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'We must control our own destiny'

Speakers at day two of Abu Dhabi event champion idea of forum that will allow Arab nations to solve their own problems

Caline Malek

ABU DHABI // Arab governments must rely on themselves to seek stability and reshape the regional order, experts say.

Institutions have a strong role to play in managing tensions and threats, an audience heard at the second day of the Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

"There is no Arab plan for the region," said Amr Moussa, former secretary general of the Arab League.

"The order that we have had since 1945 has come to an end. I believe we should set a goal, an objective, and that objective is a new regional order."

With the turmoil in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, Mr Moussa said plans must be set and a joint force created for the region.

"We are facing international policies that belittle Arabs and we are all facing these issues as an Arab region. So it is necessary for us to sit and examine the situation [to find out] how to act in the face of these challenges."

Mr Moussa said the Abu Dhabi conference could be a first step.

"We have not even had brainstorming sessions regarding Arab and regional shaping. The Arab mind must be activated and we have to shoulder our responsibilities."

Regional institutions were central to the discussions.

"If I look across the world, I see them as assisting in [defeating] those conflicts and stabilising those disputes," said Kevin Rudd, former prime minister of Australia and president of the Asia Society Policy Institute in the United States.

"The world is looking for effectiveness of institutions in the Arab world, for it to have its own body to manage regional tensions and fundamental threats from within."

He said the solution laid with the Arab people, 60 per cent of whom are youth.

"There is a crying need for a robust pan-regional institution to take hard decisions on politics," he said.

"We should ponder with supreme realism what it would be like if our state structures would begin to break and collapse."

With about 6,000 Hizbollah troops in Syria and thousands of Shia militia from Iraq, some said the problem stemmed from Iran's intervention.

"Having stronger Arab institutions and Arab League would prevent Iran from intervening this way," said Dr Elliott Abrams, senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, and former US deputy national security adviser.

"[They] would allow for a stronger Arab response to this kind of intervention."

And with millions of refugees pouring out of these Middle Eastern conflicts, the situation is alarming.

"I think that we have to look into our identity and to preserve our Arab interest and this also has to be done on the inter-Arab scene," said Nabil Fahmy, former foreign minister of Egypt and founding dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the American University in Cairo.

"It is high time that we launch initiatives in cooperation with others because we will not be able to solve our problems without co-operating."

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, Foreign Minister, attended a gala dinner on the opening night of the summit on Saturday at which Prince Saud Al Faisal of Saudi Arabia was honoured posthumously for his diplomatic work.

Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, wife of Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Ruler of Sharjah, received an award for her humanitarian work, particularly with UAE children and refugees.

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Amr Moussa, former secretary general of the Arab League, speaks at the Beirut Institute Summit yesterday. Delores Johnson / The National