

Revolution in the Middle East: Democracy and the Digital Domain

A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION FEATURING:

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MS. KAREN HOUSE: Good morning. Happy to see all of you. I'm Karen Elliot House. I'm on the board here and spent many years in Washington as a diplomatic correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* and then became a bureaucrat for the *Wall Street Journal* in charge with some business bottom line responsibilities and retired as publisher of the journal in 2006 and I'm now writing a book about Saudi Arabia. So I'm looking forward to hearing the panelists.

I'm going to make some brief introductions of the speakers and of the topic and then lay the foundation on moderating some discussion and then go to you because I know from sitting in audiences that you come to events like this to have the opportunity to ask questions of people like these and there's nothing worse than a moderator who doesn't know when to share and shut up.

I'm going to start by just mentioning the Internet Freedom study that Nate mentioned because it does give a really good discussion of the issue of technology and the double-edged sword that it is and hopefully we'll hear some more about that because one of the authors is on our panel. We have four truly I think genuine experts here this morning in different areas.

On my immediate right, Colin Kahl, who's the deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East and prior to that was a fellow here at the center and a teacher at Georgetown, although he tells me now he has only one job at the Pentagon. He can't have a side job the way he did here. He is an expert on counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, the causes and consequences of violent civil and ethnic conflict, so well positioned to talk about the topic here, the Middle East.

On my left is Dr. Shadi Hamid who is – just flew in last night from Doha. He works for Brookings there. He is an expert on Islamism political parties and democratic reform in the Middle East which he was studying long before the Arab Spring.

On my far right is Richard Fontaine who, as I mentioned, is an author of the Internet Freedom study and has experience on the Hill, five years as the foreign policy adviser for Senator McCain, experience at the NSC where he was the associate director for near Eastern affairs and at state where he worked on South Asia.

On my far left – I don't know about politically but situationally Andrew Exum who has served in the U.S. Army in both Afghanistan and Iraq, was an adviser to General Stanley McChrystal and is the author of *This Man's Army: A Soldier's Story from the Frontlines of the War on Terror*. And has a degree in Middle Eastern studies from the American University in Beirut and has been all over the region and specifically in Egypt after the revolution.

I think all of us have watched the administration be somewhat conflicted about how to respond to events in the Middle East this spring where to support stability of autocratic regimes and where to support democracy for which America stands. I suspect some of us have also been conflicted precisely because not all Middle Eastern regimes, while authoritarian, are the same. There are gradations of authoritarianism and there are clearly gradations of strategic importance of these countries to the U.S. So where do we draw which lines is one of the things I hope we can draw people out on. Libya's obviously a terribly repressive regime and I would argue is not strategically very important to the U.S. Syria is in my view an equally nasty regime but is far more inimical to U.S. interests if only because it serves as an Iranian proxy in the region. So why do we fight Libya and largely ignore Syria?

Egypt had a relatively repressing ruler and was relatively important to us but after some hesitation we helped the Egyptians – (inaudible) – Mubarak. And Saudi Arabia, which has an authoritarian but I would say paternalistically smothering regime is by far the most important country in the region to the U.S. and our president couldn't even bring himself to utter its name in his latest Middle East speech which I found quite interesting. The *Wall Street Journal*, for which I no longer have any responsibility, has laid out or advocated that the strategy in the Middle East ought to be protect – support our friends and be for regime change with our enemies.

So I'm also interested if we can even agree on who are friends and enemies are. And I won't go on about Iran and Pakistan which are probably in many ways more important to us than anybody in the Middle East except Saudi Arabia. So with that backdrop, I'm going to start with you, Colin, to get you to lay out what are the principles that the administration uses? We once had Ariel Shalom visit us at the *Journal* and he said that you ought to have – your principals and policies ought to be so clear that in essence you're like a woman with a recipe box with Iran. You just go in there and take out the card and that tells you what to do. I'd like to know what the principles are on the recipe cards in the Pentagon box.

MR. COLIN KAHL: It sounds like the Joint Staff wanting to have that plan on the shelf when the president asks for it. I should say after Nate Fick destroyed my credibility by saying I was going to play music at the CNAS event in January that my day job – I run the Middle East Office at the Pentagon. And the Middle East is defined a little bit differently across the government. And in the Pentagon, my office covers the region from Egypt up through Israel and the Levant to Iraq, Iran, down the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula to Yemen. So I don't deal with Libya so I'm not going to talk about that. I don't deal with Afghanistan and Pakistan. I just have those easy countries in between. So I'll focus on that.

You know, it's been said about revolution that prospectively they look impossible and retrospectively they look inevitable. And I think that that's never been truer than in the Middle East.

I know this panel is very much about the Internet. I'm not going to talk about the Internet. But one thing I will say is that I don't think the Internet caused any of this. I think what the Internet did was facilitate collective action in response to a set of underlying structural tensions in this part of the world, political, economic in terms of legitimacy deficits, the relation between this part of the world and other parts of the world that have been around for decades and have now been unleashed.

You know, Secretary Gates is still my boss another 30 days or so has likened what we're seeing to the shifting of tectonic plates that had been frozen in place for six decades and unleashing a political earthquake and a tsunami of change across the region. I think we don't know where it's going to go. I think we all need to be humble about that.

So let me just say a couple of words about the fact that as we go into this, we don't go into it as – (inaudible) – world realist, nor pie in the sky idealist, that we see a set of challenges in the region and a set of opportunities in the region that emerged from the Arab awakening or the Arab Spring, whatever you want to call it. And I would say that we tend to think of these in terms of four bins or baskets of challenges and opportunities.

One relates to how all this will affect our relationship and cooperation with so many countries in this part of the world to include our partners. I think that if you look at countries that are democratizing and governments that are going to be more responsive to political will – and that's true of new democracies in places like Egypt and Tunisia but it's also true of governments that survive this democratic unrest. They will also have to be more responsive to the street. I think there are some possibilities that this will complicate our cooperation with some of these countries. We very much have had cooperation with specific governments and sometimes specific leaders and new actors will bring new uncertainties in our relationship.

At the same time, I think that one of the opportunities that this chain of events represents is the ability to deepen and build a more lasting and enduring relationship with countries that are more closely aligned with our values where our relationships are not determined simply by a set of key ties with a handful of leaders but are deeper and across the region. So in the near term, it's going to create some tension, frankly, in some places but in the long term I think it's ultimately in the U.S. interest.

A second basket is kind of the al Qaeda basket or the violent extremism basket. On the one hand, unrest in some countries like we're seeing today in Yemen will provide opportunities for violent extremists to potentially expand their area of operation in ungoverned spaces. We're seeing al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula hold more terrain in Yemen today than they did six months ago largely as a consequence of the unrest.

But I think the more fundamental opportunity that the Arab Spring poses at least the way that we see it is to fundamentally destroy al Qaeda's narrative about the pathway for change in this part of the world. Thomas Friedman pointed to the delicious irony of the fact that Osama bin Laden spent his last days watching the Egyptian people do what he and Ayman al-Zawahiri, who of course was Egyptian, could never accomplish and that was topple the Mubarak government, a pathway of peaceful unrest and peaceful political change in advance of universal values as opposed to values that are 1,000 years old and aren't widely subscribed to by most people on earth is a huge rebuke to al Qaeda. And I think in combination with bin Laden's death is a sign that they are very much on the decline.

The third basket is Iran. You know, we've been very clear from the onset that Iran didn't cause any of this. Secretary Gates has said, no country in the history of the world, not us, not the Iranians, nobody has had the ability to create this much change in such a short period of time. We didn't start this. The Iranians didn't start this. But it's also clear the Iranians are hoping to capitalize on this unrest. Now, the supreme leader shortly after the unrest started in Egypt tried to say that this was all inspired by Iran's Islamic Revolution. Well, revolutions are a repudiation of that notion as well and these weren't inspired by Iran's ideology. These folks aren't on the streets pushing for an Iranian style theocracy.

So I think ultimately, while there may be some avenues for Iran to exploit in the short term and we have to be – we have to recognize that, in the long term this is not going to work to Iran's advantage for a couple of reasons.

One, these countries in this part of the world, if you allow people to get dignity in Arab countries through Arab governments that are seen as legitimate, Iran's ability to exploit grievances, anxieties and the aspirations for greater dignity on the Arab Street will be marginalized overtime. You're also going to see the standup I think of rival democratic states like Egypt and perhaps the new Iraq which will ultimately I think be counterweights of some sort against Iranian influence. And then, lastly, there's just the fundamental hypocrisy of the fact that Iran is claiming to stand up for protest movements everywhere around the region except of course inside Iran or in its allied Syria where brutal repression has denied the very freedoms that we saw expressed in Tahrir Square or in Tunis.

And then the last basket is the Middle East peace process. I think on the one hand this has created a lot of anxiety in Israel for understandable reasons. Egypt is a pillar of – to the degree that there is an Arab-Israeli peace, the two pillars are Egypt and Jordan, and in both places, from an Israeli perspective, those are now shakier because of the Arab unrest.

On the other hand, there are opportunities for that peace to deepen and, again, become a peace between people as opposed to a peace between leaders. And on the Palestinian question, President

Obama has encouraged the Israelis to get out of in front of the populist wave that's sweeping the region. The Arab Spring is not about Israel but as elections start to take place in Egypt and other places, Israel will be an issue and it's in Israel's interest to take arguments away from extremists who would seek to use Israel's relationships with the Palestinians against Israeli interests.

So it's a very complex mosaic. We've basically tackled it in two ways. One is to articulate a common set of principles and we've emphasized three: one, we oppose violence in all circumstances – governments should not repress their people and doing so will only invite more opposition; protests – protesters also have an obligation, by the way, to not engage in violence. So that's the first principle.

Second, we support universal rights in every country without exception. As the president said in Cairo in 2009 and again 10 days ago, those rights include freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, the freedom to peacefully protest and the right to have access to information.

Third, we support political and economic reform that is responsive to the people in the region and it's our belief that the status quo, whether you liked it or didn't is gone. The status quo anti is not – we're not going to return there. The status quo wasn't sustainable and ultimately it wasn't stable and that there's a real opportunity now to align our principles and our values. That's the general – that's the top line message and we have been consistent about that throughout this crisis.

But we've had to adapt our policy and the specifics of that policy to the specific conditions in every country. It's not hypocrisy. It's not a tension. It's not choosing values over interests. It's navigating a pragmatic way forward in each of these places cognizant of the fact that we do have different interests in different places; we do have different influence in different places. So in countries like Egypt and Tunisia we've been very forward leaning in supporting democracy. We're also standing up and helping to consolidate the democracy in Iraq and look forward to a long-term partnership within. In countries like Jordan we're encouraging –

MS. HOUSE: Let me just ask you on Iraq for a second. Do you think Iraq had any impact on the – I want to ask you the causes, what made this happen. Do you think Iraq did have any impact?

MR. KAHL: You know, I don't know because the distance was so great. And the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003 – the good news was it got rid of a dictator. The bad news got was it unleashed a set of instabilities that left thousands and thousands of Iraqis displaced and dead and sent a message to the region in some respects that democratization is accompanied by sectarian and religious warfare and insurgency.

I think the stories are going to have to sort out the Iraq effect and it's too soon to tell. But without re-litigating the past, I would say moving forward it's our administration's belief that you do need to consolidate democracy in Iraq and you do need to consolidate the long-term strategic partnership between the United States and Iraq for all the reasons that were true six months ago but are even more true in the context of the Arab Spring.

Let me say just a few words then I'll shut up and let others talk about some other places. In Yemen, I think we have vital interests in combating al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and a vital interest in that country not becoming a completely failed state or descending into civil war. At the same time, we've been very forward leaning in encouraging President Saleh to live up to his commitments to step aside and we're working with the GCC states to try to make that happen.

Throughout the Gulf we've been reassuring to our partners in this part of the world that all the reasons why we cooperated with you before, that's the underpinning of our strategic partnership, our interest in counterterrorism, in countering proliferation, in countering long-time hegemonic ambitions in maritime security, in ballistic missile defense – all of these areas, all those arguments for cooperation are the same today as they were six months ago. But we have also articulated to our partners in the Gulf that we have a common interest in stability and that stability in the new environment requires evolutionary progress towards political and economic reform and that has been our message in all the countries in the Gulf and most particularly that's been our message with Bahrain, which is now starting to move back in a positive direction, I hope, but it's a problem we're going to have to – a challenge we're going to have to continue to navigate.

And then lastly, on Syria, the president, again, was very clear 10 days ago when he said that President Assad in Syria faces a fundamental choice. He can either lead or leave. If he doesn't lead a transition, which frankly doesn't look all that likely at the moment – you know, yesterday he announced amnesty and then his forces started shelling more villages. If he doesn't stop the human rights abuses, if he doesn't stop the detentions, the arrests, if he doesn't allow investigators to come in, if he doesn't engage in genuine reform, then the alternative is clear. He's going to face more pressure, more isolation, and more demands.

So you know, we have this general set of principles and then we've tried to navigate our way through each of these specific circumstances. And I only really hit the wave tops on these. And I'd be happy to talk about any of these in whatever depth you would like. Thanks.

MS. HOUSE: Can I just ask you quickly what do you think as someone who's been studying this region and looking at democratic impulses, what do you think caused this tectonic shifting of the plates? What are the causes or do they differ? Is there any common cause?

MR. SHADI HAMID: I think there's a narrative that this Arab Spring was surprising but it actually wasn't. I mean, we've been – even Condi Rice in '04, '05 would say things like the status quo was untenable and she would keep on repeating that. And that's a line that we heard from Middle East analysts for quite some time now. And I think we have to just acknowledge the very basic fact autocracies don't last forever. And I think there was a sense in Washington that these regimes were durable. They were going to last somehow, that they were somehow immune from the broader historical sweep that we saw in other regions of the world. So I mean, the factors were all there.

What I think had to happen was the spark. And Tunisia provided that initial spark but all the other basic factors were there – high levels of unemployment and underemployment, the fact that people were living under these dictatorships for nearly 50 years. I mean this has been going on for such a long time now. And also anger – I think this is important because it's not just about domestic policy. Arabs were also angry that their autocratic leaders were too pro-U.S. or pro-Israel and weren't reflecting their own preferences on foreign policy. So you put that all together and it was really just a matter of time.

MS. HOUSE: Richard, maybe you can talk a bit about your own views from having done this report on what role did technology and social media play.

MR. RICHARD FONTAINE: Well, first of all, Colin is right and others have made this point too. It's not that new technologies or the Internet caused revolution. The people cause a revolution and the causes why they wanted to have a revolution are some of the ones that Shadi just talked about. But, it seems to me that these tools really did matter and they mattered in a way that's been different than what we've seen in the past with other forms of communications, technologies. And they've mattered in a couple of different ways.

So first, one of the things that's been striking about this series of political revolutions has been the speed with which a demonstration effect is happening in one country and people throughout the Middle East have been able to see images and get information about what's happening in countries whereas previously they would have been much more limited in doing. So there's been an educational or informational process, an awareness process and potentially a politicizing effect.

There's also been a growing sentiment among people in countries that their view, which may have been in opposition to the regime was not the only one, that they had a shared sense of opposition. The technologies have been used quite obviously to organize protests on Face Book and things like that. And then there's been an interaction with satellite TV.

So in a place like Yemen, where few people have Internet but a lot of people watch satellite TV, a lot of the images that have been in al Jazeera have actually been YouTube video, so there's been this

kind of interaction there. But the other thing that I would point out is that describes the kind of democratic protester side of the equation and there's the regime side of the equation too which is very carefully been trying to use these tools to do just the opposite, which is to crack down on protesters. So Face Book organized protests in Tunisia, well, the Tunisian government cracked all the Face Book accounts in the entire country. In Egypt infamously the regime pulled the plug on the Internet but that was after it had been using it to monitor people.

And in Syria, in what was billed as a concession to the protesters, Face Book, which had been banned for two years, they allowed to go back online. And there were a lot of suspicions that this could have been the best thing that the regime could have invited because a lot of people who don't know how to use Face Book in a secure fashion would go online and then the regime would have access to them and all of their friends and everything that they're talking about and make it that much easier to crack down.

So it's very much a contested space but those I think are some of the initial ways that we can see how this had an overall effect on the political change.

MS. HOUSE: Colin sketched out what I thought was a – I hope you're right – but a quite optimistic scenario that subsequently will be better off in the Middle East because will have more solid friendship foundation and not just with some dictator or some king. I'd like to ask you, Andrew, despite what Nate said about forecasting, to look ahead because it seems to me it depends on how this turns out, whether the – and clearly you're right that al Qaeda is currently delegitimized but if people don't wind up with more dignity, which is the key word I think, and a better economic situation, then I think they'll be in search of something else.

MR. ANDREW EXUM: Yes. Let me just start off by maybe reinforcing some of the things that my fellow panelists have talked about. I think I agree with Colin, not just because I hesitate to disagree with a former college debate champion but I agree with Colin vis-à-vis al Qaeda. I think al Qaeda has been weakened. And I think that this – the Arab Spring really was in a lot of ways the demise of al Qaeda.

And Richard talks about something I think is also very important which is that if you're going to talk about technology in the Middle East, which Richard does so in a very good and nuanced way in his new report, you have to really look at it as part and parcel of a broader Arab public sphere that's been developing over the past 20 years.

And Marc Lynch was with us for breakfast. He's now on his way to Egypt, but nobody's been better at describing the new Arab public sphere than Marc Lynch, Abu Aardvark himself. And really you look at the ways in which not just satellite television but also satellite newspapers and then later the

Internet has created a unified public sphere within the Arabic speaking world. That is very much true.

On the other hand, the individual conditions in each country differ greatly. Lisa Anderson is now the president of the American University of Cairo, had a good article in the latest Foreign Affairs talking about the very fundamental differences between the challenges that a state like Libya will face and a state like Egypt.

I mean, I'm talking about Egypt and Tunisia – we spend justifiably a lot of time worrying about the direction in which Egypt will go, but Egypt at least has state institutions. Libya doesn't even have that. Not only were they – did they inherit – apologies to the Italians. My wife is Italian. I love Italy but they did a horrible job of building up institutions during the colonial era in Libya and then – they were then followed by a man, Muammar Gaddafi, who has no interest in building up state institutions. So when you look at the individual challenges that a lot of these states are going to face, Egypt, which should worry us tremendously because it has 83 million people, because it's pivotal in the Arab speaking world – Egypt's actually the easy case. They were talking about security sector reform. We're talking about the reform of political institutions. We're talking about making political institutions responsive to the public. That's all good. That's all happy. But in places like Libya, the situation could be much more dire going forward. So I actually worry a lot more about Libya than I think the administration does, unfortunately.

MR. HAMID: Can I add a more pessimistic note?

MS. HOUSE: Please. And then we'll take your questions.

MR. HAMID: I think even the phrase Arab Spring is by now a bit of misnomer because what does spring suggest? Flowers, blossoming, forward momentum, and that is certainly not what we're seeing right now. I mean, I was in Tahrir Square on February 11th when Mubarak stepped down. And it was one of the most beautiful things I've seen and it was remarkable to be there at that time. And I think, unfortunately, though some of that euphoria was premature. And just in a couple of months we've seen what's happened. There was a hope that leaders would use less force, but in fact they're using more force.

And, you know, we're talking about will Syria lead the transition? We're beyond that. Syria has killed more than 1,000 of its own citizens. I mean, that's a just level that is just really remarkable. And you add that to Libya, Bahrain – which is a close ally of ours – and they're essentially waging war against their own people. So all of this suggests that the Arab Spring is going in a very troubling direction. And I think this is where the U.S. role becomes more important because it hasn't spread

throughout the region. We're talking about two countries where there's been revolutions out of 20. That's a pretty low percentage.

So I think going forward, the Obama administration's rhetoric is great. The U.S. is on the side of freedom and democracy. But, in practice, that is not what's happening. And if you look at the perspective from the Arab world, they see our role as Americans very differently than we see it. And they see us as being on the wrong side of history. And we have been behind – and even from my standpoint we've been behind the curve in nearly every single Arab country. We only support revolutions after they happen, not before they happen, and that's really the true test. I mean, even Tunisia – Obama came out with some great words supporting their aspirations only after President Ben Ali had already left the country and was a plane. That's not going to cut it.

MR. EXUM: Can I –

MS. HOUSE: I want to make – I want to mention the unmentionably country of Saud Arabia, because as you say about Libya, there are no institutions.

MR. EXUM: Well, yes. There's a bigger Saudi Arabia problem. I mean, the president made a very good speech and he talked about women's rights and he talked about freedom of worship and he didn't mention the word "Saudi" or "Arabia" anywhere in that speech when, of course, when you think about women's rights, the right to worship, the right of minorities, Saudi Arabia is the country that looms large.

And the one thing – I'm going to disobey my rule, I am going to pick a fight with Colin a little bit – we have been hypocritical to a degree, especially with respect to Bahrain. And it's not just us but we talk about the democratizing influence of Al Jazeera. Jazeera – Arabic at least – did a great job in Egypt. They were largely pretty quiet. Their coverage was pretty crappy on Bahrain. And then, in addition, we were pretty supportive of the democracy movement in Egypt. But when Saudi Arabia invaded another country along with other GCC nations, we were pretty quiet about that. I think there were some good reasons for doing so in terms of U.S. interests perhaps but it's quite laughable to talk about Iranian intervention in Bahrain when you have the GCC nations occupying it militarily.

MS. HOUSE: They're trying to draw the protective corral around monarchies.

MR. EXUM: Yes.

MS. HOUSE: You say these things happen in nasty authoritarian dictatorship but we're different.

MR. EXUM: Now the GCC includes Morocco and Jordan which –

MS. HOUSE: They're adding to the club of kings, right?

MR. EXUM: – aren't in the Gulf but do have one thing in common. Right.

MS. HOUSE: We should take questions from some of the club of kings and queens here. Who wants to ask a question? I see people standing but I don't – are you – all right then. I'm going to ask.

MR. EXUM: We've got a Twitter question.

MS. HOUSE: Oh.

MR. EXUM: I wanted to live Twit this for myself instead of with the microphone. I couldn't do it with the –

MS. HOUSE: I'm going to add on to this Twitter question, which is how can social network activity provide post-revolution guidance to emergent democracies? I'd like to broaden that to what can the U.S. do to shape events? You say it's already going in the wrong direction. How much authority and influence do we have in – and I realize it varies from country to country, and should we use it or if we attempt to encourage Bahrain are we only going to screw it up?

MR. FONTAINE: As Shadi and Andrew were saying before, U.S. policy in the Middle East has been and will continue to be attacked as inconsistent because we say that we support democracy and human rights everywhere, we apply that inconsistently. Some leaders we say must go on the basis of that principle. Others we say nothing about. That is true. And it's also going to be a fact of life. I mean, no superpower is going to apply dogmatically a foreign policy that is rooted only in the promotion of democracy and human rights in the region that it finds vital security and economic interest.

So the question is how you balance the security and economic interest with your promotion of democracy and your standing for the human rights. And the opportunity I think in the Arab Spring, summer, fall, year, whatever it may be is that we can actually align our interests and our values better than they've been aligned in the past.

That certainly won't be true for every country because there's no change happening in some countries but in a country like Egypt, for example, in 2003, in 2004 when the Bush administration was pressing the case for reform, Egyptians would come and say, well, you can either have us

continue to close off Gaza and participate in the Middle East peace process and work with you on counterterrorism cooperation or you can really give us a hard time on our reform. Pick which one you want.

If there's a democratic government there that we are actively supporting through the kinds of things that some of which the administration's talked about, debt relief, if there's a trade framework that would loop in that hopefully the Europeans had become a part of, that would have some economic incentives for these kind of countries. And if we're moving in the same direction to support the democracies that are also our partners on these interests, then that would be the best possible outcome.

MS. HOUSE: Is Egypt moving in the right direction? I mean, you're the Islamist Party expert here. How much should one worry about the –

MR. HAMID: Right. Well, I mean, I think in a lot of the Western coverage there was a sense that these were secular revolutions. That's not true. They were only secular insofar as people weren't explicitly raising Islamist slogans. The Muslim Brotherhood ordered its members in Tahrir Square to not say anything remotely Islamist. Don't raise *Korans*, don't do any of that, because they knew that that might provoke the West and also the regime.

And now, if we're looking two or three months into the post-revolutionary era, there's no doubt about it. The Muslim Brotherhood is the single most powerful political force in Egypt. And, you know, I was just in Egypt two weeks ago and I met with the top three leaders of the brotherhood's new political party – they're pretty confident – they're pretty confident about their chances.

That said, they're not trying to win a majority because, again, they're worried that might worry people too much but they could win a plurality of the vote. I think we shouldn't be as worried about the brotherhood. The brotherhood after all is a non-violent organization that has long been part of the political process in Egypt overseeing now is far right Islamist parties emerging really almost out of nowhere. And you have not one Salafi group but three Salafi groups that are trying to form political parties. So they're going to enter the electoral ring and so you add the Muslim Brotherhood, three Salafi parties, there's also one or two progressive Islamist parties. Altogether, they could win 50 percent of the seats in parliament.

Again, I think a lot of the alarmism that we have in Washington is unfounded because, again, they're not as radical as we sometimes think they are. And, in some ways they reflect Egyptian popular sentiment. This is a conservative religious society and we've seen a number of polls the last couple of months where anywhere between 60 to 90 percent of Egyptians believe that Islamic law should be the main source of legislation or the only source of legislation. Let's be honest about this. There's

no constituency for what we call secularism in a place like Egypt today. And even the word “secularist” in Arabic, no one would actually call themselves that publicly.

So I think we have to be realistic about where Egypt is going but I think that’s why we have to engage with groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. It’s very troubling to me that we don’t have any channels of dialogue with them. We’ve been afraid to even talk to them. So now they might become the most powerful force in the new parliament and we don’t know who to talk to. That’s troubling.

MS. HOUSE: The gentleman in the back over here. They’re bringing you a microphone. Could you state your name and affiliation?

Q: Peter Wilson, RAND. A follow up to this question – it seems to me that the (numbers ?) you already alluded to, the realities of the evolution of this revolution in Egypt that we’re going to inevitably now go through a very tough time vis-à-vis Egypt and its evolution vis-à-vis Israel. There’s reports in today’s *Financial Times* that the natural gas pipeline has been repaired and for, again, internal political reasons there’s not been a resumption of sale of gas to Israel. The opening of the Gaza Strip has – (inaudible). And then obviously one of the interest questions is to what degree the subject of the peace process, to the degree that it exists, becomes an important feature of the political dialogue and debate inside Egypt.

MS. HOUSE: Colin?

MR. KAHL: Yes. I mean, I think we don’t know what Egypt’s foreign policy orientation overall is going to be. I will tell you that we’re doing a number of things to try to maintain a good relationship with all – across the political spectrum in Egypt and also facilitate the transition. There’s the economic package that President Obama announced. There’s the efforts to work with the international community to bring even more economic resources to bear because, frankly, whoever wins the next parliamentary election and presidential election is going to face a set of monumental challenges economically and it will be very difficult to live up to the expectations and aspirations of the people who protested on the streets during the fall of Mubarak.

We’re also working on our democracy assistance program to try to help nascent political actors who aren’t as well mobilized, learn how to run campaigns and do political platforms and compete. And that will be a gradual process. And the last thing we’re trying to do in Egypt is maintain a good relationship with the Egyptian military which I think has the possibility of being kind of guarding for democracy. I think what’s interesting about the role that the military played in the transition is that they really played a role as a buffer between the regime and the people and established a lot of credibility with the Egyptian people. And I think that the Egyptian military can continue to play a positive role moving forward. And this speaks actually directly to your question about Israel.

Look, Egypt and Israel in many respects have had a cold peace, not a warm peace. There's not a lot of love between the Egyptian military and the Israeli military, for example. But the Egyptian military does have a fundamental interest in maintaining the peace with Israel. They have no interest in having that border becoming active. They have no interest in having a war with Israel and they have at least a billion reasons every year to maintain a positive relationship with Israel and that, of course, is the security assistance that we provide them which is conditioned upon that maintain the peace agreement with Israel.

So I think the military in Egypt is an important counterweight to some of these tendencies. But certainly you're seeing what the reconciliation agreement between Fattah and Hamas with the reopening of Rafa. But you are going to see an Egypt polity which will have to be more responsive to the fact that the vast majority of people in Egypt have difficulties with the relationship with Israel.

And I actually see the reconciliation in the Rafa Crossings as throwing a bone to the street on some issues as it relates to Israel while the more fundamental strategic question of the peace agreement is maintained at the highest levels of government. And I will tell you that in our interactions with the Egyptian officials – and I've sat with Secretary Gates and Field Marshal Tantawi on more than one occasion to include since the revolution happened – that I think the elite that's likely to remain very important in the new Egypt will remain committed to the peace agreement. But I think there will be more tensions with Israel than there were before.

MS. HOUSE: Do you wanted to add –

MR. EXUM: Colin was talking a lot of sense there. I mean, on the one hand, success in Egypt looks like institutions and politicians that were responsive to the will of the people. And it's not just the extremist groups that are going to be using the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians to curry favor and it will have to. The people of Egypt are genuine – have a genuine support for the Palestinian people and for Palestinian statehood, for Palestinian dignity.

That's not anything that's ginned up by outside forces. That's genuine and it's from the people. On the other hand, Colin's exactly right that the institution that is the Egyptian military is fundamentally conservative and it will resist I think any big swings in Egyptian foreign policy going forward.

MS. HOUSE: The gentleman here in the front. Here she comes. There.

Q: My name is Chris Taylor with Mission Essential Personnel. I wonder if we could just through the digital age perspective talk about what these things mean from a U.S. public diplomacy strategic

perspective? Should we only be relying on the viral spread of things for the digital age to help us virally spread and facilitate changes or do we need to return to a U.S. information agency – how do we better strategically and tactically use what we’ve got in front of us? And comment from anyone.

MS. HOUSE: Richard.

MR. FONTAINE: I think part of this goes back to the big attempt here is to try to change the narrative, and the president’s done that through his speeches, the narrative of al Qaeda on the one hand, democratic aspirations and where the United States comes down on this. We’re not just in the business of stopping terrorism but actually should be on the side of people who are pursuing their legitimate democratic aspirations.

The form and the way that that happens I think should be – as much as we can throw at that in the sense that the State Department now, for example, has a Farsi language spokesman, and Farsi Twitter feeds, and so forth. That’s good. The Broadcasting Board of Governors is doing more. There’s – on the Internet freedom side, the U.S. government now is spending \$30 million a year on not public diplomacy but making different platforms available and training people so they can communicate amongst themselves.

The idea of reconstituting USIA has been percolating since about a day after USIA folded and – I mean, having seen over the past few years various government agencies be formed anew, I’m not sure the track record is all that great. Without offending anyone here who works for one of those agencies. So I’d be a little hesitant to bureaucratically reform USIA, but I think when it comes to all forms of social media and speeches and everything that we can push out as much of this we can.

Part of this also is devolving the ability to do this to people in the countries themselves, ambassadors and embassy staff. And the State Department has sort of the opposite model of a military in that sense where State Department, everything has to be cleared back in Washington before you can say it in Cairo, whereas military guys are running around all over the place saying things. (Laughter.)

So there’s – I think the State Department is ultimately going to have to be more nimble and move more toward the military’s model in that sense.

MS. HOUSE: I think we shouldn’t underestimate just how much impact the plain old exchange of information available on the Internet does have on young people, even in Saudi Arabia where they now have – when I started going there, there was the newspaper to read and the king was at the top and then the crown prince and then on down. No matter what happened, the hierarchy was there. Now, people get somewhat more honest information and they don’t have the same respect or fear of their leaders anymore. Over here.

Q: (Off mike.) You probably figured the point or the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood – the Muslim Brotherhood has – (inaudible). What do you think we can do from a – (inaudible) – drive a wedge between Islamists and militant Islamist – (inaudible) – in part. You’ve got to separate the two internally. I mean, is there anything that we can do as the United States?

MR. HAMID: Well, this is something – this is becoming problematic because the brotherhood is exploring the possibility of forming coalition with Salafi groups, not because they have any ideological affinity. Salafis and Muslim brothers haven’t usually gotten along in Egypt but the brotherhood is a very pragmatic organization. So, if it is thinks that it can improve its electoral chances by allying itself with far right groups, that’s what it will do.

So I think it’s important to look at how can we kind of find ways to keep the brotherhood in a more kind of center right area of the political spectrum. From a U.S. perspective, we don’t have a lot of power over that but I do think starting real substantive dialogue with Muslim Brotherhood leaders as soon as possible is crucial. We have to reach out of them, have a better understanding of where they’re coming from, where their interests are. And that is going to help down the road. And it will also give us some degree of leverage with them.

They do care about what the U.S. thinks about them. They are sensitive to international opinion and that’s why they have been careful about how they’re perceived in terms of trying to win a majority in Egypt today. So I think there is some opportunity there.

If we’re talking about the brotherhood versus al Qaeda, thankfully, that wedge is still very much there. I mean, al Qaeda and the brotherhood pretty much hate each other and I don’t really see that changing anytime soon. So that’s something good. And that’s why in some respects the brotherhood serves as a counterweight to some of those more extremist groups because if someone joins the Muslim Brotherhood, we might not like their ideology but at least they’re not going to be using violence.

MR. EXUM: Can I actually ask a follow-up question to that? Within the brotherhood – I mean, it’s not a unitary actor. We saw during the – even during the demonstrations, we saw a divide start to emerge between the younger activists and between kind of the old line. Can you talk a little bit about how we can engage different parts of the brotherhood or are there different factions within, especially in the youth that may be more amenable to outreach?

MR. HAMID: Right. The brotherhood is a –

MS. HOUSE: And can I tack onto that?

MR. HAMID: Yes, sure. Okay.

MS. HOUSE: If, as you predict, there's a kind of 50 percent Islamist across the spectrum government, will they fight amongst each other or will they run the country in a way we don't want it to go?

MR. HAMID: Right. Right. Well, the brotherhood is a massive organization and in some way it's just a giant bureaucracy of sorts. So there are different tendencies within the movement. And there is a division now between some of the Muslim brotherhood youth who are in Tahrir Square and who are cooperating very closely with their liberal and secular counterparts and they have a different kind of outlook, much more open, very much part of the social media atmosphere, and there's been some talk of defections from the brotherhood as some of these youth kind of have a different view of where their organization should go.

Those are the kind of people that – and they're ready to talk to Americans and talk to U.S. officials. And, again, we should be doing that and hearing what they have to say and seeing how not how we support what they're doing but the youth in general, how we find a way to support the role in a new Egypt because, right now, the youth were excellent at bringing down a regime. They're much less effective in the post-revolutionary era where they're a relatively weak force and they're having trouble organizing.

So on your question about the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists and whether they'll take – you know, what will they do in foreign policy and all of that, I think what I would like to see, and God knows if this will happen, is a kind of broad national unity government where you have the Muslim Brotherhood, liberal groups and leftists kind of coming together and finding ways to govern together.

The last thing – I don't think what Egypt needs right now is a fully Islamist government. And if you talk to Muslim Brotherhood leaders, they're aware that Egypt isn't ready for that, the U.S. isn't ready for that, and that's going to cause a lot of alarm on the international stage. So I think there is a realization on the brotherhood's part that that's not the way to go.

MS. HOUSE: We have a question from the – (inaudible) – since they can't be here to raise their hand, I'll ask on their behalf: could the panel discuss the rebel response to NATO air campaign in Libya, whether positive or negative? And also the issue of are other reform movements in the Arab world seeking military assistance cover or overt?

MR. KAHL: Yes. I kind of talked about –

MS. HOUSE: Tell us the cover one first.

MR. FONTAINE: Yes. Tell us the covert plans – (laughter) – in written format, signed in triplicate.

MS. HOUSE: As you did this –

MR. EXUM (?): Marine Corps University Press – (inaudible). (Laughter.)

MR. KAHL: I have my clearance in my pocket. I'll tear it up before I – I'm obviously not going to answer that latter. (Laughter.) And, frankly, I can't speak to the – I just won't speak to the Libya question because it's not in my portfolio. I think that we have seen outreach by a lot of groups across the region.

But the one point I would make is the overwhelming majority of the groups across the region that are protesting are doing so peacefully and they're not looking to us for a lot of material assistance. They're looking to us for political support, for symbolic support. We're doing our best to do that diplomatically.

But, I mean, I don't know how the Arab Spring or the Arab Awakening or whatever you want to call it, I don't know whether it's going to turn into a summer or into a fall or a winter. I don't know which way it's going to go. But the violence in the equations here have largely been initiated by the regimes in this equation, not the resistance in this equation which is one of the reasons why I think the violent resistance movements could be in trouble if this actually works out well because they've been violently resisting for decades and failing. And now we see some opportunity for peaceful resistance to actually work and that could be a pretty potent model.

MR. EXUM: Yes. I mean, I think just with respect to the rebels in Libya, and I haven't been on the ground and spent a lot of time with them but you read a lot of the accounts of some of the great journalists on the ground like Chris Chivers from the *New York Times*, Bryan Denton, his partner in crime over there. You see a tactical evolution that's taking place that's to be more or less expected from a non-state actor on the battlefield trying to learn.

I think one of the biggest deficiencies that the Libyan rebels have done has not been in terms of equipment or fancy weaponry but really in terms of just learning how to fight cohesively on the battlefield. We're starting to see an evolution. And it's interesting from the perspective of somebody who studies these things, but I hesitate to speak to extensively on that subject without being able to see more on the ground.

MS. HOUSE: Yes, ma'am.

Q: Yes. I had a question about –

MS. HOUSE: Can you identify yourself and use the mike?

Q: Can you hear me now? Remaskar Ani (ph) and I had a question about whether or not – I mean, people are talking a lot about a possible Palestinian autumn. And if we see sort of a Palestinian non-violent resistance, I'm wondering what is your advice as a panel to the U.S. as a response because, you know, there's one thing to be a conflicted response between Bahrain versus Syria versus Libya, but if there's conflicted response on a Palestinian non-violent resistance, then that could be very interesting for the region.

MS. HOUSE: Who wants to –

MR. EXUM: I'm not – (inaudible) – I don't want to answer this question but –

MR. HAMID: I don't want to either but I'll try. (Laughter.)

MR. FONTAINE (?): Like Hollander (sp).

MR. EXUM: Yes. Like Hollander.

MR. HAMID: The U.S. is going to be in a very difficult position come autumn. And the Palestinians will take their case to the U.N. to seek formal recognition of a state. And, you know, the rest of the world is going to be supporting them in that to different degrees and presumably we won't, as Obama I think said in his recent speech. And this fits into a broader question of if there is a full on non-violent movement that emerges in the Palestinian territories, how are we going to react?

And, at breakfast, Marc Lynch made a very interesting point about that. That is going to be one of – any good will that he was saying that we're going to bring on because of our response to the Arab Spring, we'll lose 100 percent of that if we're seen as siding with Israel against a non-violent Palestinian movement. I don't know how you square that circle. And I guess I'd be interested to hear what Colin thinks on this. (Laughter.)

MR. EXUM: Well, speaking for the administration. (Laughter.) –

MR. KAHL: I was just looking for like the prop. Does anybody have a third rail I can grab on to with my teeth?

MR. EXUM: What are your views on Social Security? (Laughter.)

MR. KAHL: Move it all in the defense budget.

MR. EXUM: Right. Yes. (Laughter.) That never gets cut.

MR. KAHL: Now, look, I think that what we see is in the fall you're going to see a very dicey time. I mean, I'm not sure that – I think the clock – there are kind of two clocks, a near-term clock and a long-term clock that I think are going to be problematic.

The near-term clock is that you are going to see a Palestinian drive I think for a declaration of statehood in the general assembly in the fall. I think the president has made crystal clear that we want a two-state outcome. We see that as something that should emerge from negotiations between the parties, not be imposed by the international community through the U.N. I don't know. There's obviously a debate about whether the president and leaning forward on stating some of the principles that we all knew has created a lot of political theater in Washington last week but there was a lot of banality in those statements actually too, shocking that the future of the two-states would be – the starting point will be '67 borders with adjustments. And that was what the entire soap opera of the last week was about, was about interpreting that line.

But I don't know whether that – you know, whether we'll have a lot of buy-in from the international community into our view which is that there should be a negotiated outcome that isn't imposed by the U.N. or how the Palestinians will fair. But I think it's going to create a challenge for the Israeli government.

The long-term challenge is the demographic one. And I think Jeffrey Goldberg has been very good about this. I mean, in 10 or 20 years, what if the Palestinians don't go to the U.N. and ask for their own state? What if the Palestinians go to the U.N. and ask to vote? What's the Israeli response to that? The Israeli response to that is no, and we're going to drift towards a state that would I think be viewed as undemocratic by a large number of folks around the world or, yes, in which case the Zionist dream of a democratic and Jewish Israel goes away. So that's a demographic reality – I mean, that's coming down. That's a freight train coming down the line. So even if you get past this fall, you're talking about a long-term challenge.

So it's for that reason that the president did lean forward in pushing both sides to get back to the negotiating table. All those outcomes are suboptimal.

And I'll just return to the point I made at the outset which is one of the great things about the Arab Spring is that it's not about us and it's not about Israel. But it will become at least in part about Israel once elections start happening in these places and it will be partly about Israel as some regimes try to divert attention towards Israel as we saw with the Nakba protests along the borders with Lebanon and Syria a few weeks ago, right? And I think Israel – Israel has an interest in getting out ahead of that by making some progress on the Palestinian front too. And I think that was the position the president had.

MR. HAMID: Colin, could I just push you on this “not about us” comment just for a second because this is what we've been hearing from senior Obama officials for a long time now. This is about them. It's not about us. I mean, we were supporting many of these regimes with billions of dollars for five decades. How is it not about us? There's almost a sense that we're pretending to be this innocent bystander. We're watching this and we're supporting the aspirations of the Arab people when we were never neutral in this. And, in fact, we were siding with the wrong side, at least from the perspective of Arab people. So I mean –

MS. HOUSE: And continue to from the perspective of the Arab people.

MR. HAMID: And continue to to this very day, to this very day.

MS. HOUSE: I mean, here's Bahrain on the table right now allegedly wanting to negotiate with their own people. Where are we going to be in that? Actively, quietly doing something, actively overtly doing something or just praying?

MR. EXUM: Do you want me to bail you out for a second?

MR. KAHL: No. I got it. I got this. (Laughter.) I think that when we say – or at least when I say it's not about us, I mean that the hundreds of thousands of people protesting in the streets aren't protesting about the relationship between the regime and the United States, right? They're not – in a way in which, for example, the insurgent violence in Iraq was in response to our presence in Iraq, right, as well as a set of sectarian divisions and other things.

But we were very much at the center of unrest and violence in Iraq in the aftermath of the fall of Saddam Hussein. We were not at the center in Tahrir Square. We were not in the center of Tunis. We're not at the center in Sana'a. We are not in the center in Manama or in Daraa or any of these other places. The revolutions or the unrest, the popular turmoil, the protests are driven by a popular response to a set of economic and political, structural challenges, inequalities, injustices, perceive

illegitimacies that have been around for decades and have now the – it's been a nonlinear shift in the environment, right? Once one happened, people said, oh, my gosh, this could happen.

And so that's what we mean when it's not about us. Clearly we're relevant to the equation. Our relationships to these regimes are relevant. We're just not the driving factor which is why I think we've tried to position ourselves and make clear what are set of principles and what our narrative is. And that's why the president spoke so eloquently about that 10 days ago, Bahrain.

I was with the secretary of defense in Manama on March 12th, two days before the Saudis and the Emirates crossed the causeway into Bahrain. And, of course, that trip was interpreted that we were there giving the green light to the Saudi forces moving in. Quite to the contrary. We were there to push the national dialogue forward and get the government in Bahrain to move forward on some steps on civil rights. And, in fact, 36 hours later, Ambassador Feldman, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs was going to come in to try to get the national dialogue started. In that intervening period, there was a very violent Sunday set of protests that provided the excuse or the rationale to check your language, for the forces to come in. And we saw what we saw.

Now, it's right that we weren't – during that initial period, right, we were relatively quiet but don't confuse being publicly quiet with what we were doing behind the scenes to push the Bahraini government, to push our GCC partners, to make the point that, yes, you have legitimate concerns about security, yes, you have legitimate concerns about law and order, yes, you have legitimate concerns about Iran exploiting the circumstances here, but there's ultimately no security solution here. There's only a political solution and you have to get back to that. We saw with the lifting of the state of emergency yesterday and some of the other steps with the crown prince and the king have talked about that maybe, maybe we're getting back on the right track.

But I will tell you, the president had some pretty strong words about Bahrain in the speech. So it's not that we've been quiet. It's just these are messy. These are hard. These are tough questions and we're trying to stick by our principles while executing them in a pragmatic way.

MS. HOUSE: On that note, we are going not have to close unfortunately, pragmatically. So please join me in thanking the panel. (Applause.) And I believe all of you have earned a coffee break. Is that right, Nate?

MR. FICK: That's right.

MS. HOUSE: Okay. And when do they need to return?

MR. FICK: Ten minutes.



MS. HOUSE: Ten minutes. Thank you very much.

(END)