



مركز الجزيرة للدراسات
ALJAZEERA CENTER FOR STUDIES

Youth and Change in the Arab World

Questions of the Present & Visions for the Future

28-29 May 2011 – Doha

الشباب والتغيير في العالم العربي

أسئلة الحاضر ورؤى المستقبل

٢٩-٢٨ مايو ٢٠١١ – الدوحة

Report on Forum Activities

By Dr. Jamal Abdullah, Mariam Sharbash, Hareth Adlouni



Introduction

On 28th-29th May 28-29, 2011 Al Jazeera Center for Studies organized a forum entitled "Youth and Change in the Arab World: Questions of the Present and Visions for the Future" held at the Ritz Carlton in Doha, Qatar, and witnessed the participation of over eighty youth, both male and female, representing 18 Arab countries.

The forum discussed the issue of change in the Arab world in light of the current wave of revolutions and popular protests that has overrun the region since the end of last year. It also aimed to offer participants the opportunity to meet with each other and build means of cooperation, exchanging experiences and bolstering understanding and integration amongst themselves.

The two day forum was also an opportunity for participants to learn about the experiences of different countries that made great strides in change and democratic reform. These interactions were shared through five open sessions and three specialized workshops.

The Center invited to the forum young men and women that represent all types of political and intellectual affiliations in their respective countries, and that played key roles in recent efforts for change and reform that marked the Arab World, especially during the recent events of the Arab Spring.



Dr. Al-Tijani Ibrahim, Dr. Salah Elzein, Dr. Mohammed Al-Zayat, Dr. Ahmad Abdul Ati

Furthermore, the forum witnessed the participation of a host of experts, who contributed with their expertise and experiences in ongoing discussions. There were also guests from the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations (IIFSO), headed by Secretary General Dr. Ahmad Abdul Ati, in addition to several key personalities from Al Jazeera Network.



The Opening

The forum kicked off with a speech by Dr. Salah Eddin Elzein, Director of Al Jazeera Center for Studies, in which he stressed that the forum's timing coincided with a unique moment in Arab history which had been filled with decades of stagnation and political impasse. "Today, [Arab countries] live in a state of widespread popular liveliness, fueled by an overwhelming desire to achieve freedom and human dignity," he stated.



Dr. Salah Eddin Elzein delivering his opening speech

Dr. Elzein then called upon the youth present in the forum to contribute towards a rational, objective dialogue with pertaining to the situation, consequences, and outcomes of the Arab revolutions.

He also pointed that Al Jazeera Center for Studies will remain a haven for freedom of thought, inviting Arab youth from all flocks of political and intellectual affiliations to actively participate in different forums and conferences organized by the Center in order to contribute to building a better future for the region.

The First Session: "How Does Arab Youth View the Current Situation?"

Following the opening speech, the first session commenced under the title: "How Does Arab Youth View the Current Situation?" The discussion was chaired by Dr. Rafik Abdessalem, Head of the Studies and Research Department at Al Jazeera Center for Studies, and met the participation of Arab youth represented by:



The forum's first session

- **Islam Lutfi**, member of the executive office of the Revolution Youth Coalition in Egypt
- **Ghaith al-Qudah**, head of the Youth Panel in the Islamic Labor Front Party in Jordan
- **Mustapha Mouchtari**, Communication and Relations officer of the Baraka Movement in Morocco
- **Youssef Drira**, a leader from the Renaissance Movement in Tunisia.

In his presentation, Islam Lutfi discussed a number of issues in attempt to offer an answer to the question. He believes there was a double standard policy adopted by some Arab regimes in dealing with ongoing revolutions in the Arab world. He inquired about the reasons and goals behind such a policy. He also discussed what he called anti-revolution movements, giving the example of



the Gulf Cooperation Council's decision to approve Jordan's membership to the bloc and invite Morocco to join in as well. He concluded that the Arab nation was experiencing a rebirth and another attempt to revive the Arab Unity project, but this time, according to Lutfi, the rebirth was coming from the peoples themselves, not from the heads of regimes, "which are founded only on purely ideological interests," he said.



Islam Lutfi presenting his views

These revolutions, Islam Lutfi continued, contribute towards confirming the identity of Arab citizens since the Arab peoples are starting to see themselves as a unified entity rather than separated individual entities. He also maintained that these peoples have succeeded in taking control of change; therefore, the most important result of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions was the gathering of Arab peoples to achieve their interests and goals, as well as confirming that the common enemy of the Arab nation was Israel.

Ghaith Al-Qudah from Jordan, however, believes that the gap between the ruler and the ruled has become even wider and thus argues that in each Arab country we find two separate worlds: that of the ruler and that of the people. Also, by alienating itself from the Arab nation's issues, the state has

encouraged injustice and grievances to prevail in the streets.



Ghaith Al-Qudah from Jordan

Al-Qudah holds that these Arab revolutions are radical, comprehensive politically, economically, socially and culturally. He argues that the similarity of conditions of these insurrections could lead to a uniform future in the Arab region, which in turn bring about the spread of revolutions as far as Palestine in aims of liberating it from Israeli occupation.

As for Youssef Drira from Tunisia, his observation of the current Arab situation was as follows:

- The youth have been a marginalized component in society.
- All Arab revolutions share the same values and demands: freedom, dignity, justice and democracy.
- The Arab peoples have not called for reforms but rather sought the overthrow of regimes.
- The Arab peoples aspire to free Palestine from Israeli occupation.

Finally, Drira inquired whether the new status of the region, following the successful revolutions of Egypt and Tunisia, would lead to a change in the balance of power at the regional level.

He concluded that the Arab nation is one united nation, and that the key aspect its peoples shared in was the despotism of their regimes.



The Second Session: What Kind of Risks and Challenges Are the Arab Revolutions Facing?

This session was hosted by Abdessamad Nasser, journalist and presenter at Al Jazeera Channel. The representatives of the Arab Youth were:



Young audience following the second session

- **Mohammed Othman**, member of the Revolution Youth Coalition, rapporteur of the Youth Committee in the Egyptian Pharmacists Syndicate, member of the Committee for the Defense of Prisoners of Conscience in Egypt.
- **Jamal Al-Maliki**, a young activist in Yemen.
- **Mahmoud Sabbagh**, columnist and documentary film director from Saudi Arabia.
- **Israa Al-Houni**, member of the “For Shabab” foundation for the development of youth, and member of the Libyan Rebels Union from Benghazi, Libya.

Mohammed Othman summarized the risks and challenges as follows:

- Prevalent disorder in Arab societies as a result of the heavy heritage left behind by overthrown
- Managing the transition phase before setting the foundations for a solid, durable democracy, while emphasizing

the fact that not all those who were in the opposition can take part in the management of the transition process

- Rallying the youth, especially the elite
- Initiating reconciliation dialogues between social parties
- Foreign interference for the realization of peoples' interests
- Attempts to abort revolutions (thus requiring revolution forces to stay in the field to counter such attempts)
- The possibility that getting involved in other causes might lead to the failure of revolutions' goals.



Mohammed Othman from Egypt answering questions from journalist Abdessamad Nasser

In conclusion, Mohammed Othman stressed the importance of building the future by relying on the rebels themselves instead of military councils or formed transitional governments.

Israa Al-Houni from Libya started her presentation by giving a quick summary of the causes behind the current revolutions in the Arab world, construing that injustice and deprivation of dignity and freedom were the main reasons.

She argued that the major challenges confronting the Arab revolutions could be divided into internal and external impediments. The internal challenges were:



- Founding the state of law and building a new political structure based on a real civil society
- Integrating what remained of the former regimes into the institutions of the new state
- Comforting and reconciling souls and minds from the effects of the war crimes inflicted on them by the former regimes
- Raising social awareness
- A total national consensus on preventing serious escalations in society
- Durable development, achievable through the eradication of economic rent based on exporting raw materials, in exchange for a productive economy
- Drafting a new social pact that involves all spectrums of society
- Disseminating freedom of speech forums
- Enforcing the culture of security for the service of the people rather than the regimes
- Disseminating a culture of conscience and mass awareness within society through the establishment of training and development centers
- Adopting transparency in all dealings and transactions
- Cooperation and coalition between Arab revolutions against any foreign challenges
- Preparing qualified, competent political leaderships



Active participation of youth



Israa Al-Houni speaking on behalf of the young women of Benghazi

As for major external challenges, Al-Houni finds that they pertain to tackling any Western attempts to hijack the Arab revolutions by trying to interfere in the process of establishing the future states of law in the Arab region. She suggested a number of mechanisms to confront these challenges:





The Third Session: "Arab Revolutions and Issues of Integration and Emancipation"

The session was hosted by Dr. Bashir Nafi, senior researcher at Al Jazeera Center for Studies, with the participation of:



Third session: Expert voices meet youth enthusiasm

- **Dr. Ibrahim Qwaider**, Libyan economist and former director general of the Arab Labor Organization
- **Dr. Al-Tijani Tayeb Ibrahim**, Sudanese economist and international expert
- **Sami Hamoud**, Palestinian activist interested in the issue of refugees and the right of return.
- **Salam Ahmad Abdullah**, Iraqi journalist and Facebook activist.

Dr. Ibrahim Qwaider presented his perception about the status of Arab integration through three focuses: political, economic and social. He found that currently Arabs are unfortunately unable to reach fundamental agreements during their regular meetings within the Arab League, let alone the implementation of the Arab Common Market project given its "contradiction with the interests of Arab leaders." In order to change this reality, he argued, there should be a political will to achieve change, and before that the full dimensions of the problem and its seriousness must be acknowledged.

Dr. Al-Tijani Tayeb Ibrahim, on the other hand, discussed Arab integration from the

view that it comprises the commercial integration of Arab economies in its initial stage before currency unification at a later stage. He attributed the failure of Arab integration projects on several causes, particularly differences in ruling regimes, which in turn cause differences in the concept of integration and a lack of economic strategies to achieve this integration.



Continuous dialogue between Arab youth

Sami Hamoud, however, discussed the impact of Arab revolutions on the Palestinian issue especially in terms of the settlement process, resistance, breaking the blockade, Arab-Israeli relations, and the refugee revolution.

Finally, Salam Ahmad Abdullah gave a presentation about protests in Iraq, their motivations, demands, scale, achievements, formations and impediments. He also reviewed the impact of Arab revolutions and protest movements on the US occupation of Iraq, which led him to the following conclusions:

- Providing political support to protest and demonstration movements in Iraq promotes the popular role of Iraqi resistance.
- Iraqis are increasingly inclined to reject the presence of occupation forces in Iraq.
- Arab revolutions have undoubtedly contributed towards large-scale interaction among Arab youth, which furthers Iraq's inclination to re-embrace its position within the greater Arab nation.



The Fourth Session: "Perspectives of New Arab Reality Amidst Media and Politics"

This session concluded the first day of the forum. It was hosted by Director General of Al Jazeera Network Waddah Khanfar who presented Al Jazeera's perception of current events and its modality of dealing with them. He pointed to the professional ethics adopted by the network in covering the news as well as the choices it made to preserve its image as a professional media institution.



Al Jazeera Network's Director General addressing the youth

Khanfar also emphasized that Al Jazeera was not creating events but intensely covering them as they developed and became more important and thus did not create the revolutions but only covered them. Al Jazeera does not see itself as a political movement or party but a professional media institution that succeeded in becoming a key component in understanding what is happening in the world in general but particularly in the Middle East, he explained.



A straightforward dialogue between youth and Waddah Khanfar

Khanfar stressed that human capital was at the center of Al Jazeera's editorial policy, pointing out that the network developed a reputation of unbiased media and diverse contents and production. Human values founded on justice, equality, freedom, dignity and democracy were the main drives of Al Jazeera's success story, he continued.

Khanfar then called for the following:

- Taking the unified conscience of the Arab nation into account
- Promotion of unionist ideology
- Prevalence of common interests first and discarding borderline divisions
- Promotion of human value and focusing on the development of the human being
- Disseminating democracy as a culture throughout the Arab societies

Khanfar also discussed Al Jazeera's efforts to expand its channels in aims of reaching all the peoples of the world, especially after the success of Al Jazeera English which has become one of the most credible news channels in the West especially in the United States. Therefore, Khanfar continued, Al Jazeera Network considered enriching this experience further with the creation of a channel in Swahili, the prevalent language in the Horn of Africa. This is among the network's strategy to open up to these peoples and provide them with a high standard source of information and round-the-clock news.



Five years after the creation of Al Jazeera English, the experience set up new rules in the media scene, becoming at the forefront of credible news channels in the eyes of the English speaking audience throughout the world, Khanfar explained.

He added that such success was the reason behind the announcement last November of the launch of two new channels, Al Jazeera Turkish and Al Jazeera Balkans.



Waddah Khanfar citing al Jazeera's achievements

Moreover, Khanfar concluded, Al Jazeera was planning to expand the scope of its web audience through the creation of a Spanish-language portal, aiming particularly at communicating with the peoples of Latin America.

The first day of the forum was then concluded with a group photograph of the participants, followed by a play staged by Al Jazeera Theatre Group entitled "Down, Down!".



A group photograph of participants in the forum

The Fifth Session: "Democratic Transformations: International Experiences"

Held early the second day, this session was hosted by Dr. Salah Eddin Elzein, Director of Al Jazeera Center for Studies. The key participants were:



Academics presenting to international experiences to the youth

- **Dr. Devon Curtis**, lecturer at Cambridge University, UK
- **Professor Arlene Clemesha**, historian and professor at Sao Paulo University, Brazil
- **Dr. Talib Kujakjan**, lecturer at Marmara University, Turkey
- **Taher Herzuk**, South African journalist at Al Jazeera Network

Professor Clemesha started her presentation by giving a brief overview about the Brazil's unique transition towards democracy between the early eighties and the nineties, explaining how this country was later able to design a successful foreign policy based on promoting relations with countries from the Southern hemisphere, in addition to taking part in benefiting agreements with the Arab region.





Dr. Devon Curtis talked about the democratic transition in South Africa during the nineties when divisions thrived in the country. She elaborated on the long struggle to achieve the process of taking power away from the white minority and establishing constitutional democratic institutions in the state, in addition to issues of power-sharing and relations between the military and the civil society.



Dr. Devon Curtis and journalist Taher Herzuk discussing the South African experience

Afterwards, Taher Herzuk outlined the experiences of South Africa during its transition towards a democratic state, emphasizing the importance of leadership.

Dr. Taleb Kujakjan, however, stressed that the mass protests in the Arab world for peaceful transition to democracy and the Palestinian issue were both key elements in bolstering the unification of the Turkish people at this time. He also discussed the importance of nongovernmental organizations and the civil society in this regard.



Dr. Taleb Kujakjan discussing the Turkish experience

Workshops

Following the presentations, participants moved to parallel workshops and split into three groups for debate and reflection on political, security-related, economic and media challenges that the Arab revolutions were facing.

Workshop: "Political and Security Challenges Facing the Arab Revolutions"

This workshop was attended by a large number of participants. It first started with a presentation by Dr. Mohamed Megahed Elzayat, security affairs expert and deputy chairperson of the National Center for Middle East Studies, in which he discussed security challenges faced by the Arab revolutions. Meanwhile, Dr Saifuddin Abdul Fattah, professor of political science at Cairo University and the Islamic Studies College at Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, spoke about political challenges standing in the way of Arab revolutions. The workshop was chaired by Iraqi journalist Noura Al-Khafaji.



Noura Al-Khafaji in the center chairing the workshop with Dr. Mohammed Al-Zayat and Dr. Saif Abdul Fattah

The workshop on political challenges offered the following recommendations:

1. Promoting the access of youth to the political process by all means possible to preserve the impetus of the Arab revolutions and guarantee the achievement their goals



2. Disseminating the policy of training the youth in the mechanisms of creating political awareness during the transitional stages that follow the revolutions
3. Implementing laws and mechanisms of fair accountability allowing revolutions to preserve their path and goals;



A serious debate among the youth during the security and political challenges workshop

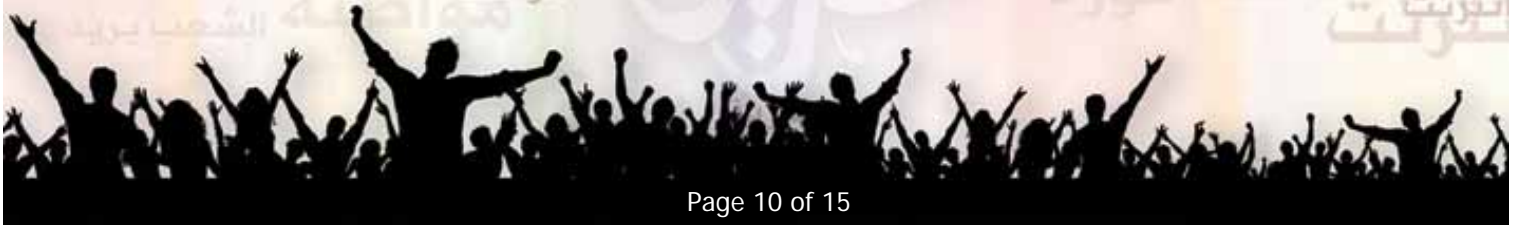
4. Developing perceptions and strategies for the fundamentals of the Arab revolutions and reform processes in order to achieve a real renaissance in Arab societies
5. Confronting “deep” states that defend short term interests by supporting counter-revolutions forces
6. Stressing that Arab revolutions are the core of the unity of the Arab peoples after Arab regimes failed to achieve this goal and exploited it as a cover for their legitimacy
7. Stressing that Arab revolutions supported the Palestinian revolution in its struggle to recover its exacted rights;

As for the security challenges workshop, the following recommendations were given:

1. Maintaining extreme caution against attempts by foreign intelligence services, particularly Israeli services, to infiltrate Arab countries in which revolutions took place in order to influence events
2. Promoting change in the mentality and strategies of security institutions, in addition to restructuring them towards becoming institutions for citizens and the state rather than the ruling regime
3. Reinstating the lost trust between peoples and security apparatuses, and ensuring discipline and transparency within these security institutions
4. Focusing the Arab national security system on the following:
 - Reviewing the security coordination agreements with the United States regarding the so-called international war on terror as well as Washington’s security strategy on the Arab region
 - Reordering risk priorities that threaten Arab national security
 - Reformulating concepts that define Arab national security through studies and seminars
5. Maintaining caution against the increasing influence of some of the forces taking part in the Arab revolutions, whose demands may become self-centered and no longer reflect the revolutions' goals.

Facebook YouTube

Google Twitter





Workshop: "Media Challenges"

Youth, new media, and the relationship of youth with traditional media. These were the main issues discussed at the media challenges workshop, which focused on the importance of the new media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. These new sources of information exchange have become a real nightmare in the eyes of Arab regimes as it is extremely difficult to control or manipulate them. However, while this new media space has virtually no limits and could encompass all ideological trends and affiliations, it has become a necessity to keep a rein on it through professional and ethical rules.



Participants in the media workshop

It is not surprising that the youth are the main social category targeted in media orientation as they are the most qualified to make change. It is therefore important to focus more on them and offer them appropriate opportunities to share their views and opinions.

The main contributors in this workshop were Assif Hamidi, newsroom administrator and media trainer at Al Jazeera and Ammar Mohammed, head of the projects unit at the New Media Department at Al Jazeera. The discussion was chaired by Bahraini journalist Salman Ali.



From right: Assif Hamidi, Salman Ali and Ammar Mohammed

The workshop concluded with the following recommendations:

1. Studying the relationship between traditional and new media systems, focusing on the development of mechanisms allowing for the verification of the credibility of new media, avoiding set up and fraud materials, and avoiding bias in the coverage of events
2. Training youth leaderships in new media technology, finding solutions and substitutes to face challenges related to these issues, such as controlling the internet
3. Preparing effective youth leaderships capable of addressing local and international media
4. Protecting those working the new media sector from repression, and guaranteeing their security and safety





Workshop: "Economic Challenges"

Economists generally agree on the fact that the deterioration of economic conditions was the first and major factor behind revolutions in the Arab world. This workshop discussed current and future economic challenges under the continuing insurrections of the Arab peoples.



Hatim Ghandir and Dr. Al-Tijani Ibrahim talking about the economics of revolutions

The workshop kicked off by economist Dr. Al-Tijani Tayeb Ibrahim, who gave an overview about the international economy. Hatim Ghandir, head of the Economics Section at Al Jazeera, on the other hand, reviewed the major economic challenges that most countries are currently facing with special focus on those in which revolutions started or were expected to see protest movements demanding change and reform. The discussion was chaired by the young leader Abdelkader Ben Khaled from Algeria.

The workshop concluded with the following recommendations:

1. Entrusting an Arab authority with the support of projects initiated by young Arab entrepreneurs covering capital, workforce and all types of capabilities
2. Devising a mechanism that would facilitate the mobility of persons and

goods between Arab and Islamic countries, and leaving behind personal and interstate differences

3. Stressing that the economic benefits in favor of citizens rather than a small elite (which could be achieved by fighting corruption)
4. Prompt response to the social and political demands of the Arab revolutions rather than abortion of these efforts by establishing new regimes similar to those overthrown by the popular revolts.



Participants exchanging ideas at the economics workshop



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The Closing Session

The second day of the forum concluded with the presentation and endorsement of the workshops summary. Presented by Dr. Salah Eddin Elzein, the workshop recommendations were unanimously endorsed by the participants.



Workshops rapporteurs presenting the recommendations

Afterwards, Islam Lutfi presented an initiative on behalf of the youth, which consisted of the creation of a Facebook page through which the forum's participants could further interact and communicate in the future. Simultaneously, it would allow young people who share the same ideals and values all over the Arab world to join in. This initiative, Lutfi explained, would be the first step towards creating a global platform for the youth of the Arab revolutions.



Islam Lutfi presenting a youth initiative for communication and cooperation



Activities: Day One

Activity	Timing		Details
Registration	8:00	9:00	
Opening	9:00	9:30	Opening of the Forum
First Session	9:30	11:30	"How Arab Youth View the Current Situation" Islam Lutfi (Egypt), Ghaith Al-Qudah (Jordan), Moustafa Mouchtari (Morocco), Youssef Drira (Tunisia)
Break	11:30	12:00	
Second Session	12:00	13:30	"What Kind of Risks and Challenges Do the Arab Revolutions Face?" Mohammed Othman (Egypt), Israa Al-Houni (Libya), Jamal Al-Malki (Yemen), Mahmoud Sabbagh (Saudi Arabia)
Break	13:30	16:00	Lunch invitation by the Chairman of Al Jazeera Network
Third Session	16:00	18:00	"Arab Revolutions and Issues of Integration and Emancipation" Ibrahim Qwaider (Libya), Al-Tijani Tayeb Ibrahim (Sudan), Sami Hamoud (Palestine), Salam Ahmed Abdullah (Iraq)
Break	18:00	18:00	
Fourth Session	18:00	20:00	"Perspectives of New Arab Reality admist Media and Politics" Waddah Khanfar, Director General of Al Jazeera Network
Break	20:00	21:00	Group photograph & Dinner
Evening Show	21:00	22:00	"Down, Down!" by Al Jazeera Theatre Group

Activities: Day Two

Activity	Timing		details
Fifth Session	9:30	10:30	"Democratic Transformations: International Experiences" Talib Kujakjan (Turkey), Arlene Clemesha (Brazil), Devon Curtis and Taher Herzuk (South Africa)
Break	10:30	11:00	Move to Workshop Rooms
Workshops	11:00	13:30	"Security and Political Challenges" Saifeddin Abdulfattah (Egypt), Mohammed Megahed Elzayat (Egypt)
			"Economic Challenges" Al-Tijani Tayeb Ibrahim (Sudan), Hatem Ghandir (Algeria)
			"Media Challenges" Assif Hamidi and Ammar Mohammed
Break	13:30	17:00	Lunch Break & Free Time
Closing Session	17:00	19:00	Closing the Forum's Activities Presentation of workshop summary and recommendations by workshops rapporteurs & Closing speeches
Break	19:00	20:00	Dinner



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