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AMERICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC OPINION

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FEATURED SPEAKERS:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. AMR: Good afternoon. My name is Hady Amr. I'm the Director of the Brookings Doha Center, a project of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings.

We are very pleased to invite you to our first in-house policy lunch. We have been working hard over the past year to open our facility. We made a lot of progress, but we still have some more work to go. And we're pleased to have you all here. And I just—administratively—before I introduce our speaker, I'd like to ask you all please to silence your cell phones. And this is a non-smoking facility, so if you need to smoke, you can smoke outside.

And also say that this event will be on the record but we invite you to speak as freely and frankly as you can.

I want to introduce to you our speaker, Professor Shibley Telhami from the University of Maryland. You have his bio, so I won't go into it too much.

But Professor Telhami has an association

with Brookings that goes back about 15 years. He is a professor at the University of Maryland and a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

It gives me really great pleasure to introduce Shibley. He has been a mentor to me professionally, and recently personally on some things in my life.

And so he's going to speak today about Arab public opinion. He has been doing this poll since -- annually since almost 9/11, and even before 9/11, and he's been doing -- he's really been a leader, in fact, maybe the leader in the U.S. on public opinion in the Arab world.

And he is able to communicate and articulate the voice of the people of the Arab world in a way that has been very important and very influential in U.S. policy discussions. I only wish it could be more influential.

Because it's small, before Shibley starts speaking, I'd like to just ask if we could go around the table, beginning with the ambassadors, and to do a one -- two-thirds of a sentence introduction of your name, and where you work, and I don't want to take too

much time. If we can go around the table in a few minutes, I think it would be useful for Professor Telhami. So, please, Mr. Ambassador.

SPEAKER: Thank you. My name is Ambassador Abdul Aziz Dawoud. I'm the Ambassador of Egypt in Doha.

MR. AMR: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. And I apologize. There wasn't a microphone there, but if you could use the microphone also. If you push the green button.

SPEAKER: Okay. My name is Abdulelah Al Fukeiki. I'm the Ambassador of Iraq in Doha. Well, actually I come here (inaudible) from 1970 before Saddam Hussein fired me in 1975. And now I am back.

MR. AMR: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

SPEAKER: My name is Suleiman Joumaa of the Syrian Embassy. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Ahmad Helal. I'm interning with the Brookings Institute.

MR FORBES: My name is Patrick Forbes. I work for the Doha Debates, a television program, which is part of Qatar Foundation.

MR. TOWNS: I'm Peter Towns. I'm a reporter for the Gulf Times.

SPEAKER: My name is Norma Fares, I work for Lakom Al Qarar as production manager.

MR. KUMAR JHA: My name is Ajit Kumar Jha, and I'm the editor of Qatar Tribune. It's the youngest newspaper in town for the last two years, and I've been here for about two and half years in Qatar.

SPEAKER: My name is Bakri Soubra. I work for Al Fardan in the marketing and leasing department.

SPEAKER: My name Nader Oweini. I'm the marketing and leasing manager at Al Fardan.

MS. ARUDA: My name is Diana Soubra, and I am the budget manager for the Brookings Doha Center.

SPEAKER: Hi, I'm Hiba Zeino. I'm the person who sends you all the e-mails—Communications Coordinator for the Brookings Doha Center.

MR. HAJJI: I'm Khaled Hajji, Al Jazeera Research Center.

SPEAKER: Good afternoon everyone, I am Ruqayyah Mustafah, a native of the Sudan and professor at the University of Qatar and Harvard Human Rights Program. I am interested in human rights, political violence, and most recently the crisis in Darfur in the Sudan.

MS. MAJID: I'm Marwa Majid. I'm a lecturer and sociologist in communications at Qatar University and the University of Washington in Seattle.

MR. SHARIF: My name is Kais Sharif. I'm the assistant to the director here at the Brookings Doha Center, and I would like to thank you all for attending this wonderful presentation.

SPEAKER: This is Ayman Abboushi. I am a journalist in the political section of Al Raya newspaper. Thank you.

SPEAKER: My name is Indlieb Farazi and I work for Al Jazeera English as an interview producer.

MS. SMITH: My name is Millie Hyatt Smith, and I'm a communications consultant here in Doha.

MS. JACOB: Hi, my name is Janine Jacob, and I work for Qatar University in their International Affairs Program.

MR. FROMHERZ: Hi. My name is Allen Fromherz. I'm a Professor in the International Affairs Program at Qatar University.

SPEAKER: My name is Alastair Campbell and I am the director of RUSI Qatar.

MS. WILSON: I'm Emily Wilson, and I work at Georgetown University.

SPEAKER: Hi. I'm Alaa Abu Zaakouk and I work at Georgetown University.

SPEAKER: Good afternoon. My name is Ikram Yacoub and I'm the Ambassador of Malyasia here in Doha. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Yes, my name is Mohsin Mazuk. I'm the Secretary General of the Arab Democracy Foundation.

MR. AMR: Thank you. Professor Telhami, please begin, and one thing about Brookings' tradition in Washington, we eat while we talk, so I would like to—usually not at the same time, but why don't you all

please begin eating and have my staff please pick up your forks to encourage other people—please begin eating while Professor Telhami begins, and I'll begin eating just to encourage you.

MR. TELHAMI: well, it's really an honor to be here and to have this first in-house function in Doha. This is an institution that I have to place--this project particularly emerged—the U.S.-Muslim world dialogue, the form that we've had here (inaudible) from the beginning with Brookings, and it's nice to see Hady taking charge and the staff at the beginning of what we hope will be a very fruitful relationship in Qatar.

What I'd like to do is first tell you a little bit more about these public opinion surveys, so you have a sense of what they are, and then give you the most recent results from the 2008 public opinion survey.

First, this is not a survey that's political. This is entirely academic. No funding whatsoever from governments of any kind. It's all academic funding. And it was really intended not so much to measure public opinion after 9/11. It became

more important after 9/11 because people were focused on the issues, and particularly in the American context about public opinion. But the project itself was much more scholarly in intent.

I actually began thinking about it in the mid-‘90s as a -- essentially as a response to the Arab satellite television phenomenon.

We knew that there was a new media environment in the Arab world; that this media environment is going to have consequences. It's not only going to change the nature of the media, but it might also change the nature of opinion.

And it might even, over time, change the way people think of themselves; who they are by virtue of this large a market that was created by the satellite television.

And, for that reason, I intended to measure what people watch on television every year, to see how that's changing, what's happening in the media environment, and then eventually also to see how many people are using the Internet, and how that's changing in every country. And then test their opinions on a lot of issues -- foreign-policy issues, domestic

policy issues, as well as what I call identity issues -- how people define themselves.

And I wanted to do it for a period of 10 years, and the reason that I wanted to do it for a period of 10 years is that that allows us for scientific study of change over time -- how things are changing over time; just tell you the trends in the statistical analysis.

And I began asking -- testing the waters, as you know, public opinion in the Arab world is a relatively new phenomenon. We haven't had much in the past, certainly not political ones. We've had some that was much more commercial.

And I began -- as a first step of public opinion surveys they were small – they were short just to test the waters of the late-1990s and then in 2000 it was Zogby International.

And since 2002, we began a systematic testing, where we're repeating the same questions every year and adding new questions every year as well that are more topical.

So this particular one is the sixth repeat survey, where we have six years of measurement to

study how things are changing. And this particular one was very much similar to the others in the sense that we have had – it's in six countries, and we repeat the same six countries -- Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

And we repeat the same countries every year. We have a sample, which is now a sample of over 4000 people, in those six countries.

So what I'd like to do is review the results, because in this particular question, and, by the way, these are very lengthy surveys. We have roughly 70 questions that are asked and we have very -- many demographic questions – income, education, even unemployment, as well as media behavior. And they cover a lot of issues that I'm not going to cover today, because I want to focus largely on foreign-policy questions. That's really what I'm going to focus on today -- really a sense of where people are -- in -- on the foreign policy area.

And I divided into questions here into different questions. There's a summary of the key findings, by the way, that you find in front of you

that you can read later on. And there's also the sampling methodology.

But I want to start with the war in Iraq, just to say where people are on the war in Iraq. And let me just again repeat this is a public opinion poll, so it doesn't mean that's where governments are.

In fact, one of the things that we find is that there's a huge divide between government positions and public opinion in much of the Arab world. And that's very clear.

And so on the question of Iraq, the first question is, you know, do you feel that Iraqi people, most Iraqi people, are better off or worse off than before the Iraq war. Eighty-one percent say they're worse off than they were before the Iraq war. By the way, when I say 81 percent, this is the total, the weighted total from the six countries.

They vary little from country to country, not a much actually, but there’s some variation. And it’s not what Iraqis feel. The Iraqis have -- we know that there were divided opinion that clearly differs whether you’re Shi’a, Suni, or Kurd. There’s very much a sectarian divide in Iraq and how they answer

this question. But generally, they are both outside Iraq. Remember this is outside of Iraq. The Arab public thinks that Iraqis are worse off.

And this, by the way, is not very different from 2006, which was the last survey we did at the end of 2006. You can see 81 percent in 2008; 87 percent in 2006 -- a slight improvement, but when you take into account the margin of error, it's not that big as a difference.

Which of the following countries is your biggest concern? Which of the following is your biggest concern about the consequences of the Iraq War?

This is a question that we began asking before the Iraq War in 2003, knowing that it will -- on the eve of the war, because that survey was done in early March of 2003. And then we started asking -- we asked it every time after that.

And the idea was they can chose two of these answers, not one. We gave them those answers. They worried -- whether they worried that Iraq will remain unstable. Instability will spread. Whether continuing trouble in Iraq will divert attention from

the Palestinian issue. Those are the two top answers.

You can see that 59 percent say Iraq will remain unstable; instability will spread. And it'll divert attention from the Palestinian issue -- 42 percent.

The most striking thing about this is that only eight percent say that their biggest worry is that Iran will become more powerful. Now that's interesting because, you know, certainly governments in the Arab world have been worried that Iran will become more powerful. Arab elites have been worried that Iran will be more powerful. But as expressed in Arab public opinion, that is not a central worry in comparison to these other issues that are on the table.

This is a little bit of a comparison from previous years. Country by country you can see. I'm not going to go through it. You have it in front of you. But I want to go through some of the key issues.

Since the surge of American forces in Iraq, the number of reported violent incidents has significantly declined in many parts of Iraq. Which of the following is closest to your view?

And you can see that the largest group, a plurality, 36 percent, they don't even believe the reports that there's been a reduction in violence. They think this is, you know, this is kind of more of a conspiracy of information here, which is an instinct. Yeah, I don't believe that violence has dropped in Iraq.

But of those who do, 31 percent say the reduction of violence has little to do with the American surge, and it's only a matter of time before violence increases again.

Nineteen percent say the reduction of violence has little to do with the American surge, but still believe that the situation in Iraq is headed toward a stable political outcome. Only six percent believe that it's an indication that the surge has worked.

So no confidence whatsoever in America's strategy in that regard.

What do you believe would happen if the United States quickly withdrew its forces? Now, we know that Arab -- many Arab governments are very concerned about that, and many elites are, and many

analysts are. There's a division here as to what would happen. Some people fear for instability. Some people fear for expansion of Iranian influence. No doubt.

But if you look at public opinion, 61 percent think that Iraqis will find a way to bridge their differences if the United States pulls out. They see America as part of the problem, not part of the solution. And that's very interesting.

Only 15 percent say civil war will expand rapidly. So the public is all for American withdrawal and think things will be better. And this is an increase, by the way, from 2006. You can see in comparison in this year 61 percent say Iraqis will find a way to bridge their differences; in 2006 only 44 percent said that they would find a way to bridge their differences.

The use of Al Qaeda. Now this is a question that we've asked regularly, which is when you think about Al Qaeda, what aspect of the organization, if any, do you sympathize with most.

And generally, the number one answer has been that the -- the fact that it confronts the U.S. Of

course, a number of them say I don't sympathize with any aspect of Al Qaeda at all. But those who have any aspect -- can sympathize with any aspect, the largest number say the fact that it confronts the United States; the second is the fact that it speaks for causes like the Palestinian cause. But only seven percent express admiration of its advocacy of a Palestine like Islamic state.

And there's a little bit of a change, but not much change from 2006 on that one.

Views of Iran's nuclear program. This year we've asked specific questions, more questions, about Iran's nuclear program. Do you believe that Iran is starting to develop nuclear weapons or do you believe that Iran is merely conducting research for peaceful purposes? Forty-six percent believe Iran is merely conducting research for peaceful purposes; 39 percent think they're developing nuclear weapons.

Interestingly, by the way, this is a change from last year. Last year a majority, 51 percent, felt that Iran was actually developing nuclear weapons. This is a drop. And I think is that our intelligence, the NIE report, that was released last year, which was

interpreted by many to mean that Iran had -- is not developing nuclear weapons, seems to have influenced opinion here in terms of a change on this issue.

If Iran acquires nuclear weapons, which of the following is closest to your view? It will use them against Arab states. It will use them against Israel. It will not use them.

Well, 45 percent say it will not use them. Thirty-one percent think they will use them against Israel, and eight percent they will use them against Arab states.

If you ask them, if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, which of the following is likely outcome. The outcome would be more negative or more positive for the Middle East.

The largest number, the plurality, 44 percent think the outcome is actually better for the Middle East. And only 29 percent think it's actually negative for the Middle East, so it's very interesting to see. And obviously looking at this through the prism of anger with America and Israel, no doubt. It's not an embrace of Iran as such, but this is what we see in every -- in everything. And the trends are roughly the

same.

The interesting thing is, you know, even in places where you might expect the trend to be significantly different, the United Arab Emirates, well, it's not very different. It's a similar -- it's a similar trend. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it's very surprising that you'd have those kind of answers.

There's international pressure on Iran to curtail its nuclear program. What is your opinion? Well, 67 percent think that the international community should not pressure Iran to stop its nuclear program. So, again, it's very different from the stated governmental positions. They differ from country to country.

The Israel-Palestinian conflict. Which of the following statements is closest to your views about the prospects of lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians?

I don't believe it will ever happen; 55 percent. Fifty-five percent of the Arab public don't believe that peace will ever happen between Israel and the Palestinians. Pessimism is the order of the day. That is really kind of the defining characteristic of

the psychology toward this issue.

Only 13 percent believe it's going to happen in the next five years, and you have 27 percent who say it's inevitable, but it will take more time. But it's remarkable how much pessimism there is.

And that pessimism is actually contrasted with, you know, there are -- just before that, let me just say about the importance. Every year, I ask a question about how important the Palestinian issues and their priorities. Is it the top most important issue? Is it the top three? Or is not in the top three?

And you can see that every year around three-quarters of Arab states either the single most important issue or the top three issues to them.

This year is actually an increase over the past two years. Eighty-six percent say the Palestinian question is either the single most important issue to them or in the top three issues to them.

This has been consistent throughout.

But views of Israel. What do you believe motivates Israel policies in the region and America's support for these policies?

Actually, I skipped one question that I

wanted to go over, and I don't know why -- how I did that. Let me just see if I can go backwards for a minute, which is about the prospects of peace.

Yes. This a question that occurs 2006-2008, and the question here is which of the following statements is closest to your views. I'm prepared for a just, comprehensive peace with Israel, if Israel is willing to return all the territories occupied in the '67 War, and I believe that (inaudible) should do more to attain it. I'm prepared for peace with Israel based on the '67 borders, but don't believe that the Israelis would ever accept to return the territories peacefully. And then the final one: Even if the Israelis returned all the territories occupied in '67, Arabs should continue to fight Israel no matter what the outcome. It's sort of a principled opposition.

Actually, it's interesting that the principled opposition is a minority; in fact, a decreasing minority. In 2006, it was 29 percent. It's only 19 percent in 2008.

Over 70 percent in 2008 say in principle they agree to peace based on the '67 borders. But if you look at that middle number, which is 52 percent, 52

percent don't believe that the Israelis would ever accept it. It's sort of in harmony with the pessimism.

So in principle, there's an agreement to peace. In practice, they don't think it's going to happen. And that defines, I think, their attitudes towards this issue.

The views of Israel. Do you believe -- what do you believe motivates Israeli policies in the region and American support for these policies? U.S. and Israel have mutual interests. Most of the time, Israel is a tool of U.S. foreign policy. Or Israel influences U.S. policy through the Israel lobby.

And it's interesting, actually how much division there is here. Forty-one percent say Israel and the U.S. have mutual interests. Twenty-six percent say Israel is a tool of American foreign policy. And only about a quarter, 24 percent, say Israel essentially influences the U.S. through the Israel lobby.

So that kind of -- that was kind of a surprise to me. And, by the way, that's not very different from what -- from 2006. So, in a way, we repeat this and we find the same trend. In 2006, you

have roughly the same kind of division. There's hardly any change from year to year on this one.

Looking at the recent violence in Lebanon and Gaza, describe your attitudes toward Israeli power. This is about what I call the deterrence argument that Israelis make. Has it been strengthened or undermined? Do you think Israel is stronger or weaker?

One choice, the blue choice, is Israel is very powerful and is likely to use that power to consolidate its position even more. Israel is weaker. That's the red. And it looks -- it's weaker than it looks and it is a matter of time before it is defeated. And Israel has its strengths and weaknesses. No one can tell whether Israel will be stronger or weaker in the future.

So if you look at this, really only 16 percent in 2008 and 13 percent in 2006 think that Israel continues to be strong and will be able to use that strength to consolidate its power. Thirty-five percent think Israel is weaker than it looks. That's actually a drop from 2006. I think that's a function in 2006 it was right after the Lebanon War, and people were reacting to a sense of Hezbollah's victory, but

didn't drop in scale. I mean, it's still -- the trend is pretty much the same.

On Palestinian domestic politics. I asked questions about where they are on the Hamas divisions. In the current conflict among the Palestinians with whom do you sympathize with most?

Now, the total -- let me just where the totals are. Right here. You can see -- I don't know why this -- this is with Egypt and without Egypt. So if you look at it just with Egypt, which is the red bar, 37 percent sympathized with both to some extent, with both Fatah and Hamas, to some extent. Eighteen percent sympathized more with Hamas and only eight percent sympathized with Fatah more.

So clearly, the ratio of sympathy for Hamas is more than two to one vis a vis Fatah, although, you know, there is -- the plurality sympathized with both equally.

When you observe the current state of affairs in Gaza, which of the Palestinian parties do you believe is most responsible for it?

This is a question about who they blame for the misery in Gaza today. And you can see that 39

percent, again the red bar, they blame both equally. And the 23 percent blame the government of President Mahmoud Abbas, appointed by -- by President Mahmoud Abbas more. And only 15 percent blame Hamas more.

And I say this because remember, particularly from the point of view of our American foreign policy in the Middle East, one of the theories that was put forth was that over the past year the policy was intended "to empower the moderates and make the militants pay."

Well, you can look at the numbers, and you can see that clearly there's more blame for President Mahmoud Abbas than there is for Hamas. And that's very interesting.

The same thing, by the way, in Lebanese politics. Here's some questions about Lebanese politics. I know this is the crisis that we have at the moment, and I'm just going to go through it quickly and then conclude with some remarks.

In the internal crisis in Lebanon, with whom do you sympathize with most?

Now, remember this was done in March of this year. This was just a few weeks; okay? So this

obviously preceded the current crisis that we've just witnessed in Lebanon.

But remember that the expectation -- I mean, when Hezbollah fought the war in 2006, it became very popular in the Arab world, because it was seen to have won the conflict with Israel. And since that war in the summer of 2006, there has been more focus on sectarianism in Lebanon. And Hezbollah is seen by many and certainly portrayed by some media as playing a sectarian role on behalf of the Shi'a community in Lebanon.

And much of the discourse was about that. And so there is at least some expectation that during the past year, the popularity of Hezbollah will have diminished and the popularity of Hasan (inaudible) in particular will have diminished.

Well, look at the results. It's interesting. In the internal crisis in Lebanon, with whom do you sympathize with most? Look at the numbers.

Thirty percent say the opposition led by Hezbollah. Twenty-four percent say neither. Nineteen percent say with both to some extent. Only nine percent -- if you could take that -- but only nine

percent say -- no, I'm fine with that -- only nine percent say with the majority governing coalition led by Minister -- Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.

So what's interesting is that at least in the Arab world outside of -- that includes Lebanon. These are totals that include Lebanon. I'm going to show you the Lebanon numbers specifically. But what's interesting here is Hezbollah's support -- Hezbollah has plurality support, sympathy, in the Arab world. And the Lebanese government has only nine percent among Arab public opinion.

We're not talking about governments. Remind yourself of that obviously. Or even the elites, because elites have different views of this.

Now in Lebanon, let me just see what I have -- here is a by Lebanese groups. In the current internal crisis in Lebanon with whom do you sympathize with most?

First of all, look at the total. The total is the same trend almost as the Arab world in the sense that Hezbollah gets exactly the same number, 30 percent sympathy. The only difference is the Lebanese government gets more. It gets 24. Not more than

Hezbollah, but more than it got outside Lebanon; 24 percent say it.

So even in Lebanon, they have more sympathy with the opposition than with the government, according to the numbers, and 19 percent sympathize with both. And nine percent sympathize with neither.

Now if you look at the sectarian divide, it's like you expect. In the Shi'a community, almost total support for Hezbollah, 83 percent. Look at the lower bar. Eighty-three percent total sympathy with the opposition. Fifty percent say with both sides to some extent. But no one says with the Lebanese government. Look at the -- the entire (inaudible) is not -- you know, we don't have a percentage that says sympathize with the Lebanese government.

But look at -- what's interesting about the (inaudible) and the Suni community. They are more divided than you might expect. I mean, among Christians, 45 percent sympathize with the Lebanese government; 25 percent sympathize with the opposition. So it's a -- obviously the largest support for the Lebanese government, but it's quite a significant support for the opposition.

And the Sunis are also divided, but certainly more with the Lebanese government, and really very few at Hezbollah. Very few at Hezbollah. That's what's interesting about when you look at the -- at the Suni numbers, while it's only 55 percent say I sympathetic to the Lebanese government, there are very few percent that sympathize with the opposition.

Now, and here's an interesting breakdown of that question about the power -- Israeli power. You can see it also in Lebanon the same kind of trend broken down.

The views of the U.S. Generally speaking, is your attitude toward the United States favorable, very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable and so forth?

Those are hardly surprises. It's been the trend. We have about four percent say very unfavorable. Eleven percent say somewhat unfavorable. Sixty-four percent say very unfavorable; another 19 percent say somewhat unfavorable.

So you have 83 percent having unfavorable views of the United States. And, by the way, that's an even worse than it was in 2006. In 2006, 57 percent

said they had very unfavorable views. Now, it's 64 percent. So there's an increase in the number of people, and there has been no increase in the number of people who have very favorable views.

Yeah.

SPEAKER: Can you switch the slide show?

MR. TELHAMI: Can I what?

SPEAKER: Can you switch the slide.

MR. TELHAMI: Just to have a little (inaudible) on your side, but now, you've -- okay.

Let me just get back to where I was here. Okay.

How much confidence do you have in the United States? Seventy percent say no confidence at all. Twenty-five percent say some confidence; four percent say a lot of confidence.

Now this is, by the way, this is an interesting number, because when you think of it, you think wow, that's an incredibly high number, which it is. I mean, it's definitely a high number of no confidence.

That measure is always is more important on unfavorable ratings. We've been doing that because

that tells you something of whether they think they can do business with the U.S. But it -- let me just tell you that our own recent poll in America. This week's poll in America shows that 80 percent of our own people don't have confidence in our government. So actually, there's more confidence in the Arab world than in our own public opinion, so you can look at it that way.

It didn't change much from last time we did the poll. This was roughly the same. The United States has been actively advocating the spread of democracy in the Middle East, do you believe that this is an important objective and it will make a difference. This is an important objective, but the U.S. is going about it the wrong way, so I don't believe that the U.S. really is pursuing democracy.

Sixty-five percent don't believe the U.S. is pursuing democracy, and only eight percent thinks it'll make a difference.

And this, by the way, is -- was roughly the same in 2006, not much change. The same kind of.

Would you say your attitudes toward the United States are based more on American values or

American policy in the Middle East? And 80 percent say American policy in the Middle East; only 12 percent say American values. This has been consistent, and we've been finding that out every single year in the poll.

Which two of the following factors do you believe are the most important in driving American policy in the Middle East?

We find that oil and protecting Israel are the two top of all the factors that they rank. And then promoting democracy and (inaudible) human rights and promoting peace are the lowest of all the factors that they ranked.

The American people are in the midst of choosing the next President of the United States. Which of the following candidates do you believe has the best chance of advancing peace in the Middle East?

Well, 32 percent say it doesn't make a difference. They think they're all alike. Eighteen percent say they prefer Barack Obama. Thirteen percent say Hillary Clinton, and four percent say John McCain.

Let me go -- I want to end with this global

powers and leaders and then I'll make a few remarks.

In a world where there is only one superpower, which of the following countries would you prefer more than the others to be that superpower?

This is a question we've been asking. France, by the way, has been number one throughout this -- from the very beginning. And it was mostly -- began through the Iraq prism, for standing up to the U.S. Jacques Chirac was the most popular leader for a number of years. And so France is still high. But look at China and Germany.

The U.S. is not up there. But China and Germany -- China has been increasing in power.

If you have to live in one of the following countries, which one would you prefer most, separate from being a superpower. The (inaudible) countries, by the way, I give them, so they have that.

Now, you see, France is still number one, despite all of what happened in France over the past couple of years. Germany, Britain. What's remarkable is for the first time China has people saying they wouldn't mind living there, even more than the U.S., within the margin of error, about equal to the U.S.

That is very strange, and I think it had to do with the -- some of the results -- I think some of the coverage we have had, particularly positive coverage on China in the Arab media. Al Jazeera had some interesting coverage in -- on China.

However, if you have to send a family member to study in one of these countries, well, they don't see China as a leader in that. So China is still at the bottom. The U.S. is still up there, but again France is number one. France, you know, trumps all in that regard.

And name two countries that you think pose the biggest threat to you. Now, that's an open question. They can name any country they want. And 95 percent named Israel as the most important threat. Eighty-eight percent named the U.S. And only seven percent named Iran.

By the way, that doesn't mean they don't think Iran is a threat. If I had ask them in an open question do you think Iran is a threat, I'd get a larger percentage in that, because this is a question that asked them identify the two biggest threats. And they don't see Iran as where they see the U.S. Israel

as bigger threats than Iran. It doesn't mean they don't see Iran as a threat. So that's not the way to interpret that.

That's -- if you look at it from last year, it's a similar trend, but even an increase, you know, in the number of people identifying the U.S. and Israel and a decrease in the number of people who identify Iran as a threat. So it's changed in that direction.

Name two countries where you think there is most freedom and democracy for the all people. Well, you can see that, you know, almost all the countries mentioned there are western countries. You don't see anything else. I mean, it's not a value issue.

France, again, is number one. But the U.S. does pretty well. The U.S. is almost tied with Switzerland as a country where there's freedom and democracy. So they separate policy from values.

And this was also very similar to the trend we had in previous years.

Now here's the question I want to end with, which is please tell me which world leader outside your country you admire most. Okay.

Now, look at this. Look at this ranking. Twenty-six percent say as number one answer Hasan Mazola , which, by the way, is an increase over last year, not a decrease. So since 2006, his popularity actually increased rather than decreased.

President Musharaf shows up on the list; takes over from Jacques Chirac, who was there strong last year. Jacques Chirac now appears on another list, which is here. If you combine, we have -- we asked them to give their second choice, and when I combined the first choice and the second choice together, what I have is (inaudible) is still number one, by far. And then Chirac reappears, because he's -- he was still on people's lists as a second choice. And then we have Ahmadinejad and we have Sheik Mohammed bin (inaudible), which is interesting, appearing as a popular. He's getting more publicity in the Arab world, but he's beginning to appear in this -- on this list.

I just want to -- just say I'm not going through the media viewership, but I want to tell you that in general, when you look at the media, which I've been tracing every year, Al Jazeera -- one of the

questions asked when you watch international news, which of the following networks do you watch most often?

Okay. So it's a question of which one they go to as their first choice for news. It doesn't mean they don't watch the others. This means that that's their first choice for news. And you can see this number. It's 53 percent say Al Jazeera. Seventeen percent refer to one of the Egyptian networks, and nine percent say El Arabya. So Al Jazeera is still dominating the market, and the Egyptian network is only dominant in Egypt, and because Egypt is such a huge size, that shows up.

So if you take Egypt out of it, if Egypt is not part of the sample, and you take the five Arab countries together, then you have Al Jazeera 49 percent, El Arabya 13 percent, NBC 12 percent. So if you (inaudible) they are sisters, you can say Al Jazeera, El Arabya, and NBC has 27 percent of the market. So it's Al Jazeera is dominant.

Let me just conclude with a few points that I want to make.

First, in all these foreign policy issues, it

is clear that Arabs look at the world and foreign policy mostly through the prism of the Arab-Israeli issue and anger with America, not through any other issue. Not through the Suni-Shi'ite divide. I'm not saying there's no Suni-Shi'ite divide. There is obviously, and we see it particularly in Iraq and Lebanon. But that's not the way Arabs are framing their opinions.

So they don't -- that's why they may not Iran, but they don't think it's the biggest threat. They know that Hasan Mazola is the Shi'a leader, but they're going to support him because they think he's standing up to Israel and the United States.

So the Arab-Israeli conflict is still the prism through which Arabs are framing their positions on most of these issues. Second, it is clear that the notion that the policy of toughness and polarization -- trying to empower moderate forces and weaken militant forces has gotten exactly the opposite result. The parties that are considered militant by American foreign policy are actually more popular than -- and parties that are considered moderate by American foreign policy have dropped in popularity.

So it's clear that the consequence has been the opposite of what is intended.

I think that in all of the interviews that I've done, these are of course all public opinion polls, but I've also been doing a lot of -- I come to the region almost every month and I go across different parts. I was a few weeks ago in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait -- to Damascus, Cairo, and Amman, and it is clear that -- that's out there, people are ready to change (inaudible) that people are not -- just like there's a mood of change in America, there's a mood of change here. And I do think however that the election of a new American president whoever it is is going to provide an opportunity for rethinking -- between the United States and the Middle East. I'll end with that.

SPEAKER: Thank you, Shibley. You have given us a lot to chew on. If you want to grab a bite while I make some remarks, you discussed a broad range of things in a way (inaudible) a service to the Arab leaders and it's really a service to everyone --

through the perceptions of public opinion and enable us to actually see it.

One of the questions that I've gotten this week is how will this current conflict affect Lebanese public opinion about the crisis and also the broader Arab public opinion. Will there be a dramatic change or do you think really it's more of the same?

MR. TELHAMI: My hunch is to tell you that I know that everybody else expected that the 2008 poll is going to show a reduction -- Hassan Nasrallah. I didn't expect that and my -- my hunch about what happened in Lebanon is that you're going to have Arab public opinion, and I say Arab -- elites and governments, is still going to have more favorable views of Hizballah -- sectarian conflict because the ruling -- part of this is that -- American foreign policy. The U.S. is so much mistrusted in American foreign policy that the policy that we embrace is almost automatically rejected. And in part we're -- on one side of this issue and that's not going to be popular.

The second is I think -- the issue. If you look at it in the context of what actually transpired, those two moves by the Lebanese -- on the one hand a sovereign government can do what it wants to do and obviously it has a good justification for doing it. In the context of being stuck in a crisis with the opposition, I shouldn't say Hizballah because Hizballah -- the opposition, but it's really an opposition movement. It has some fissures in it. And in that opposition some Sunnis have -- was to challenge those steps that the (inaudible) army took were a challenge to Hizballah -- people may take issue with obviously the way (inaudible) but people also could see it -- the general hunch in the Arab world is that you don't want to see Hizballah weakened. That's the public opinion -- standing up to Israel, and that is when Hizballah says the government -- network that was such a central instrument (inaudible) Israel, that tells you something about what -- where the pulse is and that they portray that as a threat to the very things that --

So my hunch is that Hizballah will have actually increased its (inaudible) reports about them performing well and effectively military will work for them -- what is going to happen inside Lebanon. I think inside Lebanon not much would happen. It's going to polarize. It's just polarizing -- no Sunnis are going to swing to Hizballah's side, no Shias are going to swing to the government's side. I think -- I don't think you'd have people swinging. But the impact on public opinion is going to be primarily outside Lebanon.

SPEAKER: Brookings is here to serve the intellectual life -- open to the audience to ask questions so that we can get as many questions as we can please try to -- questions to a minute and a half.

SPEAKER: (inaudible) on Lebanon and I noticed that you didn't draw a distinction between weak Lebanese -- which you did in the case of Egypt. Was that because (inaudible) was too small of the Lebanese population or because --

MR. TELHAMI: No. That's actually straightforward. The totals are weighted totals -- like the UAE with a small population you can't count it as much as 80 million Egyptians. So what you -- you can have a total -- the weighted totals are going to be -- because it's almost half of the entire sample by population. If you take Lebanon on it wouldn't change much at all -- example is a slice of the population because when you're doing the totals you are applying weights -- population size. In Egypt it was important to give you a flavor of what it would be like if Egypt wasn't part of it because it's such a bit country -- take Egypt out, that's the weighted total for the other five. And it still didn't make a huge difference except on the media because the -- media, most trends were the same. In Lebanon you wouldn't even see it because of the percentage of the population is so small.

And by the way, I just want to say something that I meant to mention. I'm here in Doha -- primarily as a guest of (inaudible) we have a producer

here and I'm going to tape it here tomorrow so I'm -- watch a few of those episodes that persuaded me to do it which a fascinating -- and open show that I'm hoping to take tomorrow. Thanks for joining us.

SPEAKER: I should have mentioned that in my opening remarks as well.

SPEAKER: I'm just wondering how much do you think -- really mattered especially if the elites are making the policy decisions and most of these countries -- and (inaudible) does actually give an argument to certain American policymakers that -- to continue with the status quo in supporting the elites as opposed to democratization which would lead to a reversal --

MR. TELHAMI: First of all, the concept was public opinion on behavior. That's an area -- I come out of a realist background in international relations and actually mostly a theorist of international relations more than I am a -- public opinion although that's what I focused on before. And I've written a lot on how states behave in the international system -

- about where there's a role for public opinion or not, and again, quite a number of articles on the role of public opinion -- big issues, not small issues, but let me give you just a couple of short things about it. One is that the fact of the matter is that -- consequence of ignoring public opinion is that we perpetuate repression in the Middle East. So if we -- or to Egypt and we find that 90 percent of the public actually opposed -- Iraq war and then we go to their governments and say we need your support and they say I got an angry public opinion -- say, well, I don't care, my main thing is to get you to support me on this issue. Find a way to deal with public opinion -- democracy then the outcome will be that governments are going to be very nervous and that nervousness will result in more -- as a matter of consequence. That's probably why in public opinion polls when you ask people -- democratic or less democratic than it was before the Iraq war, the majority of people now have all said that the Middle East is actually less

democratic -- as a matter of regardless of all these maneuvers. So that's one thing.

Second, I think that -- the whole intent of policy. President -- we say public opinion doesn't matter. How can a -- if it doesn't have public support (inaudible) Israel (inaudible) and it's -- American policy was actually over the past year to have a policy that you will get more public popular support -- so we can deliver an agreement.

And the third is in an environment for -- mobilization of militancy because at some point anger -- translated into militancy and most angry people don't become militant. But militant groups can tap into that anger and -- and fourthly, implementation. If you're outside the Arab world, let's take Pakistan as an example -- if you have a Pakistani government ordering its intelligence service and military service to crack down -- and the public sees this as anti-Pakistani, anti-Muslim -- and they sympathize with the people they're supposed to arrest more or convey information on -- half-heartedly, assuming they're

real true professionals. At worst -- in between they will look the other way when they see something because they're not going to implement. So it -- so even in environments where governments are in control, and still they are -- looking at public opinion is not a way of assessing -- governments. Governments by and large in the Arab world have been able to do things that went against public opinion, but they're increasingly -- and they behave as it if matters to them, and it doesn't come without a cost. They pay a cost when they -- the public. They pay a heavy cost, a cost sometimes in resources, sometimes institutionally. There are a variety -- visible.

SPEAKER: Thank you, Shibley. I'm sure there are more questions out there.

SPEAKER: My question is you spoke at the beginning of the session that (inaudible) that might (inaudible) like I mean figures for leaders like Hassan Nasrallah or -- typical people who can (inaudible) different -- their views about their cause without weapons. So I -- kind of education

(inaudible) so where to expect the change will come from?

MR. TELHAMI: First of all, I don't agree with that -- actually. I think that his popularity in part his weapons, no question, I mean the fact that he's -- built a strong military, no question, which makes what he says more credible before the public. But -- great communicator. I think that he is one of the most charismatic and articulate people -- he understand his public and he speaks to people about their issues. He connects with -- the conflict and the picture. And when you look at it in the middle of the war with Israel -- he was doing better than anybody expected was part of it. But when he -- I don't think I've seen people in the Arab world -- by someone when they go into a speech in the way they were mesmerized by him since the days of Gamal Abdel Nasser, and that's quite extraordinary, actually, to think of it that way. I'm not comparing them. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying -- they have the same

impact. What I'm saying is as a person he has had a remarkable impact on Arab public --

As for the method or the militancy, this is really -- story is that even more so on the Palestinian side. When you look at -- you read the polls the way they should be read, when I asked people about what -- they are prepared for peace with Israel, the majority say yes. Almost two-thirds say yes -- actually. In an historical perspective it's an extraordinary number. But when you ask them do you think the Israelis would ever accept it you have a large majority saying no, they would never accept it. And so that's why people -- and then support militancy. Not because they embrace it, but because they don't see an alternative.

By the way, this is the same on the Israeli side -- Palestine. The Israelis, you ask them, the majority say they want peace. The majority also says that the other side doesn't want it -- Ariel Sharon when they elected him. So that's the tendency that you find there where it's not that people are --

militancy or it's not even that people are embracing the agenda of a particular group. It is that -- alternative (inaudible) alternative that the international community is trying to put, and certainly -- show that moderation pays, meaning success stories. The problem is -- had success stories and that's why people end up going. So it's the same problem that happened in Lebanon and the same problem that happened -- and we have more division and polarization and there is very little progress.

SPEAKER: Knowing that the majority of Arab (inaudible) unbearable poverty and plus (inaudible) that the number of (inaudible) have increased to 75 percent. So -- this is what I cannot understand. They don't have any other alternative. But at the same time (inaudible) is what I cannot --

MR. TELHAMI: The polls don't tell you anything about that -- what should be done. That's another subject. However, I just want to say that we have -- this is a superficial analysis now because I'm not giving you the actual demographic analysis, which

groups think what, does income matter, does education matter, does age matter -- how's it changing over time. I can tell you one thing, that -- is negatively correlated with militancy and not positively correlated with militancy. They're slightly more educated -- slightly more you're likely to support militancy -- education not a factor. Income -- direction, but in general, these results are actually rather robust across demographic groups so that -- separate in the analysis.

SPEAKER: Shibley, that's -- correlation of education and militancy that you were --

MR. TELHAMI: Education -- on some questions that we studied which is groups that they support and their attitudes toward the -- they are slightly more likely to have favorable views of the United States if they have higher incomes, and they're slightly more likely to have negative views of the U.S. if they have less -- if they have more -- more likely to have negative views of the U.S. if they have more education.

MR. : More education --

MR. TELHAMI: Yes, slightly.

MR. : And that's statistically significant?

MR. TELHAMI: Yes, that's -- those are actually the only two demographics over the 6 year period -- demographic variables that were statistically significant were -- but income more than education. And this year we've entered the unemployment demographic. So we have now -- studied it yet. We've looked at it (inaudible) it doesn't appear to be hugely important -- controlled it yet. We need to. For example, I haven't looked to see if you have higher education -- employed, whether you would have the most extreme views. We haven't yet -- analyzing it. It's still fresh.

MR. : That will be interesting. More questions? Sir?

SPEAKER: You started off by framing this in an academic sense and (inaudible) how Edward Said would have seen this poll. What I'm getting at is

(inaudible) benefits from it which sort of picks up from -- whether it's from the people who are being polled and therefore getting the sense of as a community what they think of themselves. Maybe that's happening for the first time -- it's the people such as ourselves who sit on the outside and look in. I'm just sort of wondering what your thoughts are.

MR. TELHAMI: I'm not sure I understand the question exactly, but I can tell you this (inaudible) the region -- I'm fluent in Arabic and would have preferred to speak here in Arabic instead of English had it not been Arabic is my mother tongue -- come to the region almost every month. I go to every part of the region regularly. So when I design a question, not only do I design it knowing the region and being a student of the region and -- region and breathing the region, but I also look at the exact words that are being asked in Arabic and I supervise -- in Arabic to make that it is conveying the right things. So this is not a -- public opinion that somebody from the outside coming and conducting. This is a poll that is

designed in the regional context that -- understanding what the issues are and making sure -- and that's the hardest part because I write the questions myself -- three or four other experts to review, two of them regional experts. I gave them to two regional experts this time from the region -- and give me ideas in part because I want to make sure that I'm not biasing the audience being -- in the questions. So I have no doubt in my mind that to the extent -- polling is always somewhat problematic, whether it's in the U.S. or here we have to interpret through context, but that this -- is better than an armchair analyst telling you I know what public opinion is because you spoke to your taxi driver -- or something of that sort.

So we certainly have a sense -- have said we know people like him now who actually are fascinated by the results. Their first answer is -- I could have told you so, that this exactly confirms what they -- as my polling actually confirms and my statistical analysis confirms -- issues of identity. People have preformed views. They look at the world through an

identity prism -- through the information prism, and we find that on issues of identity they're not even influenced by the media as -- and that they go to the media that reflects their identity rather than the media shaping their identity. So Al-Jazeera is -- by virtue of putting on the air things that respond to their notions of identity. It -- doesn't matter too much to their identity, there are side issues, but on identity questions it might sharpen or increase the -- by virtue of reporting more but doesn't shape their views because these are -- from issues that take a long time to develop.

The media may have -- long-time impact on identity, but it's not going to be measurable over 1 year, not even maybe 10 years, so the media is -- reshaping identities. But on any given day, people start with an -- identity presents them with a prism through which they make up -- make an assessment of an issue.

MR. AMR : We've got one, two, three, four. There are two ladies in the back and want to wrap up in a few minutes.

SPEAKER: Mine are very quick interventions and questions. What is next for you in terms of -- research on public polls forward? The other thing which is related, with respect to -- you talked eloquently about militancy and the appeal of militancy outside of the United States -- primarily actually a response to American foreign policy. Where do you see -- challenges and how could they be solved in our own understanding of opinions across the Arab world?

MR. TELHAMI: I don't think they're primarily responses to American foreign policy. I think for example some things are and some things are not. I think -- al-Qaeda inherently is unappealing to the vast majority of Arabs, inherently unappealing -- go back to the days prior to its confrontation to the U.S., go back to the Taliban days, and look at -- al-Qaeda we're in the Arab world. Even Arab governments didn't have relations with the Taliban. There was

just a couple that had relations -- and the Arab public mocked them in general. They didn't have -- their message -- and the model didn't resonate. And I think the fight with the U.S. -- the enemy of my enemy more than anything else and that's a case of an organization that has defined itself in part -- confrontation with the U.S.

Hamas and Hizballah are two different stories. They're not the same organization and they're not the same -- come together in this thing in the same thing. They have different aims and constituencies, they have audiences, and the rise of Hamas -- function of the failure of Fatah, less the failure of America, although Fatah -- together so in that sense. So it's an internal dynamic. The rise of Hamas is really a function of the Israeli policy -- and a failure (inaudible) and I would say in Lebanon above all, Hizballah came out -- confrontation with the U.S., it was strictly initially as a response to the Israeli of Lebanon. And eventually it was -- because there was a united group that was the largest

single group in Lebanon that -- so I think in those cases I don't think the -- call it militancy in the sense that people are using military instruments to achieve the political -- in this case they're nonstates, that is, in both cases, Hizballah and Hamas.

I don't think -- they're entirely a function of the United States, but I think however -- exacerbating factor and I think the anger with the U.S. and Israel certainly is one reason why people -- for Hizballah. There is no natural reason for them to say Hizballah is the party that we're going to -- so the U.S. has a role to play, but frankly when I say failure, it's not just a failure on our part -- it's really local failure, failure -- resolution of global conflict, a failure of governance. In Lebanon we've had -- and those issues will likely continue.

MR. AMR : Thank you, Shibley. We have about 10 minutes left. There are four more questions. Why don't I -- you had a question and then Shibley -- answers to 2 minutes each.

SPEAKER: My question was very related to what you just responded to. I have written that -- responses and 7 percent only sympathize with the Islamic state -- proposal -- al-Qaeda, and 30 percent see that the confrontation with the U.S. is -- do you see then that there could be some sort of a government -- not Islamic state in nature but -- and that in a secular nature and that would be the kind of government that people in the Arab would be most -- to? My question is where does secularism fit in all of that?

MR. TELHAMI: What I didn't -- is some -- I focused on the foreign policy issues but I do a lot on this stuff which is on -- politics, whether they want religion to play a bigger role, a smaller role, how they envision that relationship -- remember that doesn't mean a Taliban-like religion and most people have a moderate sense of what religion is. And most Islamic -- including the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. They may want to impose sharia law in Egypt. That's a different -- so let's keep that separation clear.

But in general -- the people are really divided almost half and half between those who think religion shouldn't play a bigger role -- and religion should play a bigger role in politics. And specifically even with the clergy there is a separation -- in the number of people who say they're Muslim first in the Arab world. We've seen over the past 6 years it goes up -- but as a trend overall, Islamic identity has been strengthened over the past 6 years -- that this is all religious identity. It is in part that we know this juxtaposition, there's an interpretation that the United -- the Muslim world. Post-9/11 we've seen kind of a mobilization along these lines because of -- is breaking down.

And even on wanting the clergy to play a role, some of it is religious for sure -- anticorruption because they see the secular elites as being corrupt and they see the economic inequalities and they think -- more fair, just like what happened with Hamas in a way in Gaza. So these are not that easy to -- what we do know is even the religious

people by and large -- of Islam is very different from the vision that is put out by al-Qaeda.

SPEAKER: (inaudible)

SPEAKER: A very enlightening talk. Thank you. Although not surprising having lived in the Middle East (inaudible) France's legacy, the chaos in Lebanon (inaudible) Algeria --

MR. TELHAMI: (inaudible)

SPEAKER: My question -- a lot of it is opinion without responsibility. My question is -- and perhaps, if Arab governments were more representational would be gap be smaller?

MR. TELHAMI: If Arab governments are what?

SPEAKER: (inaudible) their people, more representative -- more representative of their people, in other words, more democratic shall we say -- representational, would the gap between these opinions -- be less?

MR. TELHAMI: No question. No question, just because it -- democratic governments. We've had that in the past. Look at our -- as I said, our --

disapproval right now in a democratic country. So you can have a gap, but you don't have a sustained gap -- critical issues generally. And we have elections to test that and then you adjust it. Elections are -- reducing the gap. Every once in a while it grows and if you can't bridge that gap you're going to lose. So -- government would make a difference.

The real issue is whether Western governments are comfortable -- governments (inaudible) would you have views like this. So what -- in the past, this is not the first time that the United States has advocated democracy. This has been almost a constant -- back in the late 1980s if you call before Iraq invaded Kuwait, you had a lot of people -- the Middle East, the U.S. was pushing democracy in the Middle East, until we saw the results and then people -- Algeria was the first one that people were frightened by and others and this was supposed to be different -- but in reality it's not. So I think there is that kind of problem right now that is I think -- have to think about because I think there's a

problem in the way we're dealing with all these issues in terms of whether -- the policy of democracy and how do we deal with governments, what do we do about public opinion, is going to be rethought.

MR. AMR : We have time for one or two more questions.

SPEAKER: I think for this terrific -- my question is related to one of the previous questions. You've said Arabs (inaudible) conclusion, but what do you think they think about democratic values and attitudes? Is that separate between -- democratic values in the West and the foreign policy of Western governments. What do you think about these values? And may I -- question, and my question is why Arabs are (inaudible) identity by defining -- other identities and let's say (inaudible) not based on their own -- and generally it's about -- it's because -- but also because I mean there is a building process or --

MR. TELHAMI: The second one is really kind of easy to address because actually much of the

(inaudible) literature -- formed in juxtaposition to another and that this is really kind of historically true particularly of political identities. It's not -- other reasons, but even if you're mobilizing people over internal issues sometimes to get people together -- the same way with pan-Arabism was in some ways at least in its roots separate from the -- came out with Nasser in 1952, the greater Syria came with Baath -- juxtaposition but also to overcome divisions and sectarianism. It was kind of an umbrella to -- and it was a formula to bridge. You had Christians in that coalition, you had Shiite, you had Sunni in that coalition, you had Druze -- and the Arabism provided that umbrella for consolidation. So you can have that.

I think right now -- no pan-Arab leader out there so pan-Arabism isn't really out there as a viable option -- Syria which is weak in terms of its cards on the table. The Baath in Iraq -- destroyed Egypt, moved away from the pan-Arab policy and -- the

regional -- you're going to have that as an option on the table. What was the first question?

SPEAKER: The position -- democratic values (inaudible)

MR. TELHAMI: People may not know exactly what -- so forth, but when we asked them name the two countries that you think are most democratic, all the countries they mentioned were Western -- so they have a notion. They don't say Pakistan, they don't say China, they don't say Russia, they say -- the United States, Switzerland, Sweden, Britain. So their notion of what democracy and freedom are actually -- much in -- roughly, I don't say this is they know exactly the details, but roughly in the Western -- no question. No question. Every poll and not just mine, Gallup has been doing -- and every poll that has been done saying that their attitudes are generally positive. It's not that they don't have fears that have to do with the values -- it's not about the nature of the system.

MR. : Thank you, Shibley -- one more question or follow-up question.

MR. TELHAMI: Someone who hasn't asked a question. Mister Ambassador --

SPEAKER: (inaudible) you mentioned that -- factor or element in shaping -- the public opinion of the people in the states in the Arab world. And I think -- direction as well. I don't (inaudible) superpower. How they can make use of such public opinion -- I say this not as an Egyptian diplomat, but I think Arab governments -- to American officials and with their American counterparts (inaudible) on the peace process or Palestinian-Israeli negotiations or Arab-Israeli -- peace process could significantly improve the image of the United States in the Arab world (inaudible) has not happened -- the public diplomacy campaign, I don't think it has helped also much. But I am more a minor improvement or -- progress in the Middle East peace process in the area would significantly change the image toward the United States. Thank you very much.

MR. TELHAMI: (inaudible) as you know, this is the data I've been waging in the United States for

much of my career -- on this than anyone else I think, making the argument this is an issue. And after 9/11 I wrote a lot -- the New York Times, the Washington Post, and my book "The Stakes" which was also talking about why this is the central issue and explaining why it is -- doesn't mean that people think Palestinians, it's just I think subconscious it's just like when you say -- I ask you who do you think is going to be better for the Middle East, Obama or Hillary Clinton, or -- your first test in your own mind, your first test is are they going to be pro -- pro-Arab. It's the first test. It's subconscious -- Iraq is important, Lebanon is -- and all of these are important, but it's the shortcut to what you think is in your heart. That's why it's important. It's -- complex than people think. It's not like people -- I care about the Palestinians, you could even not like Hamas, you think -- Abu Mazen is worthless. You can think all these things, but still the mental mindset when you're making up your mind -- good for this or good for that. That's the way.

In the debate -- in Washington it's a political debate -- accept that, they have to do something about it. They make a decision am I going to do something about it or -- if they make a decision I'm not going to do something -- and it's very easy to dismiss you because you say they can talk, talk, talk, but the -- to do or the Arab governments will behave differently or they care mostly about this or that. That's the kind of -- far more complex answer to explain to them why public opinion matters and that's hard to do when you're --

MR. AMR : Thank you, Shibley. I apologize that you're just getting your coffee -- to be respectful of everyone's time we should break. So on behalf of the staff -- we're pleased that you came out and inaugurated our first town lunch -- I want to thank the audience, the distinguished ambassadors who attended, members of the media, professors, and -- if you come out next year to do your poll, we'll do the discussion in Arabic. So thank you. Thank you very much for coming. And I apologize to those who just

got their tea -- hang around. You can hang out for a bit if you like --

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