction.

In his inauguration speech, President Mohammed Morsi made several promises: to be a president of all Egyptians; after 100 days would solve 3 major problems: cleaning Cairo's streets from rubbish, deal with traffic, and improve Egypt's energy shortage. After 5 months nothing happened.

Morsi appointed a PM from the Muslim Brotherhood, violating a campaign promise. He appointed 20 presidential advisors, most from Muslim Brotherhood (most of them resigned later since they had not been consulted.) In November 2013 Morsi issued a constitutional declaration giving himself extra powers so that his future decrees could not be contested

before Egyptian court. This led to demonstrations, 1.5 million protesting in Tahrir. The June 30th revolution saw millions demonstrating.

It was suggested that, because such a mass of activists and demonstrators desired the military to intervene, the removal of a democratically elected government was permissible. "Everyone was asking: How will Muslim Brotherhood act once in power? Now we know."

Egypt's bureaucracy is deeply rooted. Its corruption is one of the things that drove the revolution, but it also part of what's keeping the country together and not falling apart like Syria.

In the wake of the coup, a roadmap was created, which is being followed. Now there is a civilian president from the Constitutional Court, and a government composed of technocrats rather than ideologues, and a constitutional committee representing all parties and interests of the country.

It was noted that there was no representative of the Muslim Brotherhood present, but if they were there they would ask "What about the fact that Morsi was elected president?" Morsi won democratically, but it was then taken away from him. (Response: "Democracy requires democrats. Many Islamist groups may play the democratic game, but are not really democrats." "What happened in Egypt is not democracy. Democracy requires that the elected fulfill their commitments to those who elect them.")

It was suggested that the Egyptian coup resembles the 1973 Chilean coup that removed Allende and brought Pinochet to power. Pinochet had his own supporters, too.

It was suggested that there was a much greater role of outside actors in Egypt, particularly in defining the agenda of the Tamarrod movement than previously known.

If security is indivisible, not just security of states, but within states, then the security of one group in a society affects the security of all other groups. The oppression of the Brotherhood now will have broad negative effects on political development. The only option is to release Brotherhood members and start the political process anew.

The debate over the US-Egypt relationship is one that is a difficult one in Washington right now. Previously, the US always knew the address of whom it was speaking to in Egypt, who was in control. Not sure of that now. Should it talk to everyone? (The US always talks to the wrong people at the wrong time!) It is difficult to draw conclusions on where US policy on Egypt will be. This is an area where the Pugwash community can make an impact in the US debate.

The most important thing is the Egyptian economic crisis. This should be the main issue of discussion. No constitutional order can be sustained amid such a crisis. You need time to build stable political institutions and parties. Only then can you build a dependable constitutional democratic order.

Session 2: Israel-Palestine; Saturday, 2 November 2013, 16:30-18:30

Key points:

- The status quo is not stable, it is deteriorating and could collapse.
- Negotiations take place in an environment of power inequality, and that inequality is present at the table.
- There is no urgency or sense of crisis among the Israeli public, and thus no political cost for the government failing to engage seriously in peace negotiations.
- An interim deal is not favored, but there may be transitional steps based on the principle that “What is agreed, and can be implemented, should be implemented.”

Key questions: Are the negotiations happening now real? Are they making progress? This is unknown because they are keeping everything secret. This may be the right approach, although secrecy may be a necessary condition for successful negotiations, but not sufficient. Understanding is that discussions are broad so far, no real progress, they’ve stumbled on the first obstacle: Security. There is tension between two important things: Israeli security and Palestinian sovereignty. Israel will evacuate settlements but will insist on control of the Jordan Valley. That is going to be a major obstacle. Palestinians reject this, and reject international presence there, which is seen as replacement for Israelis.

The status quo is a continually changing and deteriorating one. That is not good for Israelis or Palestinians. So we should discuss what could be done in this short period.

Interim, partial deals are looked down on now because of Oslo, but how about transitional agreement? Could it be wise to accept smaller deals along the way? Continue with permanent status talks, but take steps convincing both sides that final deal is feasible? A simple step is to give up principle of “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.” How about: What is agreed, and can be implemented, should be implemented. There is a way to stop settlements: to transfer control of a piece of land to Palestinian control. Once that is done, that land won’t be settled.

The Israeli position is that Fatah reconciliation with Hamas will mean end of negotiations with Israel. But could this depend on the nature of the agreement? If Hamas accepts negotiations, and the outcome of negotiations, what’s the problem? (Response: Palestinians “trapped in a Catch 22: Israel forbids us to reconcile with Gaza, but also questions whether we can settle the issue while Palestinians are divided.”)

Netanyahu has come a long way from his original position to where he is now. But this may not be sufficient.

Recognizing Israel as a Jewish state has never been part of agreements before, that is a new condition now. Some say it will not survive in a final deal.

Negotiations are taking place in a situation of “radical inequality, and we bring this inequality to the table.” Palestinians need three things to make negotiations work: 1. Agreed terms of reference. 2. Commitment to previous agreements. 3. The right to force arbitration to enforce previous commitments. Without these, hard to see how these negotiations can succeed.

There can be support for an agreement in Israel, but who will push Netanyahu to make such an agreement? The US approach seems to be to let Netanyahu decide when he is interested in going to real negotiations. Therefore, we don’t have real negotiations. I don’t doubt Secretary

Kerry's commitment, it's that he doesn't have the means to pressure Netanyahu to do what he wants done.

Changing international opinion, particularly in Europe, is a source of hope.

There is popular and political support in Israel for a peace agreement, should Netanyahu choose one. But what are the negative political consequences if he doesn't? It seems there aren't any. The current status quo is a comfortable one for him. What options exist to create the pressure, to create incentives for moving toward a peace agreement, and dis-incentivizing the status quo? (Response: It's right that there's no political cost for not making an agreement, but this is true on both sides. Both populations blame the other sides' leaders.)

There is still regional support for the Arab Peace Initiative; Israel should take advantage of this.

Session 3: Iran and the region; Monday, 3 November 2013, 15:30-17:00

Key points:

- Easing tensions with the international community and Iran's immediate region is a key item on Rouhani's agenda.
- Iran and Syria are engaged in a proxy war for influence in Syria, as they were in Iraq.
- Saudi Arabia, while is the ally of the US, increasingly feels challenged, and even threatened by the regional policy of the US, particularly the thaw with Iran.
- Iranian foreign policy is based on Iran's perceived national interests, and when these clash with ideology, interests win.
- Rouhani has limited time to demonstrate progress; any sanctions relief would take a long time and domestic critics could raise political pressure, eventually making his position unviable.

Detente with Saudi Arabia has been among the main foreign policy aims of President Rouhani. While the Saudi approach to Iran has always been strategic (containing Iran from the inside and from the outside – building the relevant infrastructure in and out), from the Iranian perspective Saudi Arabia was not considered a threat. For Iran the main threat to be deterred was the US and Israel. But this changed when Saudi Arabia has come to challenge Iran in Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. This challenge, often realized in “proxy wars” has a sectarian basis on the Saudi side, but Iran has never supported sectarian tendencies – emphasis was on “revolutionary Islam” (and not on “Shia Islam”). At the same time, Iran has exercised a policy of appeasement towards Saudi Arabia from Rafsanjani to Ahmadinejad, and this is to be expected with the Rouhani presidency as well.

Saudi Arabia, while is the ally of the US, it increasingly feels challenged, and even threatened by the regional policy of the US.

Iranian foreign policy is based on Iran's perceived national interests, and when these clash with ideology, interests win. The Islamic revolution meant the re-emergence of Iran as a regional player. But instead of being successful in exporting the revolution, where Iran was successful was the use of the collapse of a local regime for its own purposes (Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq) – Iran has the ability of “turning any problem into an opportunity” (Rouhani).

The copyright of the Arab Spring is held by Iran: both the 1979 revolution (official regime parlance) and the 2009 demonstrations (Green Movement) are used as sources of references. [In spite of that the Iranian model was not considered by the Arab states in transition.]

There is a change in the Iranian behavior: “we are serious, we mean business, we want to make a deal, including the nuclear file, we have the support of the Supreme Leader, but we have no time!” (3 reasons why results should come quickly: Rouhani has to validate his approach, any sanctions relief would take a long time and the threat of spoilers.) Iran has to move forward especially in its behaviour towards the US and Israel, but it cannot do both at the same time. Also, in the context of the US relationship, the support of the Supreme Leader now goes for the nuclear issue, at the moment re-storing relations with the US is not on the agenda. But, Iran has retreated from so many principles during the Islamic Republic era.

Iran’s for policy has been formulated to safeguard its territory, independence and national interest. Although the declared policy by Rouhani/Zarif has been improvement with Saudi Arabia, there are issues influencing the relations: on the domestic level the domestic developments in Saudi Arabia, succession crisis, the future and possibility of democratization; and on the US level the success of nuclear negotiations and on the regional level the outcome of the conflicts in Syria and Bahrain.

Since the fall of the Saddam regime Saudi Arabia and Iran has increasingly become regional rivals. Saudi Arabia does not cause a direct military threat for Iran, and Egypt, Syria and Iraq are much more important for Iran than Saudi Arabia, but it could make it more difficult for Iran to achieve the most important for policy goal: dominant regional power status.

What to expect from Rouhani? He will try to increase Iran’s deterrence capability by investing in the missile program and domestic arms production. He will try to pursue a tension reduction policy and normalization with US and major western powers, prevention of sectarian violence on the borders and will support the NWFZ not only for its own sake, but to persuade Israel to de-nuclearize and since Iran is not interested in NWFs. While it would be in Iran’s interest to have some kind of security structure in the region, it aspires to become a centre of Asian Islamic power.

Session 4: Syria; Monday, 3 November 2013, 17:30-19:00

Key points:

- Global leaders see Geneva process as a responsible effort to end the war, but many in opposition see it as a legitimation of Assad. Assad may see it that way too.
- Syria conflict has become a proxy war for Iran and Saudi Arabia’s struggle for influence in the region.
- If the Assad regime collapses, centralizing and reconstituting power in the country would be extremely difficult.
- If the Assad regime is successfully preserved by Iran’s intervention, this could mean greater Iranian presence in Syria, which would put Iran on Israel’s border and lead to greater tension and conflict.

In Syria, a popular uprising metamorphosed into civil war. It has been widely said that there is no military solution because the Assad regime is too strong militarily. In fact, the Assad regime has used most of its cards. Now it can bomb areas, but it cannot maintain areas and keep them habitable. The army is big, but Assad is only able to use a small number of battalions, most of

the soldiers are sitting in their barracks cut off from their families and media, because Assad cannot rely on them.

Regarding the chemical weapons attacks, the Syrian opposition has not realized that the international community would let Assad get away with it, but neither did Assad think so. He is a war criminal who should be brought in front of the International Court of Justice.

It's useless to discuss whether the opposition is united. To the contrary, a unified opposition would reek of puppetry. But today the influence of the political opposition has gone down to a bare minimum, and now it is not the opposition, but the armed groups, including the Free Syrian Army, who dominate the events as they have the support, the money and the arms. There is also a new phenomenon: the members of the FSA are now trying to join the Islamists saying, "We might as well fight with those who keep their promises."

What prospects for Geneva? Prospects are very depressing: the world wants to push Syria into a never ending process because they do not know what to do, the world is looking for a new Oslo, but Assad understands it as a new legitimization.

Struggle for influence between Saudi Arabia and Iran is unfolding as a sectarian war (even though it's questionable whether Alawites are Shias.)

If the Assad regime collapses, centralizing and reconstituting power in the country would be extremely difficult.

It was suggested that a no-fly zone is the best way to use military in Syria. It's for forcing Assad toward a political solution.

There is great resentment among Syrian opposition over perceived Israeli support for Assad regime, and over Israeli holding onto Golan. Interestingly, the Iranian support to the regime is perceived to be a temporary concern, forgotten, once Assad goes, Israel remains a standing concern for all, in spite of the humanitarian assistance Israel is quietly providing the Syrian people and opposition (mainly medical care).

After Assad is gone, there is no reason why the new Syrian regime and Iran could not continue relations. This is seen as flaw in Israeli calculation. Syria has a strategic value for Iran, which is not a sectarian or a religious issue, but geopolitics. Iran wants to have a resistance front against the US and Israel, which is not necessarily offensive, but provides deterrence. Iran would not fight Israel, but wants to deter it. Hezbollah's rockets are a deterrence factor. Iran first of all would like to see the regime remain in power, so Iran would agree to Assad's leave.

Israel doesn't want to be deterred by Iran in Syria. Israel has an agreement on the border with Syria and 6 Israeli PMs wanted to reach an agreement with Syria, but failed. Still calm has been preserved, this peace has been upset only recently by firing shuts (although the intention was not to start a conflict with Israel, and Israel exercised constraint as it should). BUT the presence of a foreign army presents a threat to Israel, because Iran has stated that they want to deter Israel in Syria, which would mean that Israel will find itself at common borders with Iran. Since

the Supreme Leader still says that Israel is illegitimate, this situation can lead to a quick all-out war.

Session 5: Sectarianism; Tuesday, 4 November 2013, 09:00-10:30

Key points:

- Sectarianism has existed in some form in the region for many years, and in varying extents.
- Leaders in the region, as well as outside powers, have exploited various layers of identity, including religious, to their political advantage.
- In addition to the local and national level, sectarianism has become a globalized phenomenon.
- The way to deal with sectarianism is to address the geopolitical interests of the actors who exploit sectarianism to achieve their goals.

Almost all countries in the Middle East have suffered from terrorism in one way or another. Today we see thousands of foreign fighters who have traveled to Syria to link up with insurgent groups. They may be small in numbers, but they are extremists, and have been responsible for creating many refugees.

Civil society in the region is calling for democracy, but elites are resisting. Clashes are inevitable in areas where elites resist a redistribution of economic and political power.

Sectarian problems are worse in areas with lowest economic growth.

Leaders in the region have been exploiting sectarianism for political advantage for many years.

The British creation of Iraq out of provinces of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra has failed 80 years later. It has to be reorganized.

When we talk about sectarian conflicts in the region, we must be aware of the historical context, particularly the colonial dimension. Sectarian conflict in the Middle East is a relatively modern phenomenon. It reminds me of the "Eastern question" in previous centuries. Sectarian conflict was intensified in a colonial context by Western powers in the region. Arab nationalism was conceived as an attempt to overcome these sectarian differences. Sectarian differences are now being introduced by regimes in the region to crush the liberation movements of the Arab Spring.

Some said the Iran-Iraq war was just a new version of the old Persian-Arab conflict, but it was also war between republic and revolution.

States, whether colonial or not, will use sectarianism to create political support, just as they use other divisive issues. But a new level, globalization, is present today.

Looking at the Balkans, it was a situation of shifting elites, and often an effort to play on historical grievances to stay in power or gain power. It's very linked w/ globalization where you have many trans-national/trans-global loyalties. This is in many ways a global phenomenon.

Sectarianism isn't confined to the Middle East. It's a big problem in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Not only inside Islam, there are issues between Muslims, Hindus and others. Manipulation happens, but only made possible by the fact that these grievances are real.

The way to deal with sectarianism is to address the geopolitical interests of the actors who deploy sectarianism to achieve their goals.

It's too easy to blame colonialism for sectarian conflict. These differences have been exploited for centuries by leaders in the region. Of course there is manipulation, but manipulation only works if there is a willingness to accept it.

Modern sectarianism is driven by interaction between three levels: local, national, and global.

Challenge is to manage the threat perceptions of all parties in the region. This involves taking their geopolitical interests into account.

There should be a focus on education and curriculum reform. People should not be educated to be hostile.