

Qataris for Reform

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Our book, *The People Want Reform... In Qatar, Too*, is the product of a joint effort on the part of a group of Qatari citizens we might term “Qataris for reform”. These individuals engaged in a mature dialogue over aspects of various imbalances in need of root-and-branch reform, imbalances that generally go unacknowledged on the official level and remain unaddressed by the media and the many conferences and seminars held in Qatar. They are ignored by research centres with links to the authorities and by the satellite television empire Al Jazeera, which describes itself as “the pulpit for those with no pulpit,” a pulpit that is not, unfortunately, extended to the people of Qatar themselves.

Interest in these problems is confined to conversations between Qataris. In private meetings, in gatherings where men and women come together and in casual conversation their complaints are many. We find them in articles by Qataris that by and large are barred from publication. We find echoes of them on electronic social networks and the Internet. But there is no public arena or body—no association or debate forum or media outlet—that concerns itself with the issue of reform in Qatar.

The initial round of dialogue was held between March 14 2011 and February 6 2012 in a series of what were known as “Monday Meetings”. The twelve meetings were attended by special invitation due to the lack of a venue big enough to open them to the general public. Some sixty Qatari citizens with a special interest in the country’s public affairs participated in the events, united by their belief in the need to generate a call for reform in Qatar, which the narrow margin for free expression and debate permitted by the authorities did nothing to facilitate. Perhaps this faint call might reach the ears of the country’s public officials and find a positive response from its decision makers.

Given the clear need for this discussion in Qatar, the *Qataris for Reform* dialogue began its second round of meetings in March 2012 (www.dr-alkuwari.net/mondaymeeting).

The Monday meetings dealt with topics selected according to the expertise and specializations of the speakers. Ensuring that every invitee was able to present a paper helped foster a shared understanding between those present. The wider citizenry was involved through an electronic publication that outlined aspects of the issue under discussion and identified the imbalances and the means to reform them.

The issues covered—as listed in the book index—include the constitution, the judicial authorities and the rule of law, as well as population, society, culture, the media, education, identity and the Arabic language’s declining role in management and education. The meetings also explored the uses of natural gas, liquid gas exports, the environment, Qatar Airways and the Qatar Foundation and Education City. A critique of the National Development Strategy 2011-2016 was set out as was the need for reform in light of the shortcomings of the 2004 constitution and the strategy for national development that it contained.

I am conscious that at this juncture I should offer my sincere thanks to the Qatari researchers whose names appear in the index, and who took up the challenge of investigating issues and matters regarded as taboo, highlighting deficiencies and pointing

to possible avenues of reform. Thanks are also due to those colleagues who proposed topics and made interventions in purely spoken form, and whose contributions could not readily be published.

It need scarcely be said that the issues and opinions put forward here are a first attempt: the product of a first year of dialogue. The subject of reform remains a national issue. It requires a will on the part of society as a whole, a consensus between the authorities and the people. But before that can happen it requires a the growth of a real demand for reform, an expression of a national consensus between all individuals and groups within society reached through a free and mature discussion between all those who are ready and able to take part.

The Monday meetings are thus a necessary step, but they are not enough. They help give prominence to the problems and outline a broad agenda for reform, just as they seek to broaden the circle of the debate using every means and framework at their disposal. Yet the business of putting these suggestions into practice must wait on the growth of a nationwide desire for reform and the development of a consensus the broad outline of which is subscribed to by all the individuals and groups that make up our society.

At this stage in the dialogue, and in light of what we now know of terminal imbalances in Qatar in need of radical reform, this introduction seeks to focus attention on three themes that have arisen from Monday meetings over the course of their first year from 2011-2012:

1. Reform: Impediments and obstacles.
2. Issues in need of reform: Imbalances and their reform.
3. Conclusion: The need for reform in Qatar and how to begin.

Reform: Impediments and obstacles

It is important to take time to explore the consequences of, and obstacles to, reform. These must be confronted and dealt with if we are to create an environment conducive to a national dialogue over the aims of reform and the means of effecting it. There is no chance of reform if the current state of general freedoms continues as it is, if transparency remains absent and if public and private finance affairs remain intertwined. These obstacles include the following:

1. Concealing and preventing the publication of information related to public affairs

The principal observation agreed on by all those present at the Monday meetings (though known about and commented on prior to this initiative) is the concealment of information connected to public affairs in Qatar and the inability to publish anything related to the decision-making process that lies behind official pronouncements. Indeed, the majority of our speakers and commentators lacked precise information and are unaware of the reasons behind public policy choices and the incentives and justifications for the ruler's commands.

This ensures the Qatari people exist in a constant state of surprise at the options taken and the decisions made, as though the public policies and life-changing decisions enacted by the government were a private affair that regular citizens had no right to know about, let alone participate in.

To start with, we find that the government of Qatar does not explain the overall purpose of its population policy, nor does it publish statistics about the number of citizens, their social make-up, or projections of how their proportion of the overall population will change.

The same approach is found in finance. The estimated national budget is never published in full. Even the current Advisory Council only has the right to examine estimated capital expenditure. The budget's final account is top secret. No one may look at it. The same applies to the report of the state's Audit Bureau (itself answerable to the executive), whose powers do not include examining certain incomes and expenditures of public monies because such data does not come under the authority of the Council of Ministers: it is excepted from their authority and any other form of public oversight.

The same is true of the state's public reserves, investments made with this money and the results of these operations. Citizens hear about Qatar's massive international deals but have no idea if these benefit public finances or private interests. The size of the national debt is neither known nor published, nor the scale and composition of debts guaranteed by the state, which are estimated at tens of billions of dollars. Reports from the IMF's International Institute of Finance indicate that a large part of the income from oil and gas does not appear in the relevant section of the national budget.

Alongside the mystery surrounding the income, expenditure and investment of public wealth, there is the matter of publicly owned assets, particularly land that has been developed or property confiscated under the Public Interest Law. Many of these lands and properties have passed into private hands either for token, non-competitive prices, or as gifts and bequests. Privately owned hotels, commercial and residential projects and towns

are built. The upshot is projects like Souk Waqif, Al Jasra, Mushairib, Kahraba Street, the fifteen million square metre Education City, the Katara cultural village and the various institutes and projects of the Aspire Zone. The market value of these public properties is in the hundreds of billions.

2. Transparency

What of the transparency regarding major public policy decisions; the documents and plans that that will determine the country's present, the fate of society and the future that awaits generations to come?

We find the public and higher education systems altered on the advice of a study by the Rand Corporation (which also supervises them), in which English is the chief language of instruction and in which society and national studies have been removed from the curriculum. All this has been implemented without any public debate and without the participation of education specialists or the faculty of the University of Qatar. The same is true of the rationale behind construction projects and the property sequestration, which has grown into a phenomenon that poses a threat to citizens' sense of stability, their jobs and to the health services. We have the Human Resources Law and the decision to convert cooperative associations into commercial companies without any clarification as to why this has been done nor thought given to its legality.

Now we hear of two more projects being put in place: a health insurance scheme for citizens, replacing the government's provision of health services and a voucher scheme to replace the provision of free education in government schools. Education and health have been left to the private sector: a discriminatory private sector into whose maw the government shovels its citizens' social services, absolving itself of responsibility for providing public services through agencies and channels that once served citizens with exemplary levels of care.

We look on as the railway and metro project is implemented at a cost of forty billion dollars with no public debate, despite the project's vast scale and the statistical errors it is based on. It estimates, for instance, that in ten years Qatar's population will number five million, a growth of 200 per cent in a decade. That Qatar's population strategy rests on such improbabilities is positively sinister.

Qatar's constitution was drawn up by government committee without any public debate or discussion: merely a yes-or-no referendum overseen by the Ministry of the Interior, promoted by the media and meddled with by the executive branch. Qatar's National Vision for 2030, and the National Development Strategy 2011-2016 were both created without any discussion outside government circles. Even the Advisory Council was denied an opportunity to pass judgement on the two documents.

The list goes on: many more such decisions and public policy choices, including security treaties, military bases and laws that allow residential property purchasers and beneficiaries the right to permanent residence. It is worth pointing out that this last policy, which has no counterpart outside the smaller Gulf states, has led in Qatar to the construction of residences for around 210 thousand permanent residents, not counting those who have travelled to Qatar for work or possess temporary work visas. This at a time when the number of Qatari citizens is estimated at no more than 250 thousand.

3. Freedom of opinion and expression

The lack of transparency and the concealment of information is linked to a constriction of the margin for free expression and an absence of independent civil society organizations concerned with public affairs, citizens' rights, professional syndicates and workers' unions. These are things the law does not allow. The Associations and Foundations Law will only grant licenses to government officials or those who have received prior approval from the authorities. Indeed, there is a failure to consider requests for setting up associations and foundations that have not received prior approval and in these cases—either of a failure to consider the request or outright refusal—there is no recourse to the courts: only the fruitless option of making a complaint to the Council of Ministers.

It is worth highlighting here that Qatar law does not permit the establishment of political bodies, forums for debate, professional syndicates or trade unions. There are no civil society organizations for human or citizens' rights, nor any association or institution with a focus on public affairs. It is therefore inaccurate to talk of civil society in Qatar: it is those who hold power who set up private bodies to work in the public interest, lavishing public money on them without any oversight. There are many such examples and anyone who has attempted establishing a non-governmental organization will know them.

Freedom of expression is curtailed by a Press Law with excessively severe penalties, not to mention direct intervention by the executive in installing newspaper editors and appointing individuals in the public and private media sectors without the slightest qualification for their positions.

The lack of freedom of opinion and expression, in addition to the freedom to organize, may be the chief factor in entrenching non-transparency, allowing the terrifying official media machine to frame the situation in Qatar until reality is quite effaced, then to transmit this propaganda abroad, leaving the naïve dazzled, while those in the know chuckle at the passivity of the Qatari people who are deprived their right to voice an opinion through a strategy of carrot and stick.

All this, at a time in which Qataris themselves are unable to express themselves and forbidden from influencing current events, participating in building their own future, safeguarding the fate of their society, their identity and their wealth and securing it for future generations.

Take Law 17, 2002, the Protection of Society law, which secures neither human nor citizens' rights nor safeguards any of the traditional sources of legitimacy. Together with the pressure placed on writers and others concerned with public affairs, this law strips the concept of freedom of expression of any meaningful role. When the carrot, in the form of a battalion of laws, fails to silence the citizen, then the tools of authoritarian repression will.

4. The lack of public/private boundaries and inadequate public administration

In the modern state, public administration is the arm of the government that acts as guardian of the public interest. To fulfil this role, it must be independent, comprehensive and effective, as well as guaranteeing the civil servant's security and commitment to the public interest. For the public administration to fulfil its central function and to ensure that public influence and wealth is deployed in the public interest there must be a separation between public affairs and monies on the one hand and private interests on the other. The nature of the public interest should be determined by research and sober discussion in which all citizens, but especially the professionals among them, must participate.

The public administration is made up of ministries, each with responsibility for the public interest in a given field, which together provide a comprehensive coverage of all areas. To these ministries are added public agencies with a supervisory or organizational role, which oversee and support the ministries' activities. The state also establishes public institutions to manage projects and its currency holdings and assets.

All these various bodies—ministries, agencies, project management etc.—should come under the control of the Council of Ministers and the legislative branch and their budget, in terms of income and expenditure, either incorporated into the national budget or appended to it. The budget should be audited by an audit bureau and supervised by the legislature.

The separation of public and private interests removes an obstacle to reform. This requires that the ministries provide comprehensive coverage of all areas of activity, public, private, charitable and cooperative. Every activity, be it private or public, should fall within the purview of one ministry or another.

In Qatar, though, we have oil and education ministers but no ministries. In other words, there is nobody to safeguard the public interest in these two fields. Instead, they are left to oil companies and in the case of education, to educational, media and cultural foundations with no connection to the Supreme Council for Education, the media watchdog or the Ministry of Culture. There is no one to make ensure their activities serve the public interest, or to audit the public funds that are handed to them without regulatory supervision. Examples of such foundations include Education City, the Al-Jazeera media network and Qatar Airways, not to mention numerous public bodies, projects and councils that operate outside the purview of the Council of Ministers and whose expenditures and administration are unregulated.

For reform to take place, the public administration must become responsible for all activities connected with the public interest. The national budget, supplementary budgets, the calculations of the public reserve and the management of state assets must all be supervised and safeguarded by the government's ministries and agencies. In this way, the public administration will become a single, cohesive unit, comprehensive and uncorrupted, independent in its decision making process and unbiased in its treatment of Qatari citizens and the wider population, dealing with everyone—ruler and ruled alike—on a basis of equality and the rule of law.

The civil servant must be allowed to perform his job, expect fair promotion and enjoy job security. He must be uncorrupted, patriotic and be capable of defending the public interest against any transgressor, no matter how powerful. Civil servants and decision makers in the public administration must be capable and qualified and their job security and ability to perform their function guaranteed by law. This means that the

public administration must be reformed and developed, its authority over society comprehensively extended until there is not a single public job, institution, body or agency that is not supervised by the Council of Ministers, the Audit Bureau, the Civil Service Bureau and the other ombudsman agencies. Furthermore, a majority of these positions should be staffed with Qataris.

The reform of public administration should perhaps be accompanied by an amendment to certain articles of the constitution (such as Article 17: “Financial allocations, gifts and aid from the Emir are determined by an annual decree issued by the Emir”) as well as a review of the laws, regulations and habits followed in the current administration. The traditional failure to enforce the separation between public and private funds and the number of exceptions to this principle in official instructions that disregard the sanctity of public funds should also be looked into.

Such a review would be an indicator of an intention to enforce well-run, just and responsible governance based on the rule of law and to abide by the principles laid down in the constitution that stipulate a democratic system of government with Islamic law as the principle source for legislation. The text of the constitution calls for equality between all citizens, the separation of public and private funds and holds that no executive orders shall trump regulations or the law. The civil servant must be a “disciple to his sheikh”, a mere functionary at the disposal of his superiors.

Issues in need of reform

These are the principle and most serious imbalances in the current system and the resulting flaws that manifest themselves in all areas of cultural, social, economic and political life. The imbalances that require a process of root-and-branch reform before they can be properly addressed can be summarised as follows:

1. The imbalance in the population

The first issue in need of reform is the terminal and mounting population crisis in Qatar, which has led to a drop in the proportion of Qatari citizens from 40 per cent in 1970 to just 12 per cent by 2010. This makes it the most serious and pressing challenge in need of radical reform and the most deserving.

If Qataris are unable to apply pressure to halt this growing imbalance and begin gradual reform, their natural position at the head of society will fall away and they will be rendered incapable of reforming the other and newer problems. Indeed, they will be transformed into a deprived and marginalised minority in their own land.

The perpetuation of this growing imbalance threatens to uproot Qatari society, to erase its identity and culture, to take its mother tongue, Arabic, out of circulation, and erode the role of its citizens in owning and running their own country. Local citizens constitute the leaders and administrators in every other country in the world, particularly in the public administration.

It is worth noting here that the issue of population imbalance has long been recognized by both civil society and the authorities. Its reform has been a constant refrain for the last fifty years, culminating in the National Development Strategy 2011-2016, which signalled a radical change in the official attitude towards the problem. The population imbalance was now an issue not to be spoken of, if not positively abjured. Everything is now discussed in terms of “population” and citizens, and the proportion of that overall population that they represent, are not mentioned.

This change in tack transforms Qataris from citizens, with corresponding rights, to a dwindling class of the population, forced to compete with immigrants for job opportunities, education and social services, all in a language not their own, even as they remain deprived for one reason or another of their political rights.

The new Nationality Law from 2005, of dubious constitutionality, paves the way for this transformation of citizens into inhabitants who enjoy none of their rights of citizenship. It does this by permanently depriving citizens who have acquired Qatari citizenship (about a third of all citizens) and their descendants of all political rights. At the same time, the current constitution fails to guarantee effective political rights to the remaining two-thirds of Qataris who are citizens by birth: such scant political rights as there were, are currently in abeyance courtesy of Article 150.

We call for urgent reform to this deplorable situation. We are talking here of a country in which citizens constituted an estimated 250 thousand out of a total population of 1.64 million in 2010: in other words a proportion of 12 per cent, down from 30 per cent in 2004. Similarly, the workforce rose from 323 thousand in 2001 to 1.265 million in

2009, while over the same period the proportion of Qatari citizens in the workforce dropped from 14 per cent to 6 per cent.

The principle factor behind this worsening imbalance is an official policy brought into operation in 2004 which aimed to expand the property market and institute vast new developments (along with the infrastructure required to support them) by means of marketing property investments by granting buyers permanent residence in Qatar, regardless whether their skills were required by the workforce or the country's ability to absorb them. The perpetuation of this imbalance is thus not only caused by the traditional demand for immigrant workers but also an indefensible official policy. New towns and residential zones were constructed, not for citizens or immigrant workers, but for an entirely new population encouraged to invest in property in return for residence for themselves and their families, without the need to possess work visas like other incomers.

Nor is this imbalance acceptable from a patriotic perspective. Nothing comparable can be found in other another country in the world, great or small, with the exception of our neighbours, the United Arab Emirates, and may God forgive their rulers and ours.

There is no people or society on earth capable of absorbing more immigrants than they have citizens, so what to make of Qatar, where the figure is eight times higher? Even so, activities on the international property market continue, as does expenditure on infrastructure and educational services that Qataris not only do not need, but which are not intended for them in the first place, all of which leads to a greater influx of immigrants, further eroding the status of citizens, erasing their identity and extirpating their language.

2. Economic imbalance

The economic imbalance results from an almost absolute—and growing—reliance on income derived from exporting Qatar's abundant natural resources of raw petroleum (oil and natural gas). The country's main source of income is the profit resulting from an oil price ten times higher than the cost of production. It most evident in any breakdown of the GDP: the source of all income is the profit made on exporting a natural resource and not the productivity of individuals and institutions as is the case in a production economy.

To appreciate the extent of this imbalance we must imagine the state of Qatar's income and standard of living if oil yields were removed. We would not find the revenue sources to supply even a small part of our daily needs. Indeed, all our oil and gas funded activities would grind to a halt and our cities become cities of salt.

Because of the lack of desire (or perhaps, inability) of individual oil-producing nations such as Qatar to adopt national policies in which oil exports are subordinate to development goals, they have responded to world demand for oil in a random and unpredictable fashion. The state rushes to increase production without any serious economic or social research or the slightest regard for their capacity or the available oil reserves.

Qatar has raised its production of liquid natural gas to 77 million tons a year, making it one of the top two suppliers in the world, without looking at alternative economic approaches or alternative uses for LNG, nor taking into consideration consequences and responsibilities. This has only increased reliance on oil and gas

revenue, which has become the sole source of the GDP, the only source of revenue in the national budget and thus of public expenditure and development and other national projects. Furthermore it has encouraged risk and wastefulness in addition to promoting foreign and local investments whose impact on the national interest and economy has not been properly researched.

This on-going imbalance has been accompanied by an interpenetration of public and private wealth and lack of transparency, which treats oil and gas yields, the budget and public reserves as a state secret not to be divulged to Qatari citizens. This has led to a lot of waste and misappropriation of oil revenue for purposes of short-term expenditure instead of long-term investment. Policies for the investment of oil revenue remain backward due to the failure to link the expenditure of public funds with an understanding of the economic and national benefits they might bring.

Qatar publishes no final version of its national budget with a full account of all revenue and expenditure, nor a detailed account of the national reserves, nor the reports of the Audit Bureau (which is currently not authorised to examine all revenue streams and expenditure). It is the epitome of a profitable state with absolute authority invested in an individual. Policies to diversify income streams have failed, the sanctity of public funds is increasingly disregarded and the short-term consumption of petroleum resources grows ever larger at the expense of long-term investment for future generations.

The country is suffering from a terminal economic imbalance, which can only be resolved when natural oil and gas exports are placed in the service of sound development and their export linked to the economy's production capacity. This will build a solid economic foundation that will gradually come to replace the current reliance on raw petroleum exports.

Reforming the imbalance will also necessitate listing all state revenues from oil and gas in the national budget, in accordance with Qatari law, prompting a gradual change from a policy of using oil money to fund current transformational state projects and redirecting it towards long-term investment. Oil revenue must be preserved in productive, renewable assets from which current and future generations may benefit. These revenues should be seen as a national reserve for all generations, not just as readily available run-off from our oil reserves. This is the path pursued by Norway, ever since it began producing oil. With sixty years experience ourselves, we can at least begin to put such measures in place.

3. Political imbalance

Qatar's political imbalance in the relationship between the government and its people is best expressed in the phrase, "a more than absolute authority and a less than powerless people". The authorities in Qatar monopolize the decision-making process with no effective political participation on the part of citizens.

This is evident in the absence of democracy, the disregard shown to the principle of citizenship and equal opportunity and the lack of effective political participation in the decision-making process. Despite this, the provisional constitution of 1970 describes Qatar as a democracy, while the 2004 constitution states that the people are the source of

all political authority, stipulates a separation between the various branches of government and calls for equal rights and obligations for all citizens.

The reality, however, points to the perpetuation of absolute rule, both prior to and after the promulgation of the current constitution. In a recent paper entitled *The state of democracy in Qata*” I concluded that the political system in Qatar has yet to transition to the democracy envisioned in the 2004 constitution, and is unlikely to do so as long as the relevant articles remain disregarded, such as the statement that the people are the source of all authority. The contents of these articles have been converted into laws whose drafting and implementation is controlled by the executive in the absence of a functioning constitutional court, while the administrative courts remain barred from ruling on many of the government’s decisions and many old and new laws regulating these democratic principles remain unenforced.

Given the lack of democracy and effective political participation, and given the wording of the current constitution, it was hoped that the National Vision and National Strategy would make priorities of both political development and the necessity of transitioning to a constitutionally supported democracy. Perhaps they would offer a vision and plan for this long-awaited political reform.

Reading the National Vision for Qatar 2030 we find that it does not mention political reform and political and cultural development in its discussion of the vision’s cornerstones. Neither do we find any discussion of these issues in the National Development Strategy 2011-2016.

Correcting this imbalance requires a transition to a democratic political system governed by a constitution drafted by committee. Only then will Qatar have a contractual constitution. Only then will the people assume their proper place as the ultimate source of authority, guided by the generous principles of Islamic Law, the human rights treaties to which Qatar is a signatory and the values of the political system shared by all democratic countries.

This transition to a contractual democratic constitution can be achieved by having a democratically elected advisory council review the current constitution. The current constitution contains a number of additions to those articles dealing with democratic principles, which are designed to neutralize them. Article 150, for instance, contains the following addition—“The temporary, amended political system by which the state operates, brought into force on 19/4/1972, is to be abolished and the rulings of the current Advisory Council shall remain in force until such time as the new Advisory Council is elected”—which effectively abolished the independence of the legislative branch for ten years due the government’s failure to hold advisory council elections. This is just one of many examples of the undemocratic suspension of constitutional principles within Qatar’s constitution.

Another addition giving the authorities scope for similar interference is found in Article 81. This stipulates that “[each] parliament shall last four years starting from the date of its first convening,” to which has been appended, “if elections are not held at the end of this period, or have been delayed for whatever reason, the current parliament shall remain until new elections are held.” Like the addition to Article 150 mentioned above, this addition has been used to abolish the independence of the legislature for ten years.

Given that the electoral system is defined by the executive branch and ratified by the Advisory Council, given that the boundaries of electoral districts (Article 79) cannot

be legally challenged and given that the National Vision and National Strategy not only ignore the issue of political reform but actively support the status quo, then we have a situation in which the executive can engineer the coming parliamentary elections, using the amendment to Article 81 to extend the new parliament's life for a decade or more.

The current constitution is thus permanently crippled, incapable of change and unable to deliver a legislature in which the people are the ultimate source of authority. It can neither ensure the separation of the different branches of government nor guarantee the principle of equality for all citizens until such time as Qatar makes the transition to the democratic system first promised in the 1970 constitution. The reverse is true. The political system will remain as it is, devoid of any effective political participation on the part of its citizens.

We call for the 2004 constitution to be redrawn by a democratically elected drafting committee, given the current constitution's failure to meet the requirements for a transition to a democratic political system or keep step with developments in the Arab world, which has witnessed the emergence of a new political consciousness and popular calls for democracy. Qataris want this as much as other Arabs and it is up to Qatar's government to put their promises into effect.

Assuming the idea of an elected drafting committee reviewing the constitution were accepted, then the people and the authorities need to reach a consensus on this transition to a contractual constitution, the political landscape must open up and the root-and-branch reform needed to move forward must be put in place. The move to democracy must take place through an effective national dialogue in which the authorities guarantee the people their freedoms, particularly the freedom of expression and the freedom to organize. Public affairs, public funds, public property and public administration must all be managed transparently. Laws must be reviewed in the light of their constitutionality and a law governing democratic elections implemented, guaranteeing free, fair and effective elections overseen by an independent judicial body.

4. The security imbalance

The security imbalance is rooted in the inability of Gulf Cooperation Council member states to defend themselves militarily given their relatively small size and weakness as separate nations. Because of this they secure the security of their regimes with foreign protection, entering into alliances with the major powers and granting them military bases and other assistance.

Another cause of this inability to guarantee national security is the states' failure to ensure long-term development, due to their small size and the absence of many of the requirements for such development, such as national will, diverse revenue streams, a sufficiently large population and a strong market. Since it is difficult to imagine equipping each of these nations individually with what they need to secure themselves, the only solution is to form a democratic union within the framework of the GCC. This body should be provided with the minimum resources to establish a defensive network, adopt a proactive foreign policy and ensure stable, long-term development.

The beginning may come from clear and insistent popular support for a GCC resolution to transition from a cooperative venture to a genuine union in accordance with

Article 4 of the GCC's founding document (an article that member nations have not only ignored but actively combatted for thirty years). It is incumbent on all the peoples of the region to understand this transition from cooperative to union as an obligation and turn their polite requests into frank demands and effective pressure for a democratic Gulf union that can meet the requirements for security and development.

It should be noted that unless the region's countries transition to democracy no democratic union will be possible. No people would readily exchange their locally elected ruler for a regional tyrant, so democratic transition is a logical first step to any such union. The transition of Saudi Arabia to democracy is a particularly important step for setting up a democratic union of democratic GCC member states and perhaps other Arab countries who have made a similar transition.

Until this transformation takes place, cooperation between the peoples and governments of the region will take place within the framework of the current GCC. Calls for a federal-style union may reduce the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving the minimum requirements for security in the region and sustainable development.

Reform of Qatar's security imbalance is thus predicated on the will of both the Qatari government and people on the one hand and that of their Gulf neighbours on the other: an increased sense of responsibility on the national and regional level. If the Qatari people can join with other peoples of the region in demanding the reform of these long-standing imbalances and making the transition to democratic rule, this may prove to be the best way to ensure shared, long-term interests trump selfish, narrowly nationalistic interests. The existence and identities of the societies, states and peoples of the region are under threat, deprived as they are of development potential that their oil wealth offers. They must stand together when it is in the interest of their societies to do so.

Conclusion

The need for reform in Qatar: How to begin

Is Qatar as much in need of reform as other Arab countries, or has reform in Qatar already happened: did the Arab Spring blossom early as the media claims?

Our book, *The People Want Reform... In Qatar, Too*, shows clearly that Qatar is in need of the radical and comprehensive reform its people call for, just as much as other Arab nations and their peoples if not more, given the threat to their identity and future posed by these imbalances, some long-term, others of the utmost urgency.

It is to be hoped the proceedings of the Monday meetings contained within taken together with the exposition and analysis in this introduction, the articles written by Qatar's intellectuals, the complaints of its citizens and the participation and discussions of its youth, will all confirm the pressing and urgent need for reform in Qatar. It is the duty of Qatar's government to make this reform possible.

If reform is unquestionably an obligation then it is also a matter of consensus between the various individuals and groups at the level of civil society, not to mention an official-civil consensus over its priorities and implementation. This in turn requires holding a mature and responsible national dialogue even as the government oversees preliminary reforms in the areas mentioned above, thus opening up the way for freedom of expression and organization and enabling the foundation of a civil society that can express the hopes and ambitions of all participants without constraint, marginalization or bias.

Furthermore, reform requires a lifting of the ban on information and statistics connected with public funds and affairs and their publication. Transparency must prevail, the public administration be reformed so that it can perform its proper function of serving the public interest and the judiciary reformed to ensure that all are treated fairly.

Until this dialogue and political openness can come about there are a number of strategic preliminaries to reform whose importance requires that they be called for as soon as possible. It is on these strategic preliminaries that the present and future contentment of the Qatari people depend:

1. Halting the imbalance in the population and gradually reforming it: Returning the proportion of Qatari citizens as a percentage of the total population and workforce to the their 2004 levels (30 per cent and 14 per cent respectively) within five years. Subsequently, gradually increasing the proportion of citizens in both the population and workforce at an annual rate of 1-2 per cent. This will require breaking the link between property sales and the granting of permanent residency by changing the relevant laws.

The make-up of immigrants to Qatar must also be slowly altered, exploiting the cycle of immigrant workers returning home at the expiration of their contracts without in any way infringing on their rights. The changes would benefit Arabic speakers, professionals and skilled workers and be based on a reliance on technologies and activities requiring a low workforce and intensive capital investment. Out of work Qataris—estimated at some 50 per cent of all Qatari graduates—would be brought back to work, equipped and encouraged to rejoin the job market, thus addressing one of the

root causes of unemployment, excessive welfare recipients and a prevalent culture of “stay at home and draw your salary”.

2. Reforming and developing the public administration: Extending the powers of ministries and other public agencies and bodies to encompass all civil positions without exception. The public administration must also be given oversight of all public, private, charitable and cooperative activities. In order that the public administration can serve the public interest and carry out its functions without bias, independently and transparently, all civil servants must be given the immunity from interference that they need to perform their jobs.

A reliance on locally-recruited staff, properly qualified and untainted by unprofessional obligations is one possible starting point for developing and evolving the public administration to better serve the public interest. This is certainly the case elsewhere in the world, where public administrators are local nationals who function in the country’s official language.

3. Transitioning to a democratic political system: This entails revising the 2004 constitution, purging those articles that deal with democratic principles of additions designed to hinder their effectiveness and bolstering the document’s overall support of democracy. This should be done by drafting committee constituted via a law for democratic elections in which the people, as the ultimate source of authority, can express their will.

4. Revising and completing the National Vision and National Strategy: Making these two documents tools for reform and development that deliver approaches for resolving the principle long-term imbalances and confronting problems of development in all fields. Until such revision takes place the National Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy 2011-2016 should be subjected to a wide-ranging public debate focussed on reform and development, with the goal of revisiting all public policies, particularly those concerned with education, health, the media, culture and the environment. Obvious flaws in these policies should then be corrected.

5. Strengthening the institutions of the judiciary and ensuring the right to a court of law: The judiciary in Qatar is still subservient to the executive and the two branches are yet to be separated. The judiciary’s institutions remain inadequate and its authority often curtailed by the law during its confrontations with the executive. The constitutional court is yet to come into operation and its bench of judges has not been constituted despite a president being appointed to it in 2008. As a result it is impossible to appeal the constitutionality of any of Qatar’s laws. The authority of the administrative courts is similarly weak, having been stripped of the power to hear cases on a number of issues: decrees, orders and proclamations from the Emir, cases concerning nationality, any decrees based on Law 17, 2002 (the Protection of Society Law), any decrees based on laws concerning associations or institutions involved in printing or publishing, the licensing of newspapers or magazines, the sequestration of property under the Public Interest Law.

There is thus an urgent need to reform and strengthen the institutions of the judiciary and guarantee the right to a court of law. This requires the constitutional court to be made operational, the administrative courts empowered to hear all cases where citizens and residents come into conflict with the executive and recourse to the courts guaranteed for all cases where the government and society are opposed. The judiciary are the last resort and depriving them of their powers and curtailing the right to a court of law is in contradiction to the principles of democratic governance, Islamic Law and human rights legislation and a suspension of the rule of law.