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WHAT DOES THE AMERICAN PUBLIC

THINK OF THE ARAB AWAKENING?

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. SHAIKH: (Speaking in Arabic.) Ladies and gentlemen, students, faculty, welcome. Thank you very much for attending this very special joint event with Professor Shibley Telhami. Of course, he doesn't need too much of an introduction but I will just say, of course, he's the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland and Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Saban Center of the Brookings Institution. He, of course, has been an advisor to numerous positions including to the U.S. mission to the UN, former Congressman Lee Hamilton in Congress, and written, of course, a number of best selling books, not least, "The Stakes: America and the Middle East".

Shibley, it's really a pleasure and a delight to have you here to make this presentation for us today on what does the American public think of the Arab awakening.

Let me say, just before he starts, he, of course, is about to speak hot on the heels of

President Obama's speech on Friday on the Arab spring. There are, of course significant developments going on in the Arab-Israeli conflict, not least President Obama speaking at AIPAC today and President Netanyahu speaking to joint houses of Congress on Tuesday as well as President Abbas speaking and weighing in on developments, and of course we come today when hopefully we'll have finally the signing of the peace agreement in Yemen with President Saleh signing in a Gulf sponsored deal, and where you continue to have deaths today in Syria and an uneasy calm in Bahrain. That's just a short sweep of the region.

Let me now hand over to Shibley. Dr. Steven Wright, who, of course, is the head of the department of international affairs at Qatar University will be, I'm delighted to say, moderating the session for us. Once we're done with all of this we'll invite you to come downstairs for another special event. Thank you.

MR. TELHAMI: (Speaking in Arabic.) I'm really honored to be here. I'm grateful to the University of Qatar, this is my first visit to the

university and I'm grateful to Dr. Misnad and her leadership of this university. It's already got a great reputation all around the world. I'm grateful to Brookings Doha Center, which has made quite a name for itself already and has been extremely productive, particularly under the leadership of Mr. Salman Shaikh.

Let me put this presentation in perspective. I'm a scholar of Middle East politics, American foreign policy in the Middle East, international relations, broadly, and I do a lot of public opinion polls. Some of the public opinion polling that I do is here in the Middle East. Particularly in the past decade I've been actually reviewing our public opinion and how it's been evolving over the past decade, and some of our polls have indicated the widening gap between publics and governments every single year. And we have reviewed the importance of the evolving media for public opinion and how it's evolving, but we've also been doing public opinion polls in the United States over the past decade to see how

Americans are viewing the Middle East in particular, and what captured my imagination this time was that after the Arab awakening -- and we know that it captured the world imagination, not just the regional imagination -- the fact that you have in the Midwestern state of Wisconsin, you have a demonstration that is inspired by Tahrir Square is something really extraordinary. Here is the American public in the Midwest, in the middle of America, demonstrating over labor issues using slogans borrowed from an Arab demonstration in Tahrir Square.

So, that told me that there's some profound change taking place, and so what we wanted to do first is to see how the American public is internalizing the Arab awakening, the Arab spring, how they see it. Is it affecting the way they view the Middle East in general? Is it affecting the way they view Arabs, in particular? And if so, is this sustainable? Is this something that's likely to stay with us or will it change? And so a colleague of mine and I conducted this survey. You can see here, it's a sample of 802 -

- it's a probability based online panel, it's nationally representative, plus or minus 3.5 percent is the margin of error, and it was conducted April 1 to 5 of this year.

So, one of the questions we asked, by the way, that's not so much about the Arab awakening is how the American public ranks U.S. relations with the Muslim world. Is it a priority issue? Is it most importance? Is it in the top three? The top five? Or it's not in the top five issues to them? Do they think this is an important relationship for the United States in general? And here we have 61 percent say it's among the top five issues facing the U.S. with 3 percent saying it's the single most important issue, 50 percent saying it's the top three, and about a third, 36 percent, say it's not among the top five issues. That, by the way, is roughly the same as it was prior to other Arab awakenings, so this is not a measured change in attitudes.

But here is a question that we started with pertaining to America's advocacy of democracy. Now,

do you think that if the countries of the Middle East become more democratic, this will be more positive or more negative for the U.S.? And you could imagine that there's been a debate about this already in American discourse with some people actually raising alarm bells, saying, you know, maybe this is not going to be good if there's a public opinion that's more angry with the U.S. that will happen. And so we put this to the test to see how the American public sees this, and we asked the question, in the short-term and long-term, because, you know, some people think, well, maybe it's not good in the short-term, but it will be good in the long-term, so we put both of these in there.

And look at the results: 65 percent believe that this is going to be good for -- actually, it's mostly positive and only 31 percent they say more negative and that's in the next five years. And look at the number even in the long-term, 76 percent of the American public think that these changes are actually going to be more positive in the long-term, so,

optimistic about the future of the Arab uprisings.

What if democratization leads to unfriendly government? Now, remember that this is really, of course, the huge question for politicians. You can have an election, you had leaders who are friends of the U.S. and American foreign policy, you have a public opinion that has been angry with American policy, and opening could lead to the selection of governments that are less friendly to American foreign policy. How does the American public feel about that? Are they prepared to support that even if it leads to a government that is unfriendly or less friendly to U.S. policies?

Well, I have to say that this was a surprise to me. Now, if you look at the -- we put a contrast here, there was a similar question asked in September '05, several years ago, that's when the Bush Administration was pushing hard rhetorically on the issue of democracy and that's the bottom line you see, that September '05, where it was more divided, you had 48 percent say yes and 39 percent say no, but

remarkably, in this particular case, 57 percent of the American people say yes, even if it leads to a government that is less friendly to the U.S., so that -- I have to say that I was surprised and it's a clear change from where it was just a few years ago when the Bush Administration was rhetorically pushing for democracy.

Perceptions of the uprisings: do you think the popular uprisings in the Arab world are more about Islamist groups seeking political power or more about ordinary people seeking freedom and democracy? Now, this is a critical question for evaluation in the American public opinion and mind. If you look at American public opinion and you look at the debates that are being waged, not only in the press and the media, but also in Congress, there are all these people who are saying, you know, maybe this is going to open this space for Islamic groups to take over, that this is all about, you know, Islamic groups taking over rather than about ordinary people seeking democracy. Well, the American public appears to

believe that this is really about ordinary people seeking freedom and democracy, 45 percent of the plurality think that's ordinary people -- only 15 percent say this is about Islamic groups seeking political power, and 37 percent equally. So, it is -- this interpretation, I think, that comes out of the coverage of what happened, particularly in Tahrir Square and also in Tunisia, has been critical in shaping public attitudes.

This may seem like a small story to you, but it isn't. It's a huge story if you contrast the perception of the American public during the past decade, particularly after 9/11. You recall that you had people telling them in the public discourse, "They hate us for our values, they hate us for our freedom, they hate us for our democracy." That was one of the stories that was being told in the press and you had a lot of people thinking of this more as a clash of values than anything else, and the fact that you have, you know, a plurality of the American public -- this is all, you know, about ordinary people seeking

freedom and democracy, is quite a breakthrough, quite a change from previous perceptions.

What about the likelihood of more democracy? How likely do you think it is that the changes occurring in the Middle East will lead to more democracy there? Very or somewhat likely? Not at all or not very likely? Well, they're really divided on this. So, while they think democracy will be good, they're not 100 percent sure that these changes are going to lead to democracy and you have this division, a slight majority say, yes, it's more likely.

This question, are Islam and democracy compatible? In part, because there was always a debate about that and you had people in our discourse arguing they're not compatible, and here we also had - - we asked the question this way only because it had been asked by others a few years ago, and to the extent possible, we like to ask questions that have been asked before to see if there's real change, and so we have a point of comparison here, which is September '05, and you can see there's not much

change. You know, a slight majority say it is possible for Islamic countries to be democratic, and then you have a significant minority say they're not.

View of Arab nations, this is a question about specific countries, whether or not the American public view of these countries is favorable or unfavorable, a straightforward kind of question, the same kind of question that a lot of people ask about the Arab public opinion toward the U.S., is it favorable or is it unfavorable. And we also had points of comparison here, in some cases in February of this year, in some cases -- actually, all of these are really from February, yeah, and February of 2010 actually, so two points of comparison.

So, Saudi Arabia, note that in February 2010 only 35 percent had a favorable view. Arab uprisings may have had an impact throughout the whole range of countries with the possible exception of Syria, and 44 percent now have a more favorable view of Saudi Arabia. Even Syria, where the American public views have been negative, look how negative they were in

2007, 21 percent only had a favorable view of Syria. Now 32 have a -- so, that improved even for Syria which had been very low.

Now Egypt, you can also see, that there's a slight bump, at least from February 2011, but you have the largest number of people having a positive view of Egypt, 60 percent of the American public has a favorable view of Egypt.

Now, this is the question that is critical, because when you're asking about countries, they are not sure whether you're asking about the governments, about the people, about the state, so therefore these other measures are not going to capture whether or not they have a favorable view of the Arab people specifically, and let's face it, this Arab uprising is about the people, and so what is their view of the people? That's what we really are interested in knowing, is more even than countries. And so I have to say that I went in there not knowing what I was going to get out of this, suspected, but not knowing what I was going to get, and so we have questions --

you can see, Arab people in general, people of Egypt, people of Saudi Arabia -- we had specifics in this particular case.

Well, look at the numbers. The majority of the American people have a favorable view of the Arab people, 56 percent have a favorable view of the Arab people. Of Egypt, 70 percent of the American people have a favorable view of the Egyptian people, and by the way, that is comparable to their view of the Israeli people, which is actually quite astonishing in the American context.

So, this is comparable to roughly the same number of people say they have favorable views of the Israeli people. So, that is a huge change; that is really remarkable in the big picture. And by the way, just for your information, in my 2010 Arab public opinion poll in the Arab world, a majority of the Arab people have an unfavorable view of the American people -- I'm not talking about government, I'm not talking about the United States. We asked the question specifically about the American people because there

are a lot in our discourse say that Arabs differentiate between government and the American people. Historically they have, they still do, but unfortunately what we have had because of maybe what happened over the past decade, is that actually that gap narrowed and now we have a majority of Arabs in our poll in 2010 have actually a negative view of the American people, not just the American government, and it's really striking that on the other end now you actually have this transformation where a majority of the American people have actually a positive view of the Arab people.

Effect of the uprising on views of the Arab world, here, just a direct question, which is self perception, obviously, there's no point of comparison here, so we are asking about, you know, if their level of sympathy for the Arab people have increased or decreased. And here are the results: 39 percent say the level of sympathy for the Arab people has increased, only 6 percent say it decreased, so, obviously, huge shift here. And your sense of how

similar the aspirations of the Arab people are to yours. And look at the numbers here again, 33 percent say it increased, that they are more like us, only 9 percent say decreased. So, you have measure net improvement in the perception of the Arab people happening as a consequence of these uprisings.

U.S. position toward uprisings. In responding to the popular uprisings in the following countries, do you think the U.S. should express support for the demonstrators, not take a position, or express support for government? And this is interesting because the overwhelming majority of the American people want to stay out. They don't want this to be about America, they want to stay out, and to the extent that they want to take sides, they obviously take the side of the people far more than the governments in every single country. I mean, look, you have two-thirds in the middle, two-thirds in the green are people who basically don't want to take sides, and those who want to take sides, the blue are all the people who want to support the public, the

demonstrators, and on the right, the brown, is all those people who want to support the governments, and it goes from a huge margin of 26 percent support the people and only 4 percent support the government in the case of Syria, but even in Saudi Arabia where you have a sense in America that this is a relationship that is very important to American foreign policy, then you still have more people say they support the demonstrators than support the government, 21 to 10 percent, but, again, the overwhelming majority is neutral.

Compatibility of Muslim and western cultures, you have, it is possible to have common ground, you have 59 percent and you have 41 percent say, you know, violent conflict is inevitable, which is pretty significant minority, actually.

Now, a specific question about support for action in Libya. This is, of course, important -- we did this largely for the American discourse because there was always a debate about how much support the U.S. should provide in Libya and you know this is

controversial because when the President agreed to take part in the military operations in Libya, he had to notify -- he had to take the action and then he has to come back to Congress within 60 days, he's doing that just now, and there's a whole debate in Congress about whether this is desirable or not. And whether to increase the support beyond the current levels, and this particular question we asked if the public approved or disapproved of the military action in Libya in which the U.S. took part. And, again, we had a point of comparison, a month earlier there was also another poll that asked the same question, and basically that other question was a CBS News poll and we repeated the same question just to see if there's any change, and here's the -- still a majority of Americans supported -- as of April, support the military action in Libya and 43 disapproved, but that's a decline from a month earlier, I mean, the trend, is really kind of more against, than for, given the discourse because it's 68 percent supported in March.

When we asked about arming the rebels if the air campaign does not succeed in protecting civilians, would you support or oppose the U.S. and other countries providing arms to Libyan rebels, and here, I think, the American public is really reluctant to intervene, you know, 59 percent oppose arming the rebels, and that's what American politicians are facing, basically. Yes, there's sympathy with the public, they're inspired by it, it's changing their views, but they don't really want to intervene, they don't really want to be part of it, this is quite clear in many of the polls that have been taken, not just our own.

Approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Now, this is interesting, and I'm going to give you a little bit of background on this because this is a question similar to questions we have asked in the past, and you can see here, there's one that we actually asked in November 2010 and I've asked similar questions in the past. In its effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, what position do you

believe that U.S. should take, lean toward Israel, lean toward neither side, or lean toward the Palestinians? So, the real question is, how does the American public see its government's role in these negotiations. And look at this, again, not much change since November 2010, it's pretty identical, but you have roughly two-thirds of the American public saying lean toward neither side. And by the way, this has been consistent over the past decade. We asked this after 9/11, we've asked it -- you know, five years ago, I've asked this question, I think, five times in the past decade, and every time we have basically two-thirds of the American public saying they want the U.S. to take neither side, to lean toward neither side.

But look at the extreme ends of this. Of those who want the U.S. to take sides, of course, far more people want to take the side of Israel than take the side of the Palestinians, so actually in the most recent polls, a ration five to one, 27 percent want the U.S. to lean toward Israel and 5 percent want it

to lean toward the Palestinians.

Before I go into this other one, I just want to give you another perspective here. I'm not showing you the slides, but we've done analyses of this, demographic analysis. You know, who are the people who are in the green? Who are the people in the blue? Who are the people in the brown? Okay? We've done demographic analysis, and here's the answer to it. If you are a Republican, you are much more likely to be in the blue. In fact, among Republicans, over 40 percent -- actually, over 45 percent of those who identify themselves as Republicans are in the blue, they want the U.S. to lean toward Israel. Among the Democrats, that's less than 15 percent. So, there's a huge difference between Democrats and Republicans on this. That tells you a story, by the way, about why -- those of you who are following the debates since the President's speech and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel criticizing him for referring to 67 borders, and who are the people who are attacking the President? They are all on the Republican side and

their base is far more supportive of Israel, so you can see that, you know, much of that is on the blue, much on the support right there.

Demographically, women are far more neutral. The young people are far more neutral. African-Americans are far more neutral. Hispanic Americans are far more neutral. So, essentially, really, the profile of people in the blue of wanting to lean toward Israel is white, male, older, Republicans. That is really the profile, and more people on the neutral or left will be more female, Democrat, younger, and African-Americans, Hispanic. So, it's an interesting demographic, really, the base of the Democratic Party, separate from the politics, I mean, put the politics aside about the base. The base of the Democratic Party is far more neutral or left leaning on this issue than the Republican Party, no question about that.

Administration efforts on Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which of the following is closest to your view of the Obama Administration's

diplomatic effort to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? That they're trying -- not trying hard enough, efforts are at the right level, trying too hard? There really isn't all that much change from what we've found, you know, five months before. Basically more people say it's about the right level and then they're divided on the other ends, so Americans don't have strong views on this one.

Effect of uprising on views of Arab world, increased or decreased on the following issues: your level of sympathy for the Arab people, your sense of how similar the aspirations of the Arab people are to yours, your optimism that peaceful change is possible in the Arab world, your optimism about relations of the U.S. and the Arab world -- this is a summary. So, you can see, again, that it's largely positive. The one that is sort of more divided is optimism that peaceful change is possible. You have a division here.

This is the end of the formal presentation, but I want to make some comments about the meaning, of

interpreting what does that mean, what does it mean, and tie it to the President's speech a couple of days ago.

First, it's obvious that by and large the impact of the Arab uprisings on the American public has been largely positive, that there has been a positive change in the American perception of the region, of the Arab world, and particularly, especially, of the Arab people, where you find that a majority of the American people have a favorable view of the Arab people. Nonetheless, I want to say that I cannot be absolutely certain that this is something that is going to stay. And why do I say that? Because I have done some comparison with the period during -- following 9/11. What happened in public attitudes toward 9/11? And it is actually something of a mistake to assume that 9/11 itself generated a public American perception that was overwhelming negative of Arabs and Muslims. That was not initially the case, actually, because immediately after 9/11, despite the tragedy, there were a few weeks when polls

showed, actually, that American people differentiated between al-Qaeda and the rest of the Arab and Muslim worlds, and attitudes towards Islam, even, as a religion, were positive. And it started changing a few months later. Now, why, we can argue about, but I just want to say first of all, as a matter of fact, the initial reaction, even if it's positive, it doesn't mean it stays constant, but I want to make -- connected to one other thing, which is what happens when you have a huge event, like 9/11 or like the Arab uprisings, these are major events that lead people to reassess their assumptions about the world, whether -- anybody, not just the American peoples, leading us, all of us, even analysts, to rethink what we have assumed about the Arab world.

So, these are times of paradigmatic shifts that take place. And there's always a war of -- about how you frame these issues, there's always a battle of ideas, because people are invested in the interpretations because they have policy consequences. And in the American context, what a president and

administration says and does in times of transition of this sort matters a lot. They help establish a paradigm and we have seen, in a way, that what the Bush Administration did, whether it was intended or not, had the consequence of pushing the paradigm into this clash of civilization paradigm. They didn't make that argument, by the way. Initially they differentiated between al-Qaeda and the rest, but because of the policies they took and the supporters who supported them in the public discourse, the whole debate moved in a completely different direction into a clash of civilization kind of direction and into this, they hate us for our values, kind of interpretation that took hold.

So, that is why what a president and administration says is critical and to me, when I watch President Obama's speech a couple days ago in Washington, I was not looking at it through the prism of how it's going to be perceived in the Arab world, because to me the most important message was to the American people, not to the Arab world. There was a

message to the Arab world, yes, but I know what the sentiment is like here and how people are not exactly taking words very seriously in the discourse, even when he says the right words, but it was the American context -- and if you heard what the President did, it was extremely important in the American context in the sense that it consolidates this positive interpretation of the Arab uprising because it could have taken it in a completely different direction, but it's consolidating this positive interpretation. He is talking about embracing it, he's talking about the values are like ours, and if you look at the examples that he used in his speech, invoking Rosa Parks, invoking the Tea Party, they are like us. He's giving examples of the sort of things that motivate the Arab public in their pursuit of freedom and democracy, that they're like the American people -- and the Berlin Wall analogy, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall analogy, a positive analogy in the American mind, that is a consolidation of what is already emerging in the press because there will be a battle of ideas in the

U.S. over how to interpret these events, particularly when things turn negatively, as they're bound to in some places, and for that reason I think it's very important to watch this, but for now, this is a very good start and I think we all have an interest in making sure that the interpretations correspond to reality.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you very much, Professor Telhami, for what was a very interesting talk. We're now going to move on to the question and answer session, but I'm going to use my privilege as the moderator to ask you the first question. And if I could ask you a two-part question, firstly. The sample size that's used in the poll is about 804, 806. How reliable would that poll be in terms of distributed across the U.S.? And, secondly, do you see variances across the U.S. in terms of different states, in terms of how these perceptions are held? Thank you.

MR. TELHAMI: First of all, in terms of sampling, this is a national representative sample stratified demographically, so we have a lot of confidence in it that it's nationally representative. The samples, 800 is good, it gives you a plus or minus margin of error at 3.5 percent, but it is done in a stratified sampling mechanism that makes sure that you have representation across the U.S., and we see when we repeat these, whether it's with 800 or 1200 or 1500 -- which is quite significant, by the way, in the polling -- that by and large you get the same results, and, you know, there's never actually a debate in the U.S. among pollsters that these are pretty reliable in that regard. It's just a question of the timing.

Now, do you see variation? We do, as I said, demographically for sure, along the lines that I suggested. They're generally less regional, as much as they are driven by party affiliation, age is really a much more important factor in the U.S. than it appears to be in Arab public opinion here -- and education is a variable that matters, and gender,

actually, is one that matters in this. There seems to be sort of an ideological divide on some of these issues.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you for that. Dr. (inaudible). Please.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Professor Shibley, that was very interesting and inspiring lecture. I'd like to ask about -- now when you explain what was the message to the Americans, I was wondering what is the message that was sent to the Israelis, bearing in mind that just a few hours after the speech, there was an announcement of 1,000 plus colonies or buildings to be built in Jerusalem. Thank you.

MR. TELHAMI: Let me see that I understood the question. What was the message of the President's speech to the Israeli people? I don't think the speech was intended for the Israeli people. I mean, maybe he will today when he speaks at AIPAC, which is, obviously, a pro-Israel group in Washington and that will be more oriented. I think the president had,

really, a choice to make. One is, he needed to speak to the Arab awakening. This is a theme that's important and a lot of people asked the question, both in the Middle East and around the world, about, so what are the set of the principles that are driving your policy? Are you being inconsistent? Why are you getting involved here but not here? Are you for the governments or are you for the people? Why are you hesitating or why are you embracing?

So, he had to make a statement, both to the American people, to Congress -- remember, he's asking for aid from Congress at a time when Congress is not very open to foreign aid. He had to make a case why it is in the American interest to support revolutions, including Egypt and Tunisia. So, his big statement was really about the Arab revolutions, but how could you speak about the Arab revolutions, particularly the Arab world, about Arab aspirations, about public aspirations, without speaking about a cornerstone of the policy in the region which is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

So, he had to address the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the question was, how much does he say about this speech -- in this speech? There were people, and the press is full of stories about the divide within the Administration. There were people who were encouraging him to put an all out plan, you know, an American plan, principles, how to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, like Clinton did, but more, you know, more detailed on all the issues, and the Administration obviously considered that. They considered putting out something far more detailed and the other was to just be more in terms of laying out the principles without getting into details.

So, what happened was that clearly the President decided that that was not the right time to put an all out plan, so he ended up basically articulating more limited principles, particularly what he said about the borders, which is the 1967 plus swaps. Now, that didn't seem to be particularly bold in the sense that that's sort of implicit, although no

president has ever said it exactly the same way, it's been, you know, more or less understood to be roughly where the negotiations are going and so the surprise, I think, for the Administration was how much they've come under attack from the Israelis for this position, particularly from the Prime Minister of Israel, and then suddenly from the Republican leadership in Congress, that put him on the defensive in a big way.

So, the story that could have been about what he said about the Arab revolutions -- I mean, I just arrived here at 2:00 o'clock in the morning. The past two days I've been doing nothing but doing radio and television appearances, you know, on the speech in the U.S., and the first question is not about, you know, Arab revolutions, it's about what the President said about 1967 and Israel.

So, that's the prism through which he's being evaluated, and that's a fact of life in American politics that he's having to deal with. We'll see what happens today particularly after his speech, which is

going to be more oriented toward Israel by virtue of the venue, which is the pro-Israel group, AIPAC.

SPEAKER: First, for Mr. Telhami, Why do you think uprising turn to revolutions?

MR. TELHAMI: Why am I what?

SPEAKER: Please, please, let me complete. You're using the term uprising. We know that these are revolutions. The second I'm going to speak in Arabic as a respect for the Egyptian revolution. I am a member of the Egyptian Revolution Council, so I elect to send some messages to the American Administration, so I am going to speak in Arabic.

MR. WRIGHT: Please, sir, can you make a specific question.

SPEAKER: Quickly please. Yeah, yeah, give it two minutes. (Speaking in Arabic.)

MR. WRIGHT: Can you please state your question specifically?

SPEAKER: No ask question. He ask me --

MR. WRIGHT: Okay, please sit down then. Please sit down.

SPEAKER: So, you don't like to hear me --

MR. WRIGHT: No, I just --

SPEAKER: No, no, just hear me.

MR. WRIGHT: The question is for the speaker, not for yourself --

SPEAKER: I know the revolution more than anyone here.

MR. WRIGHT: Please, sir. Thank you. Thank you. You can engage with the speaker after the --

MR. TELHAMI: No, it's a fair question. It's a fair question. I think it's a good question. (Speaking in Arabic.) You know, if you look across the entire Arab world, in some places we've had revolutions, and in some places we're just having uprisings that may turn into revolutions, we don't know yet. So, when you -- they all start with uprisings. Uprising is not a negative term. As you can see from the title, I had it here as the Arab awakening, because I think it is an awakening, awakening (speaking in Arabic), so it is that. It's a public empowerment that obviously is resulting all

this. It's -- so, the terminology is really -- you can't ignore what it is. No one, I think -- in Egypt it's a revolution, in Tunisia it's a revolution, and I think in Yemen it's a revolution whether it succeeds or not, one can argue. I think in Libya it's a revolution. So, I don't think there's -- anyone will disagree with that.

Now, about the -- I'm not here to defend, obviously, what the United States does or doesn't do in its foreign policy, but on this particular issue, if you think about what happened on Egypt particularly, and in the case of Tunisia, for the Egyptian president -- for the American President, he has been under attack and he is already being labeled as throwing Mubarak under the bus. If you think about how quickly the Administration went from, this is the anchor of our foreign policy in the Middle East, to you must go, with a message to him directly, with the President calling and you must go, it was one week. I mean, for -- it's really extraordinary, actually, to think about it, and we must be realistic. I mean, it

doesn't matter what the heart of a man is, whether he's in the White House or anywhere else, you can't decouple what you do from all the issues and interests that you have, so I thought, actually, the evolution of the American position on Egypt and Tunisia was remarkably rapid given all of the assumptions of how governments work and how bureaucracies work and what recommendations come and what relationships do you have. So, I think it was actually more rapid than I expected. It doesn't mean that, you know, you can't criticize American foreign policy, but on this issue I didn't think it was actually as reluctant as people seem to suggest.

SPEAKER: Thank you. (Speaking in Arabic.) First, I'd like to thank the Brookings center and to (inaudible) for providing us with a good opportunity, really, to listen to the latest trends in the American public view. My question is really -- I have just two quick questions. The first one -- in one of the graphs, actually, I think it was about Egypt, the views of Americans on Egypt, where actually you had

something like -- it was 60 and then in February it had dropped to 40 and then it picked up to 58. So, I don't know why, actually, to drop that particular month. Any particular event? That's number one.

The other question, I think, now, we know, actually, American view -- the public view, is really formed by the media outlets whether it is a TV or, you know, newspapers or other outlets. I'd like to know whether there actually there has been some sort of content analysis done in this regard to see actually -- since the uprising or revolution or awakening, whatever you want to call it, occurred in the Arab world, were there actually also simultaneous change in the coverage of the newspapers, so therefore, they actually helped to reshape the American view or this was not really considered? Thank you.

MR. TELHAMI: Yeah, no, these are really good questions. Now, for Egypt, I know what you're referring to. I don't remember the exact thing particularly for that. It was just a small bump down, so I look at it as basically being constant,

relatively constant, you know, roughly between 50 and 60 percent on the view of Egypt. The view of Egypt, by the way, had been more or less positive in the U.S. it just went down a little bit after 9/11, in the middle years, but the striking thing is about the view of the Egyptian people specifically.

Now, on the American coverage of the uprisings, I think that it was very hard to ignore, you know, the kind of demonstrations that were taking place in Tunisia and Egypt, Tahrir Square, particularly, and it was impossible to ignore that they were so peaceful, that people were basically calling (speaking in Arabic) and the media covered that, they covered it, and there was, in fact, in some ways, I think the journalists were so captured, captivated by it, columnists who typically are critical of the Middle East went and spent time in Tahrir Square. The New York Times was having live coverage, had a very sympathetic columnists who were blogging daily from Tahrir Square, so there was, I think, an extensive coverage of it, you know, with an

immediacy and I have to say something really interesting is that Al Jazeera English, which is not available in the U.S. in most markets -- it's available in the Washington market, but in most markets it's not even available, had huge increase in viewership on the internet. This is actually kind of -- the Arab awakening has in some ways done to Al Jazeera English what the 1991 war did to CNN. I mean, it has increased the interest and, you know, it doesn't hurt them that the Secretary of State says, you know, something positive about watching Al Jazeera English or John Kerry, you know, a leader in the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee saying that he watches Al Jazeera in his office. All of that has actually increased. In fact, the numbers I saw was something like two million hits.

So, Al Jazeera English actually has gotten a lot of people watching right now. If it had been available on cable markets, I think, you would have had even larger viewership, but there's a lot of interest, a lot of interested people knowing the story

as it is and watching live coverage of what's happening.

MR. WRIGHT: Well, in the interest of being representative, can I invite some of the students, maybe, to ask a question? Silent majority. So, Dr. (inaudible)?

SPEAKER: I just wanted to follow up with Dr. Wright's question about the data that you collected on the respondents. You spoke of variables in politics and region. Did you collect any data on religious affiliation? If so, did you find that to be a significant variable? And if you didn't collect that data, I'm wondering why not?

MR. TELHAMI: We collected and the one area that is clearly -- particularly on the Arab-Israeli issue matters a lot, is the evangelical Christians. And that is actually the Republican base. I mean, what's striking is that, you know, when people think about, particularly on the Israel issue, people think of the public constituency being American Jews. Obviously American Jews care about Israel, but in the

polls actually that are conducted among American Jews, it is the seventh -- Israel is the seventh most important issue to American Jews in the ranking of issues, and as you can see, whether they like Obama or don't like Obama, the people who are calling Barack Hussein Obama in the elections, and he still gets 78 percent of American Jews voting for him as Democrats. They didn't know whether they were going to like him on the Israel issue or not, their constituency is the Democratic Party and they go with it even if they don't rank it highly.

Institutionally, it's different, because obviously American Jewish organizations, and particularly campaign funding, tends to be more to the right on this and that's another issue, but the core constituency actually right now, for whatever reason, we could analyze the history of it, it's a complicated history, is really the evangelical right. I don't say all evangelical Christians because they're divided, it's the evangelical right and they tend to be the core of the Republican Party.

And so when these Republican leaders are taking the President on on the 67 borders, they look like they're appeasing Netanyahu but they're actually trying to appease some of the base, and that's something that is not fully understood, I think, in the region, how American politics have evolved.

Talking about the media. They have their own media, and if you go to some of the media that they watch, Israel is a huge part of the story for that media. It wasn't always that way, by the way. This is not something that is fundamentally core of the relationship with Israel. It is something that only started happening in the 1980s with the Reagan revolution, so to speak, it created a new coalition in the right for the Republican Party beginning with the 1980s, and then it was consolidated, and then there was a deliberate policy from the Israeli right to build up this religious right support.

And so Netanyahu, for example, in his Likud party have worked extremely hard to create this base and consolidate and build relations, and a lot of

people -- that's why a lot of people see him as essentially trying to play this Republican-Democrat, even in this election in terms of the reaction that he's choosing to take vis-à-vis the President.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you, doctor.

SPEAKER: My colleague here asked about the evangelical Americans moving to the right over time toward Israel, naturally, but the question is, that group has really been pushing so hard that produce over time an American un-evenhanded policy in the Middle East, especially with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict. My question to you is, to what extent this is going to continue, because it is not really Republican or Liberal in the room that's deciding whether American foreign policy is going to shift to the right or to the left, it's that evangelical American in the middle which is populating so many small towns in America that has the upper hand right now in conducting American foreign policy. How do you see that shifting?

MR. TELHAMI: And by the way, again, I refer

to the evangelical right because you have to keep in mind the evangelicals are highly divided among themselves and there are people actually who are not on that side at all and argue even the majority, so -- but there is a significant -- what makes the evangelical right extremely important is not that they have opinions that are pro-Israel, actually, most Americans do or don't have a particularly strong opinion, it's that they rank this issue high on their priorities because in American politics what matters most -- the people who matter most are people who care deeply about an issue. You can have an opinion, but if it's number 20 on your list, it really doesn't matter. And so it's just how high you rank it.

And so what's really critical for the evangelical right, for a lot for reasons, that they rank this issue high on their priorities and they make it a political issue, and that's not going away.

And so if you say, is the U.S. likely to be less supportive of Israel, I don't think so. I don't see the sociology or the dynamics. The question, of

course, is how you define pro-Israel, and that's where the argument is in the American discourse, is that people who say, well, you cannot have, even from the point of view of U.S. supporting Israel, A, it doesn't have to be taking everything that the Israeli government says, and B, in the long-term, if you take all the interests into the account, you're going to have to have a two-state solution. So, that's where the argument is in terms of the American political debate.

But there is no one, other than the fringe, in America, who argue that the U.S. should abandon Israel. That's not there in the American political discourse at all.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. Mohammad, yes?

SPEAKER: (Inaudible), student of international affairs. My question is what is the consequences of Arab revolution in American views? Also, how you can evaluate the Arab revolution, at least until today? Thank you.

MR. TELHAMI: Well, you know, I think the

Arab revolutions are going to force a reassessment in American foreign policy beyond what the President said in his speech. I think this is a sea change. I think, you know, if you look at, regardless of what happens in every country, and it's going to differ, you know, some countries are going to have a regime change, some countries are going to have a new coalition arising, but one thing that is clear is that now you have a public voice that simply cannot be ignored. Even if you are a government that is going to stay in power, you can no longer ignore your public. It's just a matter of new reality. And to my mind that's not going to change. It's not going to change because it is not caused by, but empowered by the information revolution.

In the Arab public opinion polls that I conduct, in 2002, most Arabs said that their first source of news is television stations within their own boundaries. In 2010, most Arabs say that their first source of news is -- comes from outside their own boundaries, Al Jazeera being obviously the number one,

but it's -- you know, there are a lot of others too.
And so they've lost control.

When you look at the expansion of the use of the Internet, it has been so rapid that just five years ago when I was measuring it in the region, I didn't have enough users to have meaningful statistical analysis. This year it is so significant that I can make association of -- differentiation between people who use the Internet and people who don't. That's only going to explode in the long-term. So, that means that there's no avoiding of this public voice. That public voice has been angry with American foreign policy, it has been angry with the governments over foreign policy issues, and has been dismissed by governments, in large part. I mean, if you're an Arab government trying to take a political decision or foreign policy decision, and you get a public opinion poll and you're where the public were and then you were under international pressure to do something else, it's much easier for you to ignore your public than to ignore the international pressure.

That equation has changed dramatically. Right now I think no government can just avoid listening to the pulse of Arab public opinion and that creates changes in foreign policy, even in countries that don't have full revolutions, and that means it changes the equation for every government, including the American government, in shaping its policy. I think it's going to -- obviously, a lot of people are going to just sit and watch and see how it's going to unfold because let's be honest, this is not -- this revolution is an Arab revolution, it's not an American revolution or a European revolution. No one can control it and it's still unfolding, and the extent to which the outside world can make a difference is small. And so people will wait and see, but there's no question it's going to have huge consequences.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. Yes, sir?

SPEAKER: Thank you. Good afternoon. You spoke at the end of your talk about Obama's speech and the need for interpretations to correspond to reality. Last week in this room we had a screening of a

documentary by Edward Siad in which he talked about, you know, how representations of Arabs were often formed to serve western interests. I was wondering to what extent you think the recent events provide Americans with a more authentic lens on Arab people and their values apart from, you know, how western interests would want to portray them?

MR. TELHAMI: There's no question that they provide the American public with something more authentic, and they've seen it, and this is, of course, the result, but let's be realistic about how things happen. I mean, when, you know -- let's think about this region, you know, the Arab world. If you're looking at what's happening in America or look at what's happening in Venezuela or you're looking at what's happening in, you know, Russia, in large part you're interpreting it through the prism of your own issues. You focus on it; you don't follow a lot of issues about Russia. What do you know about it? I mean, in my own public opinion polls in 2009, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela was number one in terms of

popularity, in places even like Egypt. Now, why were they embracing him? Well, they were embracing him because he took a position that was pro-Palestinian, particularly in Gaza, and there was a vacuum of leadership in the Arab world and just the same way they rewarded Hassan Nasrallah of Hezbollah the year before. Now, if I were to poll now about Venezuela's position, Hugo Chavez is not going to be number one. I can tell you, it's not because people know about how he's running Venezuela or what is the position they have about Venezuelan culture or politics or is he a good president or bad president. It's just because right now they see him as Muammar el-Qaddafi's friend and that's going to basically create a new paradigm about, you know, Hugo Chavez.

And so what I'm saying is that I think it's too much to expect that we're going to have true, authentic interpretations happening anywhere. It's always through some limited prism. But I think even that limited prism of American interest wasn't -- you know, was too narrow to view the Middle East in a way

that was constructive. And I think right now that prism has expanded. Regardless, we've had a paradigm which I call the post-9/11 paradigm, and I think the Arab uprisings, Arab awakening, in essence is chipping away at that paradigm. That's significant. You know, what takes its place I think is still unfolding and not easy to predict.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. Yes?

SPEAKER: First of all, you are welcome in Qatar University. We are really glad to have an Arab that represents us in Washington with such ideology and such thought. So, what I'm asking -- let's just -- for Arabs and Muslim, specifically, let's not stay on these clashes and these anti-religious things and let's take this opportunity for our benefit, to take a step for freedom, for democracy, for whatever we want to get for Arab world, but forget about old traditional thoughts. Let's take this opportunity and look at America. What the speech of Obama -- as in a positive way, like he's talking about Muslims and goodwill in front of all America. He's talking about,

like -- he's not terrified, he's not afraid about what's going on. Maybe let's think this way and -- sorry. Sorry, just the speech, it's like -- it's very true to the Muslims. Okay, let's take the importance of this event, okay -- look, in America it's (inaudible) history. Muslims and Arabs since 1600 or 1500 years old. So, we didn't make this a (inaudible) that they did. Let's learn from them. What we think is things like -- really I don't think they're unintelligent at all. Let's take this approach, that's all. Sorry.

MR. TELHAMI: There was really no question, it was a comment, so unless -- if you want me to, if there's a question I'd be happy to answer.

MR. WRIGHT: That's fine. Okay, Dr. (inaudible), please.

SPEAKER: Thank you for this very informative presentation on the views of the American public on the revolutions. I actually was wondering whether, as you said, the assumptions we made out of events is very important. These will guide our

policies, the paradigm that you create, and I was wondering whether the assumption made about these revolutions is a valid one and these 100 percent valid. Some part of it may be valid, but it is really about politics? Is it really about freedom? Is it really about democracy? Or is it more about decency of life and people having jobs and then more about -- not the political system, but more about economical systems? So, is capitalism maybe the solution? Maybe this is a problem with the current economic model and that needs maybe to be addressed and debated in addition to maybe the debate on the political system.

MR. TELHAMI: Well, I could give you my own interpretation. Obviously, that's a different lecture, but I'll give you my short take on it because obviously I'm a student of politics in general. I'm a political scientist and I study these issues, but I'm obviously a student of the region in particular, and I have a take on this.

You know, economics always matters, obviously. Jobs matter, food matters, it's a critical

part of what everyone wants, and it's, in part, obviously about that. But I think it's much bigger than that. And I don't think it's wrong to call it a dignity revolution. I think it's actually right to call it a dignity revolution because it is, in the end, about dignity. And, you know, when you -- I was in Tahrir Square the week after Mubarak fell in that big demonstration out there with hundreds of thousands of people out in the street and the slogan was, (speaking in Arabic), "Raise your head, you're an Egyptian." Now, if you think about that, just think about what that means in and of itself is telling because we've been measuring this issue of identity of people, how in many cases it is that people didn't think these rulers represented who they are and they were humiliated. And part of the humiliation is complex, some of it is economic. I mean, when you're poor and you see a lot of rich people around you when you can't get -- when you have no way of advancing yourself, it's part of the humiliation. It's part of the humiliation. It's not the whole humiliation

story, because if you look at the people who engineered the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, they were not the poor. They were actually people, in some cases, who had good jobs and people who were educated and people who were on Facebook and people who generated that. It is, in the first order, about dignity and I think it's both internal and external, and I think people who think that foreign policy isn't part of that dignity formulation, I think, are missing it because it is about foreign policy and it is about domestic politics. And I think in the case of Egypt particularly, a country I know a lot about and I visit frequently, I think that if you look at that decade of humiliation, of the previous decade, of course the domestic part was always there, but to my mind the three most important things that drove things back to the people that this government doesn't stand for me, was support for the 2003 Iraq war, the government position on the war with Hamas -- with Hezbollah in 2006, and what happened with Hamas and the war with Hamas in 2008-2009. Those issues over which, you

know, there was so much coverage and so much emotion wrapped into the sense of who they are, drove home the widening gap between public identity and the government.

Nonetheless, we know how revolutions unfold. Economics is always part of it, and basic security, order, and always the fear is, if you don't take care of that, then things are going to get out of hand, and so I think that therefore the economic issue is paramount in assuring the success of Arab revolutions regardless of what actually drove them, because that's always going to be a central part of how it's going to unfold.

MR. WRIGHT: Yes, sir.

SPEAKER: (Off mic) public opinion. Do you find that Americans are well informed about Arab countries and the Arab-Israeli conflict? Do you poll on that?

MR. TELHAMI: You know, what's interesting is that there is no public that is fully informed about the outside world. I mean, even here, you know,

people think they know -- they know a lot about foreign policy aspects, but what do they know about society? I mean, and one of the fascinating stories is that when we -- I study empathy, I have some polling on empathy. Under what circumstances can people empathize with someone else, particularly an enemy or someone they criticize? And the most important demographic is actually proximity, that is that including Arab attitudes toward the U.S. and U.S. attitudes toward the Arab world, we ask people, you know, what is -- do you have a favorable view of the U.S., among Arabs in the region, or do you have a favorable view of the Arabs in the U.S. If you answer yes to the following question: have you ever visited, have you ever had a member of the family study there? Have you had a lot of interactions with it? Then the chance that you're going to say yes is much higher because obviously that's part of the -- and so most people are not going to be informed in that sense. The information is always going to be somewhat limited, but at some level people make judgments in

surprising ways. I mean, the fact that people are internalizing that these Arab revolutions are really about ordinary people seeking freedom and democracy, not about some groups trying to take over -- power at a time when you have a lot of people telling them that, saying, this is Iran trying to do it or this is Al-Qaeda trying to take control, and they're not buying into it, it tells you the public is often picking things up much more than we assume.

SPEAKER: Well, thank you very much first for Brookings Center and Qatar University. Professor Shibley, please, in your presentation the usage of terminology like Islam, Islamic countries, Islamic groups, Muslim world, then Arab nations, Arab countries, and the democracy in Arab world and Muslim world, this interchange, the sample used there, do they have the difference between the Islam, you know, like say in Malaysia or Indonesia or Turkey and the Arab world? The concept of theoreticals, is it only pertaining to the Arab world? What about Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran? And forget about the administration

where they have, you know, the Iran versus -- or the Shi'a-Sunni conflict in their foreign policy. But what about the sample? I mean, in the question used -- we hear, you know, this interchange of this terminology. Are they aware about the differences in this? And please, if you give us, you know, some light on this.

MR. TELHAMI: Well, it's good that you point that out because that's one point that I make all the time in the U.S. about differentiation. In fact, I wrote an article saying, beyond the terminology of the Muslim world, that we should get away from that because what does that mean? It's biasing a whole set of countries on the basis of just one characteristic as if it's the paramount characteristic that explains.

I think by and large, obviously, among analysts, there is a clear differentiation. I think right now what is emerging, particularly in the Arab awakening is that people are beginning to focus specifically on the Arab world, not on Muslim countries, broadly. People know the difference

between Pakistan and Egypt when you ask them about sort of the contrast. They've come to learn a lot more about Pakistan and Afghanistan because American troops are there. And they know, you know, they've come to pick up the differences. But I think there is a terminology problem. I always had a problem with this idea that we all kind of were forced to use in some ways in the U.S, of the notion of a Muslim world. What does that mean? I mean, you can talk about Muslims. You could talk about -- but does Indonesia have more in common with Lebanon than Greece has with Lebanon? I don't think so. I mean, you can -- so, I think it's a good point to make. We try to make it regularly in the discourse in the U.S. and some people get it, some people don't.

MR. WRIGHT: Okay, we'll take two final questions. Dr. (inaudible).

SPEAKER: Thank you. It seems to me from the presentation that the American opinion or the American people, they are ahead of their government to forming their opinion on what's going on in the Arab

street. My question is, how do you explain the delay of reaction of Obama's Administration to the developments in the region? It started with invasion and it continues the same, I would say, attitude of reaction. Thank you.

MR. TELHAMI: I'm not sure, you know, which one we're referring to, but as I said, I mean, if you look at -- let's start with where it all started which is Tunisia. Actually, the American reaction was very rapid in Tunisia taking the position against Ben Ali, very quickly, asked to leave. In Egypt, as I said, the Administration position evolved more rapidly. I mean, nobody expected -- people didn't know, you know, how massive this is. I mean, we all were -- and let's keep some historical perspective here. Tell me one person who expected this including those of us, you know, I've been studying public opinion. I know how angry the public is. I say when I do my public opinion polls every year, I say the question is never when will Arabs have reason to revolt, it is why haven't they revolted already. And so we all knew

that, I mean, that wasn't a surprise. I mean, the reason for it, the explanation was, it's not enough to be angry. You need to organize.

And so, well, and when you look at it and you just didn't think it was going to happen. I even wrote a cartoon once, the only -- I write a lot in newspapers as well, sort of, more public policy stuff and op-ed pieces. I only did one cartoon op-ed in my life and it was in the Los Angeles Times, and it was about this dilemma of public opinion because if I say -- and I wrote about it in 1997, I mean, this is not recent, this is like 14 years ago, and it was that if I start saying there's going to be a revolution next year and there's no revolution. And now I'll say, okay, next year, because it didn't happen this year, there's no revolution. Okay, next year, and then I do it five times and people are dismissing me as an idiot, and then one day I say, okay, there's going to be no revolution, and boom, it happens. And so it's much easier to be wrong one time than 20 times in a row, even though deep down you know something's going

to happen, but that's even at a level of analyst or somebody who's very close to it.

So, imagine if you're a politician and you know what your assumptions are about politics and this is not your central issue in any way, and you're interpreting events and you have functional things going on every day. When you say that Mubarak, Mubarak, Mubarak, just isn't just Mubarak. Mubarak was the military, which was around Mubarak, the intelligence was around Mubarak, and you are the United States of America. And as the United States of America you have forces in Egypt, you have transit in Egypt, you have coordinations on policies related to Iraq, on policies related to the Gulf, on policies related to the Arab-Israeli issue, so operationally, every single day, these are the people you're working on for implementation of critical decisions and policies that have to do with -- so, I, to my mind, I was surprised by how fast the Administration went from, he's our guy, to he should go. I thought it happened relatively quickly. I was one of the people

asking for it to happen earlier, but frankly, there's no reason why they should have listened to me. I mean, I was still surprised by how it happened.

MR. WRIGHT: I'll let Salman ask the final question.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Shibley, you know, last Sunday, actually, a week to the day, two significant things happened on the Palestinian day of Nakba, the Nakba day. One, you had the mixing of the Arab uprisings with the age old grievances -- decades old grievances of Palestinians expressing similar sentiments. The other is that this washed up onto the provisional borders of Israel. Now, I'd love you to put on your own empathy hat, with perhaps more marches and protests planned by Palestinians, how would a non-violent movement and uprising from Palestinians impact on an Israeli public?

MR. TELHAMI: Significant, I think. I think, you know, what happened on that day when you had, I think, over 15 people get killed and many, many others got wounded, it had a very important

psychological impact, I think, in Israel about sort of, you know, the possible impact of this broader awakening, public awakening, or what might happen in a way that -- you know, what if you have 20,000 peaceful Palestinians march on a settlement? Not into Israel, but on a settlement, let's say, you know, what would happen? And I think this is the kind of contingency that hasn't.

We don't even have to go into the imagination to look for an answer. If you look back to the First Palestinian Intifada in 1987, when it happened, it started mostly peacefully and to the extent that there was violence, there was actually stone throwing, and it captured the world imagination, and actually the Israeli government's problem, initially, was about a framing problem of trying to delegitimize it because a lot of sympathy emerged with the Palestinians including within Israel itself, so it created a dynamic. So, it could happen.

But I want to end, actually, on a theme related to some of the questions that were asked about

American foreign policy, and it's really interesting because I get the question, why hasn't America reacted more quickly? Why hasn't the President done this? Why hasn't he told Mubarak to go? Our two pieces in the first couple weeks of the Mubarak -- the whole Egyptian crisis, one, when it just started and one -- it so happened I wrote -- just before Mubarak fell, but was published the day he fell. The first one was, don't make the Arab uprisings about America because these are not in the first place about the United States, and the U.S. shouldn't matter one way or the other, and stay out of it, this is for the Arab people to decide. Don't engineer an outcome or appear to be engineering an outcome. So, a lot of the hesitation initially by the Administration actually was about that. When do they intervene and how do they intervene without getting a backlash instead of helping? So, beyond saying, in principle we support the aspiration of the people, what do you do? And that's not to be underestimated because right now -- and you're going to get it both ways. You know, when

you intervene, people are going to tell you you're meddling, when you don't intervene they say, why didn't you react? And that is something that should result in some soul searching here as well, because it is a dilemma for an American leader who actually wants to do something constructive and his instinct is in the right place.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. WRIGHT: Professor Telhami, Salman Shaikh, on behalf of Qatar University, I would like to thank you both for a wonderful presentation, very informative, and I think one that gives us a lot of food for thought. I'm mindful, of course that, you know, empathy, in terms of understanding, you know, public opinions, it's of course very important for that to translate to the public policy process, but I would like to hand over to Salman just to give some final remarks as well. Thank you both.

SPEAKER: No, I just want to thank you as well, Steven, for great moderating. In terms of

housekeeping, we have -- thanks very much to Qatar University. We have, I think, a light lunch for you downstairs. We're also going to make, I think, a very major announcement, something we're very pleased with, with Dr. Shaikh here about a joint visiting fellowship between Qatar University and the Brookings Doha Center, so I'd like to invite you all downstairs. Once again, thank you very much, Shibley, for this great talk. Thank you.

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