

PAVING THE WAY FOR “A Boundless Future”

How can the Middle East diversify its social and economic development?

Earlier this year, the UCLA Ronald W. Burkle Center for International Relations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar cosponsored a conference in Doha to explore the prospects for economic and social development in the Middle East. Attended by senior-level leadership from government, business and universities worldwide, “Enriching the Middle East’s Economic Future” set the stage for change and sustainable international cooperation between the nations of the region, Asia, Europe and the United States.

President Bill Clinton opened the conference with a keynote address that emphasized the need for global cooperation to encourage economic and social development in the Middle East.

“I think it is quite important to continually bring the rest of the world into this region in a positive way—more foreign partners, more foreign investments, more partners for broad security, and more general understanding,” said Clinton. “And if we get the strategy right on the politics of the region, we will have a very positive future in the Middle East.”

The Burkle Center will publish the findings and recommendations, with a foreword by Clinton; his text follows. For a copy of the book, visit the Burkle Web site for the conference at www.international.ucla.edu/bcir.

By Bill Clinton

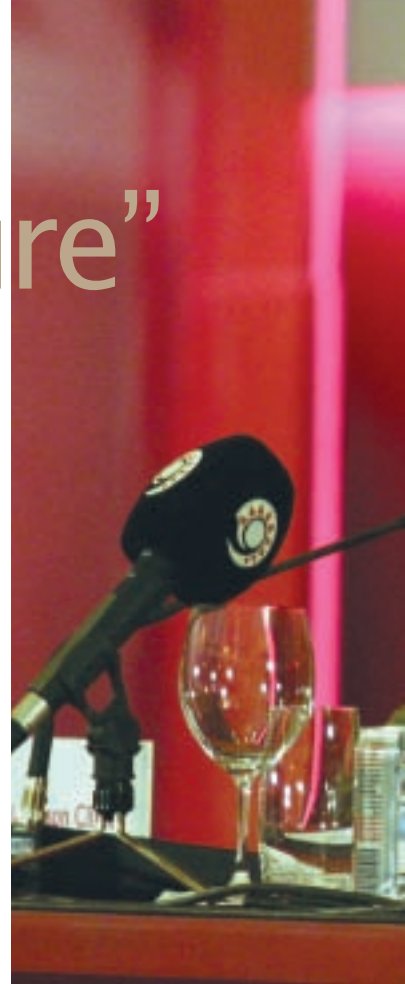
When the Emir and UCLA’s Burkle Center for International Policy invited me to return to Qatar and participate in their conference on “Enriching the Middle East’s Economic Future,” I agreed with enthusiasm and a sense of hope. I did so because I believe deeply that the story of the Middle East and the Arabian Gulf is more than the story of the price of oil, the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, the war in Iraq and its aftermath, and the question of Iran.

There are other equally important stories about the Middle East and the worldwide Muslim community that need to be explored and discussed. These are the stories of the deepening economic, cultural and political engagement of many nations in the Middle East with societies around the world; of new efforts to promote economic diversification throughout the region; and of the readiness and eagerness of many in the Middle East to take on the hard, but necessary, challenge of economic development and reform—a challenge that is critical to the transformation of the region.

International experts from government, industry and academia worked collaboratively in Doha to lay the foundations for a far-reaching agenda to spur more sustainable economic development and growth throughout the Middle East. By lifting up the lives of everyone in the Gulf, we will enhance the economic and political security of people around the world.

The conference wisely gave careful consideration to new public sector policies and private sector approaches to growing a vibrant and innovative middle class throughout the region, as well as to developing regulatory structures that will promote entrepreneurial investment in new business sectors, open new markets, and provide support for the creation of new infrastructures. Participants looked carefully at how to bring the region’s vibrant intellectual capital and creative spirit, especially those of women, to all of its citizens, in the service of building productive and prosperous societies through expanded education and training opportunities. Also, as the head of an NGO myself, I wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to participate in this event and discuss the work that my foundation is doing to address some of the issues the Burkle Center aims to address.

We also focused on transforming the great 20th-century oil economies of the Middle East into 21st-century global energy economies. As we look ahead to the coming decades, it is practical and achievable for the Middle East to






President Bill Clinton opened a conference co-sponsored by the UCLA Ronald W. Burkle Center for International Relations and the government of Qatar to begin a new focus on social and economic change in the Middle East.

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move to the forefront of innovation in the development of new and cleaner fuel sources for world markets, including wind and solar energy, and the development of cost-effective ways to provide liquefied natural gas around the world in a manner that addresses the increasing concerns about climate change and global warming. Climate change, alternative energy sources, and the threat posed by global warming have long been issues of interest to me. In fact, they are focus areas of my Global Initiative and it is my hope that by putting great minds together, we can come up with workable solutions to combat climate change.

The recommendations of our deliberations at Doha reflect many of the common aspirations of those who share a vision of a peaceful and secure Middle East that knows the blessings of prosperity, opportunity and democracy. Events like this conference, when people of good will from around the world come together to engage in a positive dialogue, ultimately pave the way for more partners, and more global understanding of the Middle East, its storied past and its boundless future. 

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