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**“Looking Forward in Yemen: Challenges, Opportunities, & the International Community's Role”
The Atlantic Council & the Project on Middle East Democracy
Thursday, October 25, 10:00 – 11:30 pm
1101 15th Street Northwest, Washington, D.C., 20005**

The Atlantic Council and Project on Middle East Democracy hosted an event Thursday at the Atlantic Council, entitled "Looking Forward in Yemen: Challenges, Opportunities, & the International Community's Role." Moderated by Executive Director of Project on Middle East Democracy, **Stephen McInerney**, the panel featured **Atiaf Alwazir**, Co-Founder of the SupportYemen Campaign, **Laura Kasinof**, freelance journalist previously based in Sana'a, and **Ibrahim Mothana**, Co-founder of the Watan party and Advisory Committee Member for the Arab Thought Foundation.

Atiaf Alwazir began by saying the "past year and a half has been a roller coaster" in Yemen. She addressed the National Dialogue, scheduled for November 15th, and warned that success and failure of the dialogue will make or break the transitional process. If the dialogue goes well, "we will have an expansion of the political elite," Alwazir said. However, there is much apathy towards the transitional process in Yemen, along with a great deal of mistrust in the political sphere. Alwazir outlined the five main challenges presented to the dialogue: immense expectation on the transitional government to create tangible change for the average citizen, lack of clarity and transparency over the transitional process, an increasing media war over the process, a perceived lack of inclusion, especially among the southern movement and the youth, and a perceived dominance of one political party over all others. Unfortunately, Alwazir said, all of these issues have compounded to strengthen an already present lack of trust in the political process. Alwazir stressed that transparency is key in easing the stress of the people, saying "for people to be more accountable we need more information." Additionally, "the people need to feel it's a Yemeni led process with aid from the international community," in order to feel connected to the process. In closing, Alwazir said, "for Yemen to move forward, a true healing process needs to happen, and a bottom up approach needs to be emphasized.

Ibrahim Mothana addressed how the U.S. can assist the transitional process, highlight the importance of receive the aid that was pledged at the Friends of Yemen event, but was never received. If the U.S. could put pressure on those who pledged, they may be more likely to follow through. In addition, the U.S. should aid in the humanitarian crisis. "The hunger crisis in Yemen is key to the success of the transition," Mothana said. Additionally, the protest movement in Yemen was disappointed by the U.S. response, which has let to increasing anti-American sentiments. Thus, Mothana urged the U.S. to increase its interactions with the protest movement and the Yemeni's living outside the city limits of Sana'a. Finally, there needs to be not only transparency attached to development aid, but accountability. In closing, Mothana argued that drone strikes are

counterproductive. "If you kill leaders in al-Qaeda, you build another who is actually local and motivated based on a local grievance," Mothana said.

Laura Kasinof said the idea of a national dialogue actually isn't new, and has been tried before, with no success. She echoed Mothana's sentiments that U.S. policy in Yemen "is very Sana'a centric," even though the Yemeni population is mostly in the rural areas. Although anti-American sentiments are not to the level it is in Pakistan, it grew substantially after the U.S. Embassy in Sana'a declined to visit the protesters in Change Square. There is also a common belief among Yemenis that "the U.S. turned our revolution into a political crisis." Many in Yemen also feel if the U.S. had asked Saleh to step down, he would have. In the U.S. community, however, the fear was that General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, "a character whom the U.S. does not want to have a lot of control in Yemen," would gain control in the power vacuum that would occur after Saleh left, Kasinof said. However, it's important to remember "how highly dysfunctional the government is," Kasinof said. "The cabinet is amazingly dysfunctional," thus building "the capacity of the Yemeni government," is extremely important at this point," Kasinof said. The main potential spoiler for the national dialogue would be if violence broke out again between the Houthi movement and the Islah party.

During the Q&A section, Alwazir addressed a question on government outreach of the national dialogue. While there was supposed to be an organization that went through Yemen discuss the dialogue with average citizens, "there is a lot of room for that outreach to continue," Alwazir said. She also urged President Hadi to issue decrees based on the recommendations his government received on how to encourage dialogue and aid the transitional process. Mothana answered a question on President Hadi's view of the U.S., saying there is a feeling among government that the U.S. has the approach "either you're with us or against us," thus during this transitional period, the government is unlikely to criticize the U.S. or its involvement in Yemen. Mothana also reminded the audience that U.S. involvement in the form of drone strikes has had a negative effect. "People will appreciate a bandage if you give it to them, but they won't appreciate it if you stab them and then give them a bandage," Mothana said. McInerney said many in Yemen view themselves as being the next Egypt or Tunisia, in the sense of revolution; however the U.S. views the situation as possibly the next Iraq or Afghanistan. Kasinof agreed, saying many in the international community believe the U.S. is only involved in Yemen for counterterrorism purposes.

Alwazir tackled a question on reconciliation, and where Yemen can "have peace without justice," mentioning President Hadi issued a decree investigating violence against the protestors, but has given immunity to members of the past regime. Turning to a guest on south Yemen, Mothana said the best way to tackle the secessionist movement in the south is to engage them in the national dialogue. Turning back to the U.S. Alwazir suggested the U.S. should withhold aid to Yemen until a government is in place, thus ensuring aid reaches those who need it and not corrupt officials. Mothana reiterated the U.S. needs to work on its PR campaign in Yemen, perhaps by tapping into the immigrant population of Yemenis in the U.S.