THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Brookings Project on U.S. Relations

With the Islamic World

NOW WHAT?

HOW EGYPT'S CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE IS INFLUENCING DOMESTIC POLITICS

Washington, D.C.

Tuesday, July 28, 2009

ANDERSON COURT REPORTING
706 Duke Street, Suite 100
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

PARTICIPANTS:

Welcome and Introduction:

STEPHEN GRAND, Fellow and Director
Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World
Saban Center at Brookings

Featured Speaker:

MIRETTE MABROUK
Ford Foundation Visiting Fellow
Editor-at-Large
American University in Cairo Press

* * * * *

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. GRAND: Welcome, everyone. I'm Steve Grand. I'm Director of the Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World which is housed within the Saban Center for Middle East Policy here at Brookings.

For the last 5 months we've had the great pleasure of having with us in residence as a Ford Foundation Visiting Fellow, Mirette Mabrouk. Mirette comes to us from Cairo where she was the founding publisher beginning in May 2005 of "The Daily News Egypt," the first independent English-language newspaper in Cairo or in Egypt as a whole. And more recently has served as Associate Director of Publishing Operations and now Editor-at-Large at the University of Cairo Press.

While here at Brookings, Mirette has been preparing for us an analysis paper that's in its final stages that looks at the changing media landscape in Egypt, the changing media landscape as a result of satellite television, as a result of globalization, as

a result of this thing called the internet that I have yet to fully master, and she ponders the consequences these all have had for political and social life in Egypt. She's going to talk briefly about that analysis paper which will be coming out shortly, and also look forward a bit and talk about the challenges and the steps ahead both for media professionals in Egypt, but also for U.S. policy. With that, let me turn it over to my colleague Mirette.

MS. MABROUK: Can everyone hear me? I have a pretty low voice. I'm going to try and keep this quite short in case people want to ask questions, but what we're really looking at is this, has the changing media landscape in Egypt affected national politics, and if so, how do we move forward if we're interested in democratic reform because that's really what we're looking at.

Back in 1952 with the beginning of the coup d'état, three officers turned up at the television and radio broadcast building and they're still there. The media is incredibly important when you're addressing a

country when you're telling people what to think, how to live, what questions they ask, it's enormously important. In 1960 the media in Egypt were completely nationalized because they had to belong to what later became the Arab Socialist Union, and it wasn't until 1970 after President Gamal Abdel Nasser died that President Anwar Sadat allowed A, the reintroduction of political parties other than the ruling party of opposition parties, and B, allowed them to print newspapers, and that was in 1970.

We can wrap up really quickly Egypt's changing media landscape by just talking about three things. One, satellite television, mostly independent satellite television; two, private and independent newspapers; and three, new media. Satellite television first made an introduction right after the first Gulf War, and this is when Egyptians were introduced to news, and news that hadn't been filtered through our state department, through our Ministry of Information, and then the first private Egyptian satellite channel came about in 2001. In fact, we'll

talk about them really, really briefly. Satellite channels, the independent ones are independent in their businesses, and businesses like any business have to give their consumers what they want, and what consumers wanted apparently which they found out very, very quickly was information. Consumers wanted information because they weren't getting it anywhere else. So consumers were then fed a sort of steady diet of fairly salacious programming, but also more importantly, political programming by important people like Mohamed Hassanein Heikal. That went swimmingly well until Dream in 2001 televised a speech that Mohamed Hassanein Heikal had given discussing the succession of power in Egypt. To the best of my knowledge, he still hasn't appeared on Egyptian television since then. This man is arguably the Arab world's most celebrated journalist. That's independent satellite television.

Independent newspapers, in Egypt again we want to make the distinction between independent and opposition. Opposition newspapers do not have a

particularly great reputation with readers mostly because they are not nonpartisan and they tend to be fairly strident. So it's been the independent newspapers that the people have really turned to for information. Lead among them has been "Al Masry Alyoum" which was formed in 2004, but there have been several others. El Sharook is now operating, and "El Badeel" which was a very great and very decent little paper unfortunately had to close down for financial reasons about 5 months ago and has been a great loss to journalism in Egypt.

Independent newspapers. As any journalist will be able to tell you, there is no such thing as a completely independent paper. Any paper will have an agenda, and one who says they don't have an agenda is either having you on or seriously deluded. There is no such thing. But it is independent in the sense that whereas you may have your own political beliefs, you don't necessarily try and jam down your readers' throats, you're not government, you're not a party, and therefore to a great extent you represent a great

many of your readers, and they have been very, very, very important.

The last one is new media. Of course, everyone who's been watching the Iran elections issue has paid attention to Twitter and has been discussing how new media plays into politics. The thing is, in Egypt new media has had an effect on politics in I think a fairly specific manner, two actually. One, it is a new technology and it has helped in the dissemination of information. But in my opinion that's not its greatest contribution because at the end of the day we've got to remember that in Egypt less than 25 percent of the population will have access to the internet even though the government has gone to great lengths to make it possible for people. Internet access in Egypt is very, very cheap. On average it's about $7 a month, and that's for high-speed internet cable ADSL, so internet access is very, very cheap. They instituted a program about 7 years ago that made it possible for people to buy computers and laptops on installment, so it is easier for people

to get access, but still at the end of the day you're talking about less than 25 percent of the population.

But what's really important I think about new media is that first of all it has pulled in a sector of sector or a section of society that opposition political parties have been trying to reintroduce into the political arena for the past 30 years with next to no success. Up until about 3 years ago, your average blogger was a young man in his late twenties who blogged mostly in Arabic, and the vast majority of the blogs, more than three-quarters, are in Arabic. As of about 18 months ago perhaps, women who previously constituted about 18 to 20 percent have shot up and women now represent on average about 47 percent of all bloggers. It's almost half and half and that's astonishing over a couple of years. If you just look at the number of blogs, the IDSC in Egypt which is a government internet think tank if you like estimated the number of blogs about 6 years ago at about 40. There are now by their estimate 163,200 at least count. That's an astonishing rise. Only about

18 percent of those have political content. The rest don't. The rest are about other things, but it's the 18 percent that are interesting for the purposes of this study and that are interesting to the government.

The change in society if we look at all these things, you can wrap it up into one thing. It's knowledge. It's information. You've all heard the old saying that knowledge is power. It's not just that knowledge is power, it's that knowledge if you like is like a drug, once you get some then you need more, you build up a threshold, and then whatever it is you're getting just isn't enough anymore. This started with satellite television about 10 years ago and it's continuing now. Satellite television I think for my money undoubtedly has the greatest penetration into Egyptian households. Egypt has a literacy rate of about 71 percent, so television is important for those who aren't reading, and even if you are reading, everyone still watches television because among the most important agenda setters if you like in the country are not actually the newspapers, although they

come in at a close second, but the Egyptian talk shows which people watch and people pay attention to. People watch them because they discuss what people are talking about, but they give people an opportunity to express themselves if you like. I think for anyone who attended my last talk, I apologize if you are hearing some of this again, but there have been many cases on talk shows where they have brought on people like government ministers and people will call in and will ask them questions, will berate them and will just scream over the telephone for a few minutes. In Egypt this doesn't happen. You do not berate a minor government official let alone a minister, and this is new. This is over the last 10 years, but people do now and they take it for granted that they can do this, that they can call and they can call using their own names, and again, this is a big thing in Egypt that people don't use their own names, they call in, you use your own name and you say I'm dissatisfied about this. Why isn't this being done? Newspapers come in a very, very close second because even if

you're reading, someone will read the newspaper to you and people will discuss them and people will discuss them at cafes where people talk.

Here is the thing. In our constitution, Articles 47 and 48 guarantee freedom of expression whether it's verbal it whether it's written or whether it's in the form of photography or any form allowed by law, and Article 48 allows for complete freedom of the press and freedom of expression in the press and outlaws censorship. It has one stipulation, Article 48, except in a state of emergency or you're a time of war, then a limited censorship is allowed over newspapers for matters related to national safety or security. Egypt has been in a state of emergency since 1981, so it does allow a little latitude there.

And Egypt has one of the most notoriously rigid press laws. It's actually one of 13 countries that allow for imprisonment in the case of libel or defamation. The problem is the definition of libel and defamation are not clear. What is clear is that the new revamped press law which was introduced in

2006 after President Hosni Mubarak said that the old one wasn't good enough and unfair, the new revamped one in 2006 doubled the fines and press sentences for journalists. You want to also bear in mind that any of the fines and press sentences are automatically doubled when the person being libeled or defamed is a public official so that makes public accountability a tiny bit difficult. The thing is this. People now expect to hear from newspapers but the thing is journalists play a very, very high price for this. Even in cases where a prison sentence is not handed down, these fines can be crippling. As anyone here who is a journalism will tell you, journalism is not a high-paying profession. This isn't anything you want to do if you want to make lots and lots of money. Your average journalist in Egypt will make anywhere between $78 to $300 a month. That's not a lot of money. In fact, it's a lousy salary generally speaking. So if you're slapped with a huge fine and you don't incur a prison sentence then you are faced with I have three children that I need to feed, clothe

and educate and these things are to be taken into consideration. Fines are less showy than prison sentences, but they can be even more effective. These things are difficult. They make it difficult for journalists to do their jobs and they make it difficult for the reader to know what's going on in the country. These things are very much to be taken into account.

New media as far as I can see has been a catalyst in many cases, A, because it's introduced this new sector of people; B, it's not that that many people see blogs. A blog is a specific address. You probably might not find it just by trolling the internet. You need to go and knock on the right door as it's an address. What happens is that the rest of the media pays attention to blogs, and in many of the more famous cases that I'm sure people here have heard about what happened was that a journalist picked up on the blog and went off and did a story either in the newspaper or on television and this is how people know about it, and once it's out and once people are

talking about it then it is much more difficult to contain the damage. To wrap up, the change made to the domestic politics arena has been that for the first time in a long time, in fact over the past 45 years, Egyptians are questioning, they're arguing, they're demanding more and they are more politically engaged than they have been in almost half a century and this is vital.

The problem is the way evolution works is that there is a certain amount of adaptation to the status quo and the state is marvelous at that and laws come into effect. Anyone who has been following will know that not last February, the February before, the Arab League put out a charter that essentially said among many things that the Arab press had to protect the image of Islam, they had to refrain from defaming Arab leaders and they had to bear in mind national security and sovereignty. Those encompass just about everything particularly the term national security. If you're an Egyptian, in fact if you're an Arab, that's a term you're very, very familiar with,

national security. It wraps up everything. It's very, very neat. All the Arab states signed that except for Lebanon and Qatar, because it has Al-Jazeera so it's certainly not in its interest. Then of course last July Egypt introduced a draft of a new satellite broadcast law that is even more all-encompassing. It includes any form of broadcast, and the definition for broadcast is where the sender knows that someone is going to receive the message and that includes everything from television to mobile phones, and that's the law so then you have to worry about breaking the law. Adaptation is fast and it's thorough, and the question then is if one is still interested in democratic reform, if Egyptians are still interested in continuing the engagement that's begun and if the U.S. is interested in having Egyptians continue this engagement then where do we go from here?

On the U.S. side, at the end of last March I believe U.S. aid for Egyptian democracy NGOs and civil rights associations were slashed by over 60 percent

and approval for funding for these projects was made subject to Egyptian government approval. That strikes one as just the slightest bit bizarre. In Egypt we have a proverb that says that something like that is rather like getting the cat the key to the dairy, but there you have it. This is what's happening this year and that's been approved for the 2010 budget as well. We have someone here from Freedom House who can probably tell you more about it, but last May, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with some young Egyptian activists who had been brought over on a project that had been funded and she mentioned that the U.S. has spent billions in democracy reform in Egypt. Actually, over the past 5 years the U.S. has spent about $250 million on democracy reform in Egypt and it's spent about $7.8 billion on military assistance. It isn't really for anyone to tell the U.S. how to spend its money, but if they're interested in democratic reform then spending money on organizations that are interested in democratic reform which doesn’t necessarily include the government would

seem a good place to start. The way things are going, I imagine that a stable Egypt would be very much in the interests of the U.S. So financial support is vital, but technical support is just as important as financial support. This study is dealing with media and in this case generally speaking, Egyptian universities tend to teach communication theories rather than journalism. The American University in Cairo deals with specifically journalism and has a good journalism program. I taught there. But things like that are more important. Technical assistance on journalism or whatever other programs you're looking at are just as important as the financial ones.

There is at the moment a problem with perception and I think there has been since the last administration and it's been there for about 8 years, but it's not that this perception is going to change over night and if the U.S. administration continues to slash funding for such programs, it's not going to help because people in general might know, but people who are involved in this area of society, people who

are involved in activist work will know and they will go away and they will write editorials in newspapers and people will read them and they'll say look at that, over the past 40 they've been propping undemocratic region for their own interests but now they don't want to help us. Public perception is not something that countries want to ignore. The world is just too small. You can't do it anymore. If there were a way to ignore other countries when people would and I'm sure it would be very convenient for everyone, but you can't anymore. It's just not possible.

So cross-cultural cooperation on many of these projects is important. Again for the purposes of journalism, in Egypt as in I'm sure many countries it's easier to sweep something under the carpet. You deal with your own problems at home so it's easier to sweep things under the carpet if they're at home. But if other people are looking, if the neighbors are sitting there, then it's more difficult to deal with family problems or at least it's more difficult to ignore them, so this is where things like cross-

cultural cooperation comes in. I mentioned ethics boards to someone and apparently in the U.S. an ethics board is a little bit of a dirty word, but other countries do it all the time. The United Kingdom has a huge ethics board that runs the country's broadcasting. It's independent and it's there to ensure the good of the public. And because it's independent, it only answers to taxpayers. It doesn't answer to companies. It doesn't answer to the government. In Egypt we have the Journalists' Syndicate which is an extremely political animal but cross-cultural cooperation on issues like that will do two things, A, it will give U.S. journalists a better idea of what other people are dealing with because in my dealings with journalists from other countries I tend to find that unless you're a journalist from the former Eastern Europe or other countries, American journalists think that they're having a bad day if they're dealing with financial issues or their editor doesn't like something or they're being sued. A bad day is when someone turns up at your door at 3 o'clock

in the morning and you go away. That's a bad day and journalists from Eastern Europe have an idea of that. So people deal with different problems and different priorities, but this is where cross-cultural cooperation comes in. It's important and it's vital, and it allows people to face their problems or to face their issues rather than just brushing them under the carpet.

Here we might come back to funding because where possible it's important to provide practical help. Practical help could include legal advice or could include legal aid fees because journalists tend to go away. Journalism has become an extremely litigious profession in Egypt. Everyone is suing. Actually about 25 percent of all suits are brought by other journalists with their own axes to grind. But legal advice and legal aid are one way of ensuring that people can continue to go with their jobs and disseminate information and tell people what's happening and hold the government to account.

I'm not a great fan of trampling other countries' national sovereignties, so it is always a very, very difficult proposition when you say we want to help someone to something, but you don't want to trample through someone else's rose garden and the owner of the rose garden doesn't want you trampling through there either, so national sovereignty is an important consideration. So then what we do is we look at ways in which we might be able to have an effect without trampling national sovereignty and a good one is generally speaking an economic option. Egypt needs FDI, it always has, and as a matter of fact, until the global recession hit the economy was growing at almost 7 percent, so Egypt wants FDI. I'm not an expert on U.S. economic matters, but a good way to perhaps ensure the cooperation of various governments would be to pass that concern on to your own companies. As an American company I'm interested in where I can invest and if I get a tax incentive to do so or whether I get a tax break to do so, this would be what I'm interested in. And as an Egyptian

company I'm interested in investment. Anyone who has taken a look at the QUIZ agreements will be able to do this; 40 percent of a new product had to be produced in Israel and three areas of Egypt. Then these products were then allowed entry into the U.S. market. It worked extremely well. So economic incentives are important if as the U.S. government you make it easier for companies to invest in countries that have certain criteria be it gender equality, be it transparency, be it democratic reform, whatever, and these things are actually not difficult to quantify. Transparency International for example does it every year. Then you might be looking at something that might be profitable to everyone. As far as Egypt is concerned, we might as well find a way of getting something good out of the crony capitalism problem. Egyptian businesses want to do business as much as anyone else and they will raise pressure on the government. That's how it works, and maybe that's what we're looking at.

Finally, in 2004, Cairo and Washington signed a memorandum of understanding which agreed on clearly delineated targets for reform and how best to achieve them. In fact, one of the things that the Bush administration did no matter what the other problems were was that for a while it did pair economic reform demands with economic reform diplomacy. It was on the table, people were discussing it, and in Egypt at least we saw progress. From 2004, 2005 and 2006 we saw more heightened political activities and greater demands, we saw greater government accountability, we saw (inaudible) we saw results. So hands-off diplomacy is not always the best way to do it. You just want to come up with a less vulgar carrot-and-stick display and less strident, but essentially you want more diplomacy and less hectoring if you like and that's really what we're looking at. I think I've talked enough. If anyone has any questions.

MR. GRAND: Thanks, Mirette for that very enlightening presentation. If I could, let me take

the prerogative of the chair and ask you one question and then we'll open it up broadly to everyone here for what I hope will be a very open set of questions and discussion. It seems to me that the recent events in Iran have sort of reopened this debate about new media in nondemocratic countries and its role, and it seems like there are two dimensions to that debate. One of them is around the question of whether this has created new behaviors. Has this led to as you said more questioning, more arguing, more engagement on the part of the public? Or has it just led for those kinds of behaviors to be more public? So what might have been taking place behind the closed door among friends now takes place on the block which has advantages in the sense that it provides social support, it gets these debates out there in the public realm. It also as you've made me aware has some disadvantages in that a security force has little trouble in identifying who's putting these messages out and then quickly rounding up those doing the engaging and questioning.

The second part of the debate is whether this is a tool that forever strengthens the hands of citizens or if it's a tool that can quite easily be put back in the box by governments; in other words, how easily can the plug be pulled. We've certainly seen in Iran and in Xinjiang by cutting internet service, by cutting the power in some instances, but cutting off cell phone communications, you can shut these kinds of mechanisms down fairly quickly at least for a short period. I wonder if you could comment on that.

MS. MABROUK: I'm not an Iran expert so I wouldn't want to say anything about that, but in Egypt definitely it's not that the behavior is more public, it's that the behavior is reasonably new and I think it's new because it allowed an avenue for expression for a lot of people. You might have wanted to, but you really didn't have a way to do it because it's difficult to go to newspapers and there was really not a platform. I think it provided a platform and that

platform could have been latent behavior, but it's certainly new and much needed.

Your question on whether you can pull the plug easily, not in Egypt. You might very well have been able to in other countries and certainly has been in Iran. The thing is, Egypt isn't Iran and it isn't China. In Egypt, no, you can't pull the plug. It does make the government's work much easier. I read an article recently where a Russian expert was discussing political blogs and he said previously it would have taken the KGB weeks to get ahold of all this information. So it does make life a lot easier for the government in some cases to be able to round people up. But the plus side of that is that you really can't control it that well and, no, you can't put the genie back in the box. It's too late. The question is not whether you're going to put the genie back in the box, the question is whether you're going to get your three wishes or whether you're going to squander them. This is really the question.

MR. GRAND: Let's open it up to other questions, and if you could ask a question rather than a statement, and before doing so just identify yourself and your institution I'd appreciate it.

SPEAKER: Michael (inaudible) the Middle East Institute. I guess it take it from your statements that bloggers or others who say things run the risk of being rounded up or what not. I've noticed by accident stumbling on blogs, from our own blog our Middle Eastern editor has connections to Egyptian blogs and Flicker accounts where you go to look at pictures of Egypt and you find yourself on a blog, that some of these just cursory looks are very critical of the government, incredibly critical of the government. I've noticed also Twitter accounts, but I haven't noticed as much criticism on Twitter accounts, they've seen more topical and it's hard to find them. Are people just incredibly courageous or is it that you have 163,000 blogs it is in a sense because of the proliferation harder for the government to control them, and this proliferation continues as I suspect in

various ways and won't that make it more difficult rather than easier? I'm just curious what you think.

MS. MABROUK: I think you're absolutely right on the matter of proliferation. Like I said, only about 18 percent of those 163,000 plus blogs have political content, but that's the 18 percent that you're interested and that I'm interested in and that the government is interested in. Yes, people are very courageous and very often they'll pay a price for it. The people who pay a price for it generally speaking are not the bloggers who are the most high profile. The government is significantly more subtle than that. Generally speaking those aren't the people who pay the high price. Generally speaking they're not people who either blog in English or who have a great deal of access abroad. A lot of the bloggers who blog exclusively in Arabic and especially are more local events, and when I say local I mean their own towns or their own villages, these are the people who go away a lot more, and yes, they're very, very, very courageous.

It opens up another problem in that generally speaking if someone is blogging anonymously there is a reason why they are blogging anonymously and it really doesn't do any good when Western journalists come along and say I have this friend of mine, he's a wonderful blogger and he's blogging under the name whatever -- it's not a good idea. I wish people would stop doing that. But generally speaking, you notice those people because they have something to say. They're a minority but they are a growing minority and you should be paying attention to them.

MS. WITTES: Tamara Wittes from the Saban Center. Mirette, thank you. I really just can't wait to read the final product.

I wanted to ask you a question in reference to your statement about knowledge and the impact that improved access to information has had on this population, and particularly that part of the population that as you say has become more mobilized as a result of getting more information. One of the debates we often have in the U.S. about the new media

landscape is that we have a lot more content but we don't necessarily have a lot more information and that there is still a reliance on traditional news gathering, traditional journalism, to provide the investigative, investment, the data-crunching investment, necessary to provide information that the blogosphere then picks up and comments on. I wonder if when you're dealing with an environment like Egypt where access to information is such a huge problem for traditional journalism, is there a role that the new media plays in bringing information to light that journalists can get access to? Or what's the relationship between traditional journalism and the new media in terms of getting new data, new information to people?

MS. MABROUK: You just touched on several very, very sticky points which I tend to froth about during the last third of the piece. Here is the thing. The relationship between new media -- there are a plethora of names, old media, traditional media, legacy media which sounds like an historic

preservation trust, you can go on about it, but to try and sort of sum things up, generally speaking new media for the Egyptian environment has been a little bit like taking a Spaniel or Retriever out hunting. The dog runs ahead and then it points and then you know where the birds are. Many of the largest stories that have been broken, not all of them of course, the stories that have generated the most buzz from a reform activism point of view were posted by bloggers. The thing is, traditional media keeps an eye on the blogs. They've got people sitting there, and then certainly with (inaudible) they've got people sitting there who are combing the blogs because they pay attention to this kind of thing, and they will pick up on the story and then they will write about it. The thing is again one of our best-known bloggers was given the Award for International Journalism by Knight Ridder which in my opinion is a huge mistake because you really need to keep bloggers and journalists separate and it doesn't help that some bloggers are journalists. Yes, traditional media has the whole

investigative journalism standards/ethics thing going. The thing with information that you find on blogs is that you have absolutely no way of knowing whether it's correct or not and that's very often a problem, and that's what generally the journalists will do. Many of the larger stories, what happened was that the journalists went out and covered the stories. I'm sure everyone remembers the microbus driver that was assaulted in the police station. The video of that was taken by some very enterprising person in the police station and then was posted to a blog, but everyone found out about it when the story was picked up by a journalist called Kamal Murad from Al-Fagr newspaper and he went and he printed it. Kamal Murad is still being hounded by the police. He gets picked up regularly. The last time that I'm aware of was about 7 or 8 months ago when he was reporting on a story in the Delta where allegedly the local police were being asked by the local feudal landlord to get people to sign over land to them. When he was dragged off he was referred to as the journalist who put the

policeman away for 3 years. The story on the sexual harassment that was downtown in Eid 3 years ago went up on the blogs but everyone started talking about it and everyone started running newspaper editorials about it, my own newspaper included, after it was covered by Mona El Shazly on her talk show "10 P.M." She's a very enterprising woman because the Ministry of the Interior not only did not want to help, they denied that this ever happened despite myriad eyewitnesses or whatever it was. She went out, she got her crew and they did a documentary on it which went up on her television show which is one of the most watched I would suspect in the Arab world. I don't have the figures on it, but that's my information. So generally speaking that's what happens. The traditional media will pick up on blog things and then disseminate it that way because at the end of the day some people will read the blogs but not as many as will read a newspaper and not as many read the newspaper as watch television. Does that answer your question?

SPEAKER: You talked about the diplomacy side of what the U.S. could do just kind of briefly, and although I appreciate your comments on foreign assistance because I think that that's important too, but with everything that's happened in Iran, I think everybody has sort of forgotten about the Cairo speech. One of the things that was so interesting about it was how much it was broadcast live which was not done really in Moscow for instance where it was broadcast live but on a very little watched satellite station that few Russians had access to, so the Cairo speech was something quite different. I'm wondering if you could talk about what the impact of that has been, and Mr. Mubarak is going to be here of course in a couple of weeks, what the expectations are or perhaps more importantly what the wishes are by those Egyptians who are interested in the forum for that visit. Are there any specific tasks or demands that you would have of the administration while he's in town?

MS. MABROUK: First, the Cairo speech. The thing is, I think people had such high expectations of that speech. I'm surprised that President Obama didn't just crawl under the pulpit and say I'm just not doing this. It was almost impossible for him not to disappoint because so many people were clustered around and everyone wants something else and he's talking to different audiences. He's talking to the governments of which he is a guest and he's talking to the people whom he should be addressing, and very often the needs and demands of both are not mutually inclusive, in fact they can be mutually exclusive. But having said that, I think he did a very, very decent job with the speech and I think what he did most and the most important thing is he bought himself time. He bought this administration time. He started off with a great deal of goodwill. Partly it's because I think that people were very, very tired after the last administration, they were disappointed, they were depressed, there's a whole list of pejoratives, and I think there was a great deal of

hope with Obama's becoming president, and I think what the speech did was buy him time.

He's already got goodwill. People want him to do well. People want to go back to being comfortable about the U.S. because the thing is, it's a cliché to say this, but Egyptians generally speaking had a very, very good opinion of Americans. They had a lousy opinion of the administration for the longest time, but they had a very good opinion of Americans which was chipped away at when President Bush was reelected the second time. That caused damage in the whole public perception thing, but they want to go back to having someone who in the world order can be looked at as a sort of more benevolent figure. So people wanted to be hopeful, and I think what he did for people was to say we know you have issues. Can you please give us some time to work on them? And in my opinion that was the smartest thing he could have done because he wasn't going to be able to address issues. He addressed them in sweeping generalizations and a lot of platitudes. Yes, we want you to do well.

Yes, we believe in democracy. Yes, we think girls should get an education, a bunch of platitudes, but they were the right platitudes and I think the speech was smart enough to not mention the government at all and therefore not align themselves at all, and I think he just avoided the largest pitfalls and he just said just give us time to be able to work on this.

I think what people want is for the U.S. to put its money where its mouth is. That's really what it wants, and I think one of the other things that he did which was very smart was to recognize that peace in the Middle East if you like was not just some rosy plan that was going to be nice for everyone, that it was in the interests of the United States because if you say that something is in your interests then you talk responsibility to do for when you say that you're going to do something about it. And he said we know that this is in the interests of the United States, we know that your interests is in our interests and we're going to do something about that. That was question one. Did I answer that for you?

The expectations for the visit. To be quite honest, I don't know that there are very many because it's right smack dab in August, Congress isn't here, lobbyists are going to be pounding on empty doors. I could be completely wrong, but I think the idea on both sides is to get it over with as quickly and quietly as possible. It was nice. They shook hands in front of that fireplace that everyone shakes hands in front of and then he goes home. I could be wrong, but honestly that's my take on it. I think it is a visit that says everyone is happy and we're all getting along rather than we have specific needs to be discussed because generally speaking specific needs are not hammered out between presidents, they're hammered out by statespeople at other people's desks, but I don't think that much will be happening. If there are huge demonstrations, I don't think that people will be standing around to take much note, so this is the thing. I don't think this is the time to expect anything. I could be completely wrong, but that's my take on it.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I wanted to go back to some figures that you shared with us regarding Secretary of State Clinton's I guess we could call it a speech in May regarding aid to Egypt, both NGO aid and also military support. I'm not sure, but it would seem to me looking at the past, the budget that was inherited by the administration, and somebody maybe around this table could be more helpful, really indicated significant cuts across the board for this particular work. But the question is, is that perceived or discussed in any way through the various media outlets that are available to Egyptians right now? That's the first question. Because the perception is the reality in terms of what does that say.

The other piece is, is there any discussion to the various media outlets about what that might say about a lessening of relationships between this country and Egypt focusing on Egypt and maybe Saudi Arabia and more focusing on the role that Iran will ultimately play in the Middle East however that gets

played out over these complexities of the last several weeks and months?

MS. MABROUK: To start off with I think a lot of people are still not aware of the budget cuts. Certainly people in Egypt weren't aware of it. I actually came across it by accident because I have the luxury to be sitting down and researching this and therefore all I was doing for 11 hours a day was going through this stuff. So it's not something that the average -- most people don't know. Activists know. In fact, around May I had a friend who was here and they were discussing this, but it has not been thrashed out yet in Egyptian media I think because they're waiting to see what's going to happen before anyone gets too riled up about it. I think they're waiting to see what's going to happen when Congress gets back in and before they jump in a muddy pool I think they're waiting to see what happens, but generally speaking people aren't aware of this.

People are aware of aid and they're aware that the U.S. gives a lot of money, but generally

speaking the perception whether it's in the U.S. or in Egypt, they're two different things. In Egypt, people are aware that the U.S. gives aid, and in fact, over the past 15 years or so, the government has been making a concerted effort to try and move the relationship with the United States away from an aid-related one to a trade-related one. That motto has been running around the corridors for about 15 years or so, aid to trade. People are aware of this but I don't think that you're going to find an Egyptian who is going to say let's get rid of American aid, we don't need it, mostly because the latest figures are out and we did previously have 40 percent living below the poverty line and apparently it's now 41 percent living below the poverty line, so no one is going to say, no, we don't want aid. It's just not going to happen.

As for perception, to be quite honest, that distinction is going to be played up by people want to use it in a particular way. The question then becomes how do you sell this? How do you play this? Are you

going to talk to the NGOs and say can we just sort of point out that it might not be the seven and a half or seven and a quarter billion dollars that we've spent on dilapidated helicopters and outdated machine guns, but if this $250 million that we've given to these organizations is not a small amount of money, but we think it should be more and we think it would be in our interests and let's see how we can improve on it, and you could say it that way as opposed to saying you've gotten this much money and you're going to get a lot less because once you say you're going to get a lot less than people are going to say why is that? Because it's not that our situation has improved so we can do with less money or that these organizations can do with less money. Already I think slashing this money by well over 60 percent, for me I don't understand it. It strikes me as a huge mistake. I'm not a diplomat so I don't know, but it strikes me as a huge mistake. It's not a wise allocation of resources at all. The average Egyptian is not going to notice if we get some more outdated helicopters, but they

will notice if they can go and vote without getting clunked over the head.

As for your question on how it's going to play out in the region, I'm not sure I'm the right person to answer it. I can tell you that Egypt is important for the Middle East mostly because the rest of the Middle East pays attention to Egypt. We're the most populous country, people read our newspapers and watch our television and watch our films, and they read our editorial writers and they pay attention, so what happens in Egypt reverberates around the rest of the Middle East big time. How that fits in with Iran is a slightly more complicated equation and I'm not sure I'm the right person to tell you.

SPEAKER: Just very briefly on the factual question, Mirette is absolutely right that in the bilateral aid package from the U.S. to Egypt, democracy aid faced a significant cut, but the overall economic aid package faced a tremendous cut. It went from about $415 million to $250 million overall. Within that, the amount allocated to democracy went

from $50 million to $20 million, so a lot of things were cut. I think it's also important to note though that of the $250 million or so that the U.S. has allocated within that aid to democracy over the last 5 years, only a very, very, very small portion of that has gone to civil society organizations. Most of it has been U.S. government helping the Egyptian government with various types of tactical reforms. So even the democracy aid is only nominally in many ways democracy aid.

SPEAKER: (inaudible)

SPEAKER: That's the other point that Mirette raised. One of the changes the Bush administration had made and with congressional legislative language was requiring that a chunk of that $50 million be spent without the signoff of the government of Egypt. When it was reduced to $20 million that requirement was removed. This is something that's upsetting the civil society groups for good reason.

SPEAKER: My question is regarding the kind of pressure that be seen on the American side for political reform or for letting up on the pressure on media and on publication and public speech in public places, for example, and I'm thinking of specifically in the case of what they called I guess in 2005 and 2006 the Arab spring when you had Condoleezza Rice put her foot down and say democratize and Mubarak had no choice supposedly but to back off and give some space to what became this beautiful opening. I've been speaking to Egyptian activists. I'm currently doing a film on Egyptian public opinion and I spoke to this activist who was I guess the leader of the youth movement during that whole era and the way he describes this freedom of speech opening in Egypt during that time is pretty phenomenal and the way he talks about how just the minute Condoleezza Rice actually put her foot down with real pressure on the Mubarak regime to stop oppressing the protestors, all of a sudden it backed off, and this is just how it described it to me. Then he described it to me as the

minute that things started to flare up I guess in Iran at the time, then Mubarak felt that was enough space to clamp down again and he wanted to sort of test the waters and see if America would indeed put that pressure back on or not. And then it was seen that it wasn't the case and then Mubarak was able to freely clamp down again and everything went back to the oppressive ways in the public speech arena.

So my question basically is what kind of real pressure can the U.S. really put on the regime in terms of opening up? And do you think this is real pressure when for example -- statement like that by Condoleezza Rice -- actual steps in that direction or is it really cutting aid? Because the money that is getting through the regime -- really that much more representative, more symbolic -- what is the real kind of pressure that the U.S. can put on and do we want to put that pressure on the government?

MS. MABROUK: I think probably a lot of people around the table could probably answer your question. I can sort of answer the last bit first.

The steps that the U.S. could take were the ones that I went through at the beginning which are a mix of financial, technical and diplomatic. To just back to the statement, I'm not sure who were you were speaking to when you said that the leader of -- here is the thing. It is incredibly hopeful to say the minute Condoleezza Rice put her foot down, Mubarak has no choice. I think that that is a gross overstatement of the facts. Condoleezza Rice or anyone else can put her foot down all she likes. If it were that simple, I wouldn't be sitting here. I'd be running my newspaper back home. As for Mubarak not having a choice, with all due respect I cannot overstate how much I don't believe that statement to be true.

SPEAKER: How much do you attribute that open spring of change to --

MS. MABROUK: That had to do precisely with what we were talking about in that, yes, the U.S. did back up demands for democratic reform with diplomatic initiatives. The U.S. does have to pursue diplomatic initiatives. People can place pressure, a little

financial, a little moral, a little diplomatic. Diplomats will tell you that their job is a tricky one and not an obvious one, but to assume at any point that because you're from the United States you're going to be able to put your foot down and say this is the way it is and you're just going to have to do it is astonishingly naïve and completely counterproductive. If I recall correctly, Condoleezza Rice was battering on the door to get Ayman Nour released for about 3 years and they finally let him out when his time was up. It's not that simple. If it were that simple really there would be a lot less work for think tanks. It doesn't work that way. Definitely diplomacy is vital because as I said, it's one thing to make a request, but you need to back it up with something and you need to back it up with diplomatic efforts, you need to back it up with economic incentives, you need to back it up with economic punishment. You can do all of these things. But the heavier handed the approach the less likely you are going to get a result and particularly

economic results. With all due respect, if they decide to slash aid to Egypt, the government is not going to be massively affected.

SPEAKER: This is the perception that the movement had. Either it was Condoleezza Rice's statement that was making the case or --

MS. MABROUK: I don't think that's the perception that the movement had.

SPEAKER: No? I'm just been talking to people --

MS. MABROUK: I understand. I understand. I don't think it's the perception the movement had. Diplomatic initiatives are important and this is what I was talking about when I said it has to be backed by diplomatic initiatives. You do have to lean on people. It's just that it would be a mistake to think that all you need to do is lean because it's not going to work, because you can give someone a little shove and they'll move along, but if you shove them very hard they're going to dig in their heels and say why are you pushing me. I think it's just human nature

and governments are actually made up of people. And also you have to go with public perception. It does the Egyptian government no good to be viewed as the kind of government that's going to fall over every time the U.S. pushes it. It doesn't do any good. And I'm going to tell you that most Egyptians are not going to appreciate it. You wouldn't appreciate it if you thought that all some government had to do to get your government to acquiesce was shove them. This is what I was referring to when I was talking about national sovereignty and it's a very, very difficult mix. I'm grateful I'm not a diplomat, but you have to be able to place enough force while knowing that you really can't trample too much because it's a delicate balance. But I don't mean to sound condescending and I don't mean to sound patronizing, but when you say the leader of the youth movement, it's possible that people wanted to be hopeful and saw that this had something to do with it. Without a doubt, the diplomatic initiatives at the time were important to what you call the Arab -- without a doubt, but to

think that this is going to be continued merely by placing pressure is, A, naïve, B, completely unproductive. It's just not going to work because things change. Does that answer your question?

SPEAKER: Yes. I have many more.

MR. GRAND: I'm going to give a couple others a chance. Let's take three last questions.

SPEAKER: I'd like to just comment on the aid issue. When we talked we didn't differentiate between the military aid which is $1.3 billion a year and the economic aid. The Egyptian doesn't care about economic aid, $200 million or $500 million is very small in terms of the national economy and for a country of 80 million, half a billion dollars doesn't matter, but for the military, $1.3 billion is a huge amount and it's almost half of the annual budget and there's the free hand of the cabinet to do whatever they want because they are not accountable to the national budget because it's coming from the U.S. I believe this is a serious tool that the U.S. can use when they talk about cutting economic aid, but the

military aid is really touchy and very important. And the Egyptian media does not talk seriously about that because it's (inaudible) military establish doesn't tolerate such a thing. So this is a point just for clarification.

A comment on journalism in Egypt or media, and it is very interesting the Egyptian government is smartly using the aid to make themselves very nationalist and we stand for U.S. interference and use the aid not to appreciate the U.S. (inaudible) U.S. industry. And it's very easy. As you know (inaudible) this media, these newspapers, these journalists receive U.S. aid and here it's bankrupt and it is done, yet they are receiving aid hugely as we know. Just for clarification.

MR. MITCHELL: Garry Mitchell from the "Mitchell Report." I've been trying to put this information in some perspective and the question it raises for me is we have this changing media landscape which has the potential to change the political landscape and that in turn raises for me to the extent

that we can generalize, what is the nature of the change that call them moderates, reformists, that element in Egyptian society, what is the nature of the change that they are seeking? I'm going to use a parallel from Iran and say that a pretty well-known Iranian expert said recently this about Iran, that the Iranian moderates and reformists are not seeking regime change, they want the regime to change. And my question is, what's the parallel way to characterize how the moderate and reformist elements in Egypt think about their government today and what their end goals might be?

SPEAKER: People from a lot of sectors in Egypt have been vilified by the government for expressing their views in the media whether it's a professor like Ibrahim or religious activists from the Koranist movement or someone even like Ibrahim Arisa -- for even publishing a story about Mubarak's health which may or may not be controversial. But my question is what kinds of things can be done maybe not necessarily from the U.S. side but internally in

Egypt? Is the media changing in a way that will have a dramatic influence on maybe the authoritarian characteristics of the government where they're repressing freedoms to express like this, is there any hope for things to move forward? I'd just like to hear your comments on what you think can be done to protect the freedom of expression.

MS. MABROUK: I think that's absolutely brilliant, we don't want regime change, we want the regime to change. I think that's marvelous. For moderate Egyptians and for moderate reformers, what Egyptians want is the kinds of things that you take for granted every day. We want to be able to go to vote. We want to be able to go and vote safely. We want our elected representatives to represent our interests rather than their own. And we want our government to be accountable. We don't want to be arrested for no reason. We don't want to be held without charge under emergency laws that have been around for almost 30 years. And we want our civil rights. That's what Egyptians want.

We have a problem because our constitution guarantees all that, but we don't have them. We've been under emergency law for 30 years, and the government, specifically President Hosni Mubarak said that the emergency laws were going to be scrapped except that we're on the way to the introduction of the new terrorism laws which are a little bit like your Patriot Bill but even stickier. We're not massively hopeful about those. That's what Egyptians want.

I think there is an ingrained perception that the government is corrupt. The problem is corruption, this is terrible to say, is kind of an endemic problem in Egypt possibly because most people have dreadful salaries and therefore have to find a way of making ends meet and therefore the corruption in the government isn't all that different from the corruption that you would get down when you go and license your car where you have to pay the person at the window money to do his job essentially because he's getting paid 180 pounds a month. That's $40 a

month to feed seven children or whatever it is. And that's what Egyptians want. They want to have a life for themselves and their children that is devoid of the petty humiliations that you go through every day when you feel that you don't have your rights and you can't feed your kids. These things are very, very serious and they grind away at your dignity as a human being. And you can start off with that by being able to vote. Or if you don't care about voting, and that's fine because there are a lot of people who don't care about voting and don't need to vote, that's fine. If you don't care about that then you want your elected representative to give a damn when your street hasn't had water in 2 weeks because the pipe has been broken and it's not election time so they don't need to get it fixed. That's what your average Egyptian wants.

Your activists are mainly sort of the educated inteligencia or the labor union leaders who are driving this horse, but at the end of the day this is what everyone wants. You want to be able to live

as a dignified human being who can support his children, but to do that your elected officials have to be accountable to you, and for them to be accountable then there has to be civil and democratic reform. Does that answer your question?

Your question, what can be done to ensure freedom of expression. I think the media is trying. The media is trying very, very hard. Ibrahim Eissa, the story that you're referring to, he wrote a very flip editorial that said, Why is it that when President Mubarak disappears for a while, people mention his health? And what happened was that he immediately got slapped with, very funny, affecting the national security and depriving Egypt of $350 million in foreign investments because what he said threw the stock market out of whack. It was very, very funny. He eventually got slapped with 6 months in prison. He appealed, he got 3 months' imprisonment and he was personally pardoned by President Mubarak who said he didn't want any personal confrontations. But I think Ibrahim Eissa is probably one of the most

sued journalists in the country. It's amazing that the man hasn't done time in prison yet. But he keeps doing it. I think really this is your best gauge is that people keep being dragged off to prison, they keep being fined and they come out and they do it again. They keep doing it. So the fact that they keep doing it I think is the greatest effort to ensure freedom of expression because they are willing to -- as I pointed out, you want to bear in mind that 26 percent of all lawsuits against journalists are brought by other journalists. This is very acrimonious. But they're willing to go to prison to defend someone else's right to say what they need to say and I think that is the most important thing. The last time you saw this much political fervor was 1917 to 1924 I think.

MR. GRAND: Let's wrap it up at this point in the interests of time, but if anyone wants to come forward afterwards and ask Mirette a specific question, I'd encourage you to do so. I want to thank Mirette both for giving us such a thoughtful and

candid set of remarks today which is greatly, greatly appreciated, but also for being with us and bearing with us for 5 months. You've been a pleasure to have with us. I know you're going to be in Washington for a while longer. You're going to remain a nonresident fellow with us for a while longer, and we look forward to deepening the connection over time even as you go on back to Cairo. And thanks to all of you for joining us for what I thought was a very lively discussion. Thank you.

* * * * *

CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

/s/Carleton J. Anderson, III

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia
Commission No. 351998
Expires: November 30, 2012