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Transcript

**KEYNOTE: HIS EXCELLENCY FORMER
PRIME MINISTER FUAD SINIORA**

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Carnegie Middle East Center Arab Fractures
Report Launch

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(Please note that the keynote address was originally delivered in Arabic)

Your Excellencies, my friend, Minister Dr. Marwan Muasher, ladies and gentlemen:

The report we are launching is entitled “Arab Fractures”. It is a title that may grab our attention and shock us, but it seems appropriate to describe recent events and the ongoing deterioration of the situation in Arab countries over the past three decades.

“Arab Fractures” expresses our situation in the past and the present. It aims to provoke a reaction: it demands that Arabs take a position and refuse to accept the shattering of the Arab will. It expresses a desire for solidarity and a determination to achieve all kinds of advancement.

I would like to start by thanking the Carnegie Middle East Center for preparing this report, and I thank everyone who took part in producing it and publicizing its findings, in the hope that it will help us reach workable solutions and ways of overcoming the dangerous situation facing the Arab nation.

Brothers and sisters,

At the beginning of the last century, after the Arabs had worked for and dreamed of a single state, the region’s citizens faced a series of consecutive fractures.

Firstly, the failure of the dream of a single Arab state on the rubble of the Ottoman Empire, and the resulting fragmentation of the Arab region into numerous nations and entities.

Secondly, the occupation of Palestine and the dispossession of its people, the Nakba or catastrophe, which left its mark and continues to preoccupy the Arab world today. Next, the nascent union of Egypt and Syria fell apart, followed by the Arab defeat of 1967.

The Arabs did not learn the lessons they should have learned on the national, political, social and economic levels in order to put in place new, wise policies and practices to create better public administrations which could have helped strengthen respect for the Arab citizen, preparing the way for better government and wiser use of the available natural resources.

The less oil-rich countries witnessed coups by military leaders who built their legitimacy on their stated intentions: re-conquering territory, restoring Arabs as citizens, protecting freedoms and strengthening participation, achieving economic and social progress, sustainable growth and development, and adopting paths of positive neutrality and independent development.

For several decades, the territory was not taken back - rather, the Arabs lost more land. The Arab citizen’s dignity was not restored. Progress and participation were not achieved in the way that had been hoped. Arab countries faced setbacks, invasions, coups, shocks, conflicts and violent disorder. In this way, we wasted many capabilities and opportunities through misuse of power, bad government and management of public affairs.

These setbacks and shocks, from inside and out, continued and had deep impacts on the present and future of the Arab nation.

In the space of just over a year, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, triggering conflicts and setting loose the demons of extremism across the region, Egypt effectively dropped the Arab cause by signing the Camp David accords, leaving a huge vacuum in the Arab world, and clerics took power in Iran, intent on exporting the revolution with an extremist religious tone under the banner of the “rule of the jurisprudent” - Wilayet al-Faqih - which crossed political borders and inflamed extremism. This undermined stability across the Arab region because of growing Iranian interference and its ever-worsening effects.

The regression got worse when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, effectively destroying the notion of Arab solidarity and collective defense. That was followed by the horrific terrorist act of September 11, 2001. That triggered the American invasion of Iraq, which broke up the Iraqi state and its army, letting loose sectarian conflicts and nurturing the growth of extremist and terrorist groups across the region.

The rise of these groups may have been caused by oppression, extremism, marginalization and deprivation, or directed from outside by regional or international actors that wanted to harm the Arab world. But ultimately, this brought down the barrier Iraq had formed between Central Asia and the Mediterranean. All this created many conflicts that could not be reined in by open, nationalist thinking, nor by faith in the openness and tolerance of the Islamic faith, nor by respect for human rights.

Over recent decades, the failures have been greater than the successes. The hoped-for progress, participation and unity have not been achieved. Much-needed cooperation on the basis of shared Arab interests has not happened. Education levels have fallen and many economic projects have failed. Manufacturing has regressed rather than moving forward, while huge social and demographic changes have pushed farmers to leave the land and form belts of misery around Arab cities.

We have also lost representative government. Constitutions designed to protect freedoms and the rule of law have been violated. Large sections of society have been marginalized and cut off from participation in political life. Provincial development and economic growth figures have regressed, and the economic gap between the rich and poor has grown. The heavy grip of oppression has tightened and living standards have fallen due to poor government, corruption, bad management of public affairs, and failure to take account of population growth.

There has been ever less accountability, creating a growing crisis between governments and the governed and a lack of trust between states and their citizens. This reflects an accelerating erosion in the social and political contracts between the state and its population at a time when bloated budgets and swollen bureaucracies are no longer able to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population. Furthermore, the population is increasingly aware of the regression. Meanwhile many Arab countries faced crises, Israeli invasions, coups, shocks and conflicts involving extreme violence.

This is especially true since a strategic vacuum has taken root across the region because of fragmentation and disputes between Arab states. As a result of these struggles for the Arab world, involving actors from within and without, and the fact that many Arab citizens, especially the youth, have lost hope for a better future, many have tried to emigrate, often drowning in the process. Our countries have become ever more vulnerable to external, regional and

international interventions, becoming arenas for wars and score-settling as we have become tools of the same.

Furthermore, our cities and towns have become testing grounds for great powers' new weapons and fallen victim to their disputes and struggles. Arab blood is spilled, Arab cities are destroyed and Arabs are expelled, sometimes by other Arabs and sometimes by non-Arabs. Yet there is no Arab response that befits the horrific crimes being committed against our countries, our people and the Islamic faith, which many are distorting. Yet the international community is silent, or smiling, or generously doling out expressions of condolence or condemnation, which do nothing to stop wars, prevent killing or bring a halt to the massacres.

In summary, the Arabs have wasted their capacities and missed many opportunities through abuse of power, bad government and poor management of public affairs.

The reality is that over the last few decades, during which the Arab peoples have faced Israeli oppression, foreign occupation and tyrannical, dictatorial regimes, there was a social and political contract in place - or rather a status quo, as something imposed by force is not a contract. Dictatorial and totalitarian regimes in power for several decades provided security, political stability and macroeconomic stability but gave no space for participation, freedoms and democracy.

Unfortunately, whatever was achieved also took place at the expense of deep structural changes that were much needed in Arab states to achieve higher levels of growth and economic, social and regional development. Nor was it accompanied by acceptable levels of essential structural reform to improve governance and rationalize the management of public affairs in order to build trust between the state and its citizens, nurture a culture of productivity or promote the values of competitiveness, positivity, transparency, disclosure or accountability. Participation fell by the wayside, along with the possibility of reconsidering merits and competency and fighting corruption.

Meanwhile, unemployment levels have grown, accompanied by growing corruption, despair, frustration and closed horizons, creating anxiety and anger among many citizens, particularly the young. This came as the telecommunications revolution broke down the barriers of time and space, states and groups, and ended the silence and fear of many social groups.

In recent years the Arab peoples rebelled against the persistent tyranny, lawlessness and corruption of their regimes. Tunisia may still be feeling its way towards establishing the rule of democratic transfer of power, but Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya face war, destruction and interference by regional powers. Notably, by Iran, whether directly or through Hezbollah or sectarian militias from elsewhere, as well as by Turkey and great powers such as the United States and Russia. These violations are unprecedented in recent times.

This persistent fighting, aggression and the fading possibility of political solutions are a warning that great dangers lie ahead not just for these states, but for the Arab region as a whole.

One result of the instability and fighting has been the spread of violent extremism and the growth of fanatical religious groups which go beyond borders in ways that challenge the very concept of sovereign nation states. These groups speak in the name of a kind of Islam that we

don't recognize and which does not represent the vast majority of Muslims, but they find it easy to kill and carry out barbaric acts in the name of religion.

Regardless of who stands behind these armed groups, who are backed by actors with interests in destroying the Arab world, other fundamental reasons for the phenomenon of extremism are the regression of critical thinking, the decline in the role of the intellectual, the denial of chances to participate in today's world, along with a lack of communication between authorities and cultural institutions.

The nation state in the Arab world has faced enormous unrest. Several regimes have collapsed and the possibility has emerged of secession and further fragmentation on the basis of race, sect and regional identity. All this has contributed to the collapse of the strategic balance between the Arab world and its hinterland.

This has smashed the image of Arab loyalty and cooperation, especially in light of the way each Arab state withdrew into itself and cut itself off from the long-term changes taking place in the world around it, while failing to pay attention to the severe risks facing the Arab region.

This exacerbated the population's sense of anxiety, frustration, depression and the lack of opportunity, especially among the young, who form a majority in our societies. These feelings grew with the rise in religious extremism, intellectual terrorism and blind recourse to violence, along with unemployment and lack of opportunities.

In the last five years, our societies have been through tough times. Our youth wanted change, and they still do. But the events of recent years have given rise to huge fears. Many of those who wanted change have been marginalized and excluded with enormous violence. This has led to state collapse in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, and dangerously drawn back the state's writ and standing in Lebanon.

As a result of these consecutive shocks, the Arab public faces two dangers. Firstly, demands for change have had the opposite outcome, even as a return to the past has become impossible. Secondly, total state collapse does not present alternatives, but can lead to a deepening sense of depression which nurtures extremism and makes it ever easier to turn to violence.

Therefore it is incumbent upon politicians, academics and activists on public affairs in the Arab world to take into account these two realities as they try to plan for the future. We cannot be hostage to the deteriorating status quo. Positive change and enlightened alternatives are essential to correct our path and bring us back to focusing on the fundamental issues rather than getting lost in mazes of conflict and disputes that distract us from the issues that should be our real focus.

Therefore, we must refocus our energies on issues of principle and practice, attempting to overcome these diverse crises and heading towards another future that opens the horizon before the Arab peoples, especially the young, who sense the gravity of these painful experiences which are still leading us towards yet further deterioration.

Brothers and sisters,

Returning to the report we are launching, we read in the introduction:

“With the old order in disarray, there is no clarity about where the region is heading. Writing from a prison cell in fascist Italy during the 1930s, the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci observed, ‘The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.’ This is the reality faced by today’s Middle East, a region that remains critical to global peace and security.”

It adds: “This report attempts to explore the underlying causes of the region’s turbulence. It examines the fundamental national and transnational trends playing out in the region’s human, political, and geopolitical landscapes, both horizontally and vertically—that is, the interrelationships between these trends both within countries and across them.”

Specifically, it looks at:

The Human Landscape—the changing experiences of Arab citizens amid demographic pressures, human migration, political polarization, and social activism.

The Political Landscape—the crisis of governance across the region, the stresses upon the rentier systems, and the influence of the security sector and media on Arab politics.

The Geopolitical Landscape—the collapsing regional order in the context of myriad internal and interstate conflicts, the implications of lower oil prices, and the longer-term impacts of climate change and water scarcity.

Brothers and sisters,

Given these changes and developments, which bring all kinds of risks, a genuine response must be one of solidarity and a return to the fundamentals that enable us to correct our course and restart the engines of Arab revival so we can successfully tackle the vast challenges before our countries.

The first challenge we must face is that of political renewal of the nation state, built on the idea of the civilian state which recognizes the equal rights of citizens, including all ethnic, national and religious groups and focusing on the principles of integration and interdependence among states and peoples.

The second challenge is that of regaining our faith in enlightened Arabism, both as a cultural and civilizational bond and as a strategic bond based on faith in shared Arab interests.

The decline of this concept of Arab unity has caused many problems, most of them linked to identity, sectarian and ethnic loyalties, which have been deepened by violence and undemocratic practices at home as well as by foreign interventions which have destroyed our thinking and destroyed both people and infrastructure.

Therefore, new life must be pumped into the veins of enlightened Arabism, in accordance with the necessity of deepening our cultural and civilizational links and our shared interests. It is essential to focus on what unifies our Arab societies, which have been ripped apart by religious and sectarian identities based on the beliefs of each of these societies regarding the relationship between the citizen and his creator, along with their different forms of worship.

We must recognize these differences, but despite them, we are all citizens who belong to the same nation and to the Arab world, and we have shared interests. Therefore we must re-focus

on these things and unify the population on the basis of equal rights and obligations, where nobody is privileged over the other except in terms of their contribution and loyalty to the nation and their sense of national belonging.

The third challenge is the idea of integration. This has two facets. The first relates to the economy, development, exchange and mutual dependency. The second relates to defense, security and strategic integration.

We all benefit from integration and gain from the opening of markets, the ease of travelling between countries, fluid cooperation between private sectors, labor markets, exchanges of investment and mutual dependence.

We are also in urgent need of defense integration today in light of the region's strategic vacuum and the waves of emigration from our crisis-stricken states, an alarming phenomenon the likes of which our world has not seen since World War II. We have become vulnerable to foreign interventions from within the region and beyond. We are the victim of struggles between superpowers: Arab blood is spilled, Arab cities are destroyed and there is no Arab response on the level of the crimes that are being committed against our countries and our peoples.

The fourth challenge is that of establishing good governance that is fitting for today's world. It is unacceptable that the only, abysmal options available to Arab societies are totalitarian regimes and regimes that claim to be based on religion. Our bitter experience over recent decades has been one of submission to murderous totalitarianism or religious extremism, which are really two sides of the same coin. It has become essential to take this coin out of circulation and find ways to establish civilian states.

The fifth challenge is religious reform. The face of Islam has become a grim presence in its homeland and around the world because of extremism and terrorist violence which is spreading across our region and beyond. Many states are fighting this phenomenon with military means. But the Arabs have soft power that could, with effort and initiative, correct these conceptions, remove the bleak veil over the face of Islam and prevent future generations growing up on a diet of extremism, hatred for the nation state, and violence that is spreading around the world.

This demands efforts to reform religious discourse and encourage education and learning, while emphasizing a culture of work and productivity, encouraging critical thinking in our societies in order to change future generations' visions of the world. Yes, our religious institutions need to reform and mobilize to take back the initiative from the extremists and return religion to its peaceful ways. They must resolve the conflict between the religion and the state, save it from being exploited politically and renew the traditions of co-existence between Muslims and Christians, Sunnis and Shiites.

In my view, fighting extremism needs a clear strategy focused on three main areas:

- 1 - Promoting a correct and enlightened interpretations of Islam
- 2 - Strengthening the culture of democracy and establishing the values of openness, tolerance and pluralism
- 3 - Promoting respect for human rights and acceptance of the other

I believe that Arab moderates and their counterparts who form the vast majority of Muslims around the world are the only force capable of defeating extremism and the phenomenon of globalized terrorism among Arabs and Muslims, especially given the current state of global instability and the rise of violent extremism around the world.

The sixth challenge is to affirm the rights of individuals, public and private freedoms, and collective rights that can only be protected by constitutions that are adhered to, respected and implemented by all.

The seventh challenge is the vital battle for institutional reform, which must be fought with institutional thinking, reform the values of institutions, put their work into action, ensuring their ability to cooperate and respect the need for harmonization and integration between institutions.

The eighth challenge is that of coupling this institutional reform with progress on establishing independent judicial and constitutional authorities which are effective and guarantee the rights and duties of the citizen.

The ninth challenge is that of ensuring economic and social development, setting up programs to eliminate poverty and illiteracy, and strengthening the level of participation whilst insisting on macroeconomic stability and structural and institutional reform.

Brothers and sisters:

These are hard, hard years. Terrorism is on the rise, millions of Arabs have been killed, injured or paralyzed. Many others have been forced to leave their homes. Human and material destruction has hit many Arab countries including here in Lebanon, our politics, our security, our infrastructure and our people. Every regional and international power has interfered in the Arab world, spreading corruption and destruction.

Yet throughout our history, while hope has been important, it was not all that we needed in order to overcome adversity and crises. Our support in times past, today and in the future is the courage to face the truth, to learn the right lessons and correct our course to do what we need to do. We need the courage to give momentum to that steadfast desire and to be persistent until we achieve what we and our Arab peoples desire.

I was a child when I memorized these lines by the poet of independence in Lebanon and Egypt, Khalil Matran.

The crushed the pens, but does crushing prevent hands from carving on stone?

They cut hands, but does cutting prevent the eyes from looking askance?

They extinguished the eyes, but does extinguishing prevent the breath from sighing?

The inner structures of Arab states have experienced fractures because of a lack of good governance. The relations between them have also fractured due to the dominance of the military and security apparatus in each. There have been fractures in relations with the surrounding region because of a lack of immunity and collective defense. There have been fractures in our relations with the modern world due to the lack of advanced knowledge and education, and because states, both big and small, have invaded our homelands.

But we still have a strong, collective will. Those who know our history know that the desire to liberate ourselves from the Crusaders emerged from the heart of the crisis, from Aleppo. Our push to be free of the Tatar invasions started in Ayn Jalout, in Palestine. With the strong desire of our people, wonders can happen. A million Arabs have been killed in Iraq and Syria in five years, ten million more displaced and suffering. They will return to hope in themselves, their nation, their future and their hope of building their history again. They must return.

In the past five years, I have become convinced that one day, reports will be published on how the Arabs have moved towards achieving the nine points I have outlined for responding to the challenges facing us, overcoming our crises and achieving renewal.

Thank you for your invitation, thank you for this painful but necessary review, and peace be upon you.