



مؤسسة قرطبة  
*The Cordoba Foundation*

## Successful Inauguration of Critical Platform on the Arab Spring

25 March 2014 - Queen Mary University of London



A successful seminar on Thursday 20th March 2014 was held at the Queen Mary, University of London as part of the inauguration of Critical Platform, which provides a space for dialogue, debate and networking. Held in partnership with The Cordoba Foundation, the seminar reflected on the three years of unprecedented changes in the Middle East and North Africa, ranging from free and fair elections to the violent suppression of change.

Helping shed light on the topic, a distinguished panel comprising of Dr Maha Azzam, chair of Egyptians for Democracy UK; Oliver McTernan, Director of Forward Thinking, and Dr Anas Altikriti, CEO of The Cordoba Foundation addressed the topic from numerous angles and took questions from the floor.

The audience comprised of academics and teachers, students, campaigners, faith and community leaders as well as the media. A number of prominent media agencies covered the launch, including Aljazeera Mubashir (Live), and Al-Arabia TV.

## THE PANEL

### Dr Maha Azzam

A prominent academic specialising in research on Political Islam, Islam and globalisation, Middle East politics, Islamist groups in the Middle East with particular reference to Egypt. She is the chair of the Egyptians for Democracy (UK), and Deputy Head of the International Coalition for Egyptians Abroad (ICEGA).



### Oliver James McTernan

Director of Forward Thinking. He was senior advisor to the Club of Madrid, a group of former Heads of State and Government committed to supporting governments in transition to democracy. He is the author of *Violence in God's Name*, which explores the roots of violence within faith traditions.



### Dr Anas Altikriti

Founder and CEO of The Cordoba Foundation, Director of the Nyon Process - UN Alliance of Civilisations; Global Strategy Consultant and a Hostage Negotiator.



## KEY POINTS FROM THE PANEL

Oliver McTernan spoke about the situation in Tunisia which he described as a model - “a beautiful plant which needs to be protected”. He said that the Tunisian constitution reflected the “realities of the country”. Talking about the Western attitudes towards the Arab Spring, he stressed that the Western response “has been one where we have put our interest before values”.

McTernan warned that “short-term aim will be a long-term regret”.

Dr Maha Azzam spoke mainly about the situation in Egypt, where over 3000 people have been killed since the uprising in reaction to the military coup of 2013. She underlined that “the Military High Command is stopping the democratic process in Egypt” and that “despite the Egyptian public going on to vote five times, the Military High Command abused the rights of ordinary Egyptians. Egypt now represents a police state”. She further analysed that “the Muslim Brotherhood has been discriminated” and “the regime in Egypt will not tolerate any opposition. It supports and encourages polarisation with its judiciary as its arm. This is no different to any fascist regimes that we know elsewhere”.





Azzam likened the past events as just a foreword: “what we are seeing in Egypt is that the Arab Spring is not dead - rather the second wave is imminent”.

Dr Anas Altikriti stressed that the origins of the Arab Spring, starting as it did in Tunisia, was about dignity: “The Arab Spring was about dignity! It wasn’t about money or food; it was about people’s humanity. The Arab Spring promises people humanity, dignity and honour...” He cautioned observers and pundits not to “make the mistake of drawing conclusions of the Arab Spring based news headlines and events of today.

Altikriti rebutted claims in the West and elsewhere that the Arabs were incapable of change, reinvigoration and challenging their dictatorial authorities. This myth was shattered with the Arab Spring: “the people who could not produce anything for so many years rose for change. They created change peacefully. These are a people who are far from the dead - they are alive”.





Altikriti further argued in favour of a change of narrative: “the struggle today is not between Islamists and democracy, because most Muslims and mainstream Islamist groups want democracy and accountability. This is a struggle between democracy and authoritarianism” and further: “We should no longer ask if Islam and democracy are compatible. Rather we should ask if we and Western governments are compatible with the vision of democracy, elections, freedom and dignity in these countries”.

The event ended with a robust panel discussion, where members of the audience were able to put questions to the speakers and engage in discussion. Altikriti commended the efforts of Aljazeera TV in its effort to cover the events in Egypt and beyond. He criticised the arbitrary arrests and the sentencing to death of countless members of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also Aljazeera reporters.

The Cordoba Foundation welcomes the launch of the Critical Platform, a venture it views as filling a vacuum in promoting debate and discussion on pertinent issues affecting communities across London and beyond.

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For further information about the Critical Platform, visit [www.criticalplatform.com](http://www.criticalplatform.com)

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[www.thecordobafoundation.com](http://www.thecordobafoundation.com)



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