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ARAB REFORM'S SLOW MARCH:  
A POLICY DISCUSSION WITH MARWAN MUASHER

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. WITTES: We are pleased to welcome you here today and to welcome back an old friend, Dr. Marwan Muasher who is well known to many of you.

Marwan is here in town, and he participated yesterday in a conference at the Wilson Center on the Arab-Israeli Peace Process. We asked him to come here today to speak about a different issue, one that perhaps gives us space for greater optimism, and that is the reform process in Jordan. However, when we were discussing the topic and an appropriate title for today's talk, as you know from the invitation, we decided to call it Arab Reform's Slow March.

Marwan, as many of you know, served here as Jordan's Ambassador to the United States, also served as Jordan's First Ambassador to Israel, as Foreign Minister from 2002 to 2004, and has spent the last several years hard at work producing Jordan's National Agenda.

Now the question of reform in the Arab world is one that is much discussed, but the specifics are notably lacking in most places. Jordan is singular in that there has been significant attention and energy invested in developing a comprehensive multi-faceted agenda with topics and timetables attached for Jordan's reform process, and Marwan has been at the center of that planning and of the drafting of the National Agenda. So he is going to talk to us about its content and also about the challenges it faces today in implementation. I think that really is the core of the issue.

Marwan, the floor is yours.

SEN. MUASHER: Thank you, Tamara. I really appreciate this. I am glad that I can still recognize most of the people around this table.

Someone was asking me yesterday what I am doing these days, and I said, "I am writing a book."

He said, "Is it a fiction book or a nonfiction book?"

I said, "Well, I am writing a book about the peace process, reform, and fight against terrorism in the area."

And he said, "Oh, so it is a fiction book."

But I hope it is not a fiction book, and I hope that the results of all reform efforts in the Arab world are going to fare more successfully than the peace process so far.

I want to just take you back two years earlier to the first collective Arab effort on the government level to deal with the reform issue in our part of the world. Reform, until

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2004, was largely the work of NGOs and civil society in the Arab world, where it existed, but truly Arab governments had not given it much thought until early 2004 when the United States started talking about its Greater Middle East Initiative. In the preparations to the Tunis Summit in 2004, the argument was made that unless the Arab world would produce its own blueprint for reform, its own homegrown process, that grandiose plans might be imposed on it from the outside world in a manner that is not really sensitized to the needs and characteristics of the region.

After a lot of debate and a lot of reluctance, frankly, on the part of the Arab governments, we did come up with a blueprint that was a declaration of principles which was endorsed in Tunis by all Arab sStates and which, for the first time, at least defined what we are talking about when we mention political reform, whereas until Tunis, political reform was really talked about in the abstract in the Arab world by Arab governments. I am still talking about the official position of Arab governments.

After Tunis, reform started having effects, if you want, and several main elements were agreed to that constitute the areas in which the Arab world needs to move in as far as political reform is concerned. These were -- none of them will come as a surprise to you -- a wide political participation process, freedom of the press and the media, women's rights/women's empowerment, judicial independence, and economic liberalization, and a sixth would be also the fight against terrorism. These constitute the main pillars of the reform process that the Arab world agreed to in Tunis.

But right from the beginning, the document was criticized by many inside and outside the Arab world, in that it was seen as a rhetorical document. It was a good declaration of principles. It talked about the issues in a forthcoming manner, but it lacked any implementation or monitoring mechanism, much like the Roadmap in the Peace Process. So, without such a monitoring and implementation mechanism, really, the document did not stand any serious chance of being implemented in the Arab world, and Arab governments, at any rate, resisted to having a one size fits all document that fits all Arab countries and so resisted to include any implementation or monitoring mechanism and left it to each Arab country to decide for itself how they want to move the process forward now that at least we have decided on the areas where we want to move.

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Jordan, at the end of that year, at the end of 2004, decided to carry the process further and decided that the time has come for us to agree on a National Agenda that did not encompass only political reform but encompassed also all aspects of reform -- political, economic, and social -- and that would serve as a framework, as a vision for all the country's policies in the next 10 years, particularly in a country like Jordan where we have successive and quick changes of government and where sometimes we lack a long term vision and a long term policy that is consistent and that is well thought of. At the same time, it was seen that for this effort to be credible and to have a buy-in from society, the government cannot, on its own, come up with such a vision because if it did, the next government would put it aside. The private sector, political parties, and civil society would not really look at it as credible if it was only produced by the government.

So, right from the beginning, we adopted two main principles. One is that the effort must be holistic. We cannot anymore keep talking about economic reform and forget about political reform. We have to talk about reform in a holistic manner that encompasses all areas, and we have to have an inclusive process of developing the agenda. We cannot talk about one particular government or one particular sector developing such a 10-year vision without the participation of all of society.

Therefore, the King appointed a Royal Committee last year in 2004 -- no, actually, it was the beginning of 2005 -- a 27-member committee that encompassed all the different parts of the political, social, and economic spectrum in Jordan. Only three members out of the 27 represented the government at the time; eight other members represented Parliament; and the rest came from private sector, political parties, NGOs, women's activists, media, etcetera. That committee was asked to then produce the 10-year vision. I will talk in some detail about it shortly.

After a lot of debate, the vision was done, and I will at least address the political aspects because I know this is probably of particular interest to you.

What really differentiated this effort from any other effort in the Arab world, at least on the government level and probably even on the civil society level, is that for the first time the effort was measurable. In other words, we did not come with initiatives only, such as those, say, in the Tunis

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document. Every initiative that was suggested or recommended had performance indicators associated with it, milestones. I keep going back to the Roadmap because it is a favorite of mine. But it had clear milestones, clear timelines, and every initiative, where it needed financing from the government, was linked to the budget. In this way, we wanted to at least make sure that we are not again producing a rhetorical document but rather producing one that can be measured and can be measured by Jordanians.

To that effect, another aspect of the effort was that there would be progress reports issued by every government institution, a scorecard, if you want, in the country. These progress reports would make sure, would compare the targets set in the agenda with actual performance, would be sent to the cabinet, and would be published in a regular way so that the citizens can, at all times, know where they are heading in the process.

We did not want, of course, to start from scratch or reinvent the wheel. We have looked at experiences of other countries that went through a similar process. What did they do? Where did they succeed? Where did they fail? What can be learned from such experiences? We looked at countries that shared similar characteristics with Jordan when they started the reform process.

Two countries that we really studied in great detail, although we looked at more than 10, but two countries that were particularly helpful in the development of the agenda were Ireland and Singapore. Just like Jordan, they share the same characteristics in terms of population size, in terms of public debt, lack of natural resources, countries that are smaller in a larger and richer environment, countries that depended a lot on outside aid, I mean you go on, the unemployment rates, you go on. We looked at what they did, and in both countries they had really spectacular success in bringing down unemployment, more than doubling per capita income, cutting down on public debt, etcetera, and moving towards a knowledge-based economy in a country that lacked natural resources, which is also what we have done.

Let me just maybe briefly talk about the different areas of political reform that we have included. This is a summary. This is just a summary of the document in English. The document itself is about 200 pages. The work that was put to produce the document is included in about 2,500 pages, but it

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is available so far in Arabic on a CD. It will shortly be available in English so that also people can know how we arrived at such recommendations.

The main committee of 27 then worked with subcommittees of about 450 Jordanians, and they decided on eight themes that they should cover, not sectors. They took areas by themes rather than sectors. Each theme would really encompass more than one sector. These were:

Political development and inclusion as one theme.

Legislation and justice or the legal environment necessary to develop the country.

Investment development: What are the investment policies that are needed for the country in the next 10 years?

Financial services and fiscal reform: Things like cutting down the budget deficit, reforming the pension system, reforming social security, etcetera.

Employment support and vocational training: This is one of Jordan's biggest problems. We have an unemployment rate of 13 percent today that might go up to 24 percent in the next 10 years if we do not change current policies on employment.

The sixth would be social welfare.

The seventh is education, higher education, scientific research, and innovation.

And the last one is the infrastructure upgrade in telecommunications, energy, water, etcetera.

In each of these themes, as I said, we have a set of initiatives and a set of performance indicators and targets that these initiatives can be measured against. In the area of political reform, we have talked mainly about five or six areas.

Political parties are linked back to the electoral law. Our view was that, unless the state proactively encourages political party development, there can be no political reform in the country. Whereas political parties exist in Jordan, they do so only in name. Other than the Muslim Brotherhood, other than the Islamic Action Front, we really have no political party to speak of in the country. The Islamic Action Front is the only real political party with a program, with popular support, with a large constituency, etcetera. All the others are parties headed by individuals and can claim no more than 50 or 100 each in their membership. That is not the way. I will get to that point in a while.

After a lot of heated debate, we managed to change the system or we recommended changing the electoral system from one

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that depended entirely on individual districts, where people are elected totally based on their individual merits without being linked to any political party, to a mixed system where you would have part of the people elected according to districts and part elected according to party lists, so that we can encourage an evolutionary process that would encourage Jordanians to be part of political parties and run for elections as part of party lists, much like the West Bank and, of course, like Israel where the whole system is based on party lists.

The electoral system is the main recommendation. We differed over how quickly or slowly we move with the process. Some people wanted an immediate transfer or evolution into political party lists. Some people said this would give an unfair advantages to the Islamists because there are no other political parties in the country, and you need to open up the system gradually so that other political parties have a chance to develop before you really give them more seats in Parliament.

We recommended an umbrella law for political reform that would be much like the U.S. system where you cannot enact laws that limit the constitutional rights. In Jordan, we have many great constitutional rights, but many of them are then regulated and limited by the laws that are issued. We recommended something like your amendment, the Bill of Rights, that the country cannot enact any law that would limit the rights given to the citizens by the constitution. It can regulate these rights in law, but it cannot limit them in any way.

Women's empowerment, we recommended the abolition or modification of all laws discriminating against women in the country, so that by the next 10 years all such laws would be amended, and we would remove any legal discrimination against women in the Jordanian system because the constitution is clear on that point. Women are equal to men according to our constitution, but in reality, many of our laws do not really give them that legal equality.

Civil society, civil society in many parts of the Arab world is a bad word. In many parts, they won't even acknowledge that civil society exists, or if they acknowledge it, they regard civil society as an enemy of the state. Again, what we recommended is an updating of all of our laws, so that we truly strengthen civil society and make it truly independent in the country in order to serve as another tool in our political evolutionary process.



Freedom of the media and press, again, many initiatives would disengage state control from the media and would allow for private TV and radio stations. In fact, we have covered already some good ground in doing so. Next month, we will have our first private TV station in the country, ground TV station not satellite. We already have some satellite. In terms of radio, we already have many radio stations. Some of them are political, not just FM stations, where they have a political point of view.

There are many other recommendations I am not going through. I will leave the documents with you. We have a web site called [www.nationalagenda.jo](http://www.nationalagenda.jo), where you can see the document on the web site.

Right from the beginning, we faced two major currents that were either skeptical or totally opposed to the process, and we still face them. One is the current from what I will call the status quo forces in the country which really include many of the political elite that really viewed the process as one that would rob them of many of their privileges. We are calling for a merit-based system. We are calling for an end to *wasta*. We are calling for a more efficient government. We are calling for people to be hired, fired, and promoted according to their merit, etcetera. That, obviously, has major implications on some of the old habits which refuse to die in the country.

But this group of people could not really say they are against reform. No one is against reform. Everybody in the country is for reform. No one will tell you I am against reform. So they had to resort to other excuses. Today people like me and others are labeled as neoliberal --

MS. WITTES: God forbid.

SEN. MUASHER: -- as people who are American agents or have been educated in the West and have no real feel for the country, they don't know Jordan as well as the Old Guard does, etcetera, or people who are disintegrating the main pillars of the state and proposing institutions that will really ruin the state, or other accusations. I don't want to even list them all. This is very, very strong. It is a minority. It is a minority among the public, but it is very strong and very vocal among the political elite, and they are fighting the implementation and the development of the agenda, and now the implementation, really tooth and nail.

The other major current was the general public which actually supported the effort and had no problem with it, in

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fact, demanded it, but at the same time was very skeptical that a political will existed in the country in order to implement. And so, what the general public was saying was, "We have heard this before. We need to see action. We need to see implementation. This is all good on paper, but where is the political will to translate this into action?"

The two currents are still, of course, alive and vocal in the country.

Enter Hamas and victory in the West Bank. The Hamas victory has really been used so far by both camps that I talked about, those who want change and those who don't want change, to make the same point, not the same point, to highlight their point of view. The traditional forces are now saying, "Look we told you so. You open up the system, and see what happens. The Islamists come in."

So the best way is not to open up the system. They are telling you guys this. They are telling the Americans this. "Don't talk about reform anymore. See what happens. You open it up, and see what happens."

The other school of thought argues exactly the opposite. They say, "See, we told you so. You don't open up the system, and the Islamists come in."

If we think about it, it is really a very alive and strong debate in the Arab world, not just in Jordan, of what to do, of what to do with this new phenomenon, with this rise of not just Islamist parties but radical Islamist parties. The conventional wisdom in the Arab world has been that, as I said, you better keep the system closed, because if you do not do that, the Islamists will be strengthened.

That policy which has spanned over at least four or five decades, in my opinion, has proved a big failure because the Islamists in the Arab world have not been weakened in the last 40 or 50 years. In fact, they have been strengthened all over. Today we have an Islamist government in Iraq. Today the Islamists in Egypt are knocking on the door. So the Hamas victory was not the first one.

It is, in my opinion, a direct result of people wanting to look, to find alternatives to the ruling party or group, particularly if the ruling group is engaged in less than good government. They look for other alternatives and see none but the Islamists who are promising good government and a clean government, etcetera. So they go for the Islamists, not necessarily because they approve of the Islamists' ideological

positions, but because they see in them a party that promises a clean government. Unless the Arab world proactively encourages political party development in a real sense, so that there are real alternatives to the Islamists and so that people can have many choices to choose from, real choices, unless that happens, the Islamists are going to get only stronger and stronger and stronger.

It is also true that if you open up the system today immediately, yes, of course, the Islamists have a big unfair advantage over everybody else because they were the only ones that were allowed to operate or tolerated or whatever for the last 40 or 50 years. So there is an argument that says don't open up the system completely.

But don't do nothing. The status quo is not sustainable. We can have a debate over how to open up the system. We can have a debate over how quickly or slowly or gradually you do that, but what we should not do is not do anything under the pretext that opening up in any way is going to bring the Islamists in.

If there is a message today that I bring, it is this: If there is a current here that thinks we better not care about reform because it is not working, well, I will tell you if people don't do anything, it is not going to work even more.

At the same point, at the same time, what we need is a homegrown process. This is, by no means, a call for the U.S. to impose its vision. It is not going to work like this. I will speak about Jordan; I won't speak about others. The reformers of Jordan, if they want to be credible, they will want to look as far away from the United States as possible. Any time you are labeled as close to the United States, you are doomed. And so, it is the kiss of death. Truly, this is not a call for intervention. Intervention is not going to work. But it is a call, of course, for what we do need is encouragement for homegrown processes that are serious, that are credible, not rhetorical in nature.

What we have done also in Jordan in an attempt to allay the fears of people because many people are afraid, and I am being very open and very candid here. Many people are afraid in the region of the Iranian model. What people are saying is, "Look, we don't want an Iranian model of government where democracy is exercised once and then denied to others. We don't want this model. If this is what we are being presented, then we want to think 100 times before we embark on this process."

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What we have done, at least with the agenda, is we have had all political parties adhere to and commit to two major principles that are mentioned here, and these are principles that have been committed to, at least on paper, from all political parties including the Muslim Brotherhood and parties from the very right to the very left.

The first principle is:

Commitment to political and cultural diversity at all times: No party has the right to come to power and then either try to change the cultural diversity in the country or change or deny other parties the right to politically organize. You know what that means in a clear attempt to not follow the Iranian model of governance.

The other commitment is peaceful means: No party can carry arms. Only the state carries arms.

If these two major principles are adhered to, of course, and adherence to the constitution but that is a given, if these two principles are adhered to, then we should not have a problem in the Arab world of who comes to power, whether it is the Islamists or anybody else. Everybody has the right to campaign and be elected, everybody including the Islamists. What they don't have the right to do is to deny that right to others. If we can translate, frankly, this commitment from one on paper to one that is practiced in reality, then we would have achieved a lot in the Arab world along the road to political development and political reform, and that cannot be done overnight. That has to be instilled in the culture of Arab societies, that political diversity should be respected at all times. This is at least what we are trying to do in Jordan.

As I said, this process is not a smooth one neither in Jordan nor in any part of the Arab world. We are grappling with real problems and with a very entrenched elite that is very resistant to any form of change. But, on the other hand, what I can say is the days when the Arab-Israeli conflict was used as an excuse for not moving on reform are over. Everybody realizes that the Arab-Israeli conflict has a direct bearing on the reform process, but nobody now says we should wait until the Arab-Israeli conflict is done before we even start the process of reform. That argument has almost disappeared from the political scene.

The argument today is an argument about the pace, not about whether we do reform or not, about the pace of reform. How quickly or how slowly do we move along this road?

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What was I saying? There was another point I wanted to make.

MS. WITTES: Do you want to give us a couple minutes on next steps?

SEN. MUASHER: Next steps, I will have to talk about Jordan; I cannot talk about others in the next steps.

In the next steps, we need to first translate this into an actionable plan because this is well and good as a framework, but the government needs to take this, needs to first of all form monitoring units in each government, in each department; make sure that the individual programs of each ministry are in line with the overall targets and objectives of the agenda; make sure that the monitoring process and the reporting process are done according to a set criteria; and make sure all these, like I said, results are published. This is on the technical level.

On the political level, you need a commitment. You really need a political commitment, not by the state, not by the government only but by society as a whole.

We have seen such a commitment take place in Ireland, for example, with spectacular results. The Irish went through a very difficult period where they made real sacrifices, but at the end, they went from having an average, I think we have a representative from the E.U. here who can maybe correct me if I am wrong on this. The Irish had a per capita income that equaled 70 percent of the average in the E.U. Today they have a per capita income that is close to 140 percent of the E.U. average. They reduced unemployment from about 10-11 percent to about 3 percent today. They more than doubled, in fact, probably tripled their per capita income. They reduced their public debt. They moved into IT and knowledge-based sectors of the economy very successfully and went from being an agriculturally-based economy to not just an industrial-based but a knowledge-based economy, etcetera. It required really a national effort that was ready to make the sacrifices necessary before they reached the results that they have.

I cannot tell you that we have such a national consensus in Jordan. I can only say that the process has started, and people are sort of internalizing what is going on. Some of the things we are proposing will make Jordan a part of the First World if they are implemented. Some of them are ambitious, but all of them are realistic. We are not putting anything here that we did not feel can be done and had been done

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in other countries of the world.

This is where we are. The process, the train has started, as I said. I just hope that it continues to move along. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MS. WITTES: Marwan, thank you for that excellent tour de force. If that is neoliberalism, it sounds pretty good to me.

I want to ask you, before we open it up for general question and discussion, given the recommendation in the National Agenda that the government actively work to encourage the development of new political parties to compete with Islamist forces which, as you say, have enjoyed an organizational advantage over others for so long, I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about the response of the Islamist movement to the National Agenda. What was their involvement in the process, first, and secondly, what has been their response since it was completed?

SEN. MUASHER: I think, in fact, they played a very positive role. We had the ex-Chairman -- what do they call him in English -- the Secretary-General of the party, Abdul Attah Farabia (?) was a member of the National Agenda and was a very active member of the agenda and participated in the development of all the political reforms.

Now the Islamists' position, as well as some other positions within the committee, was that we should go for a 50-50 system, that is, 50 percent allotted to districts and 50 percent allotted to party lists. Most of the others felt that 50-50 was too quick because the Islamists, in particular, had an unfair advantage. We need to at least allow several years before political parties can develop. So a lot of the others proposed a gradual system where you start with less than 50. We did not really specify 50. You start with less than 50, but you start the process, so that political processes can be formed and coalitions can be formed, and then you increase the ratio given to party lists as you move and as political parties evolve.

As I said, the Islamists were very much part of the process as were all the other political forces in the country.

MS. WITTES: I have on my list right now, Ori, George, David, and Jonathan, and I will begin taking others. Ori, why don't you start?

MR. NIR: Thank you, Marwan. To what extent is regional cooperation a part of the proposed plan, both with

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neighboring Arab countries and with Israel?

SEN. MUASHER: Regional cooperation is a must, particularly on such issues as free trade areas and free movement of labor and capital and all that. It is part of the plan. The issue of Israel, in particular, has not really been tackled in the plan because we already have a peace treaty. There is no need to reform the system, if you want, on that issue. We have a peace treaty. We have trade cooperation. We have QIZs in the country. We have several forms of cooperation, and we didn't feel there was a need.

We did look at the QIZ issue because the QIZ issue is becoming problematic in the country. Why? Because more than 50 percent today of the labor in the QIZ is non-Jordanian which defeats the purpose of why the QIZs were created in the first place.

MS. WITTES: It is imported labor?

SEN. MUASHER: It is imported labor because we have tough competition now from other countries in the region like Egypt and Turkey and others. So investors, particularly foreign investors, who have plans in QIZ find it cheaper to bring in labor from Southeast Asia and other places and not employ Jordanian labor, and this really is affecting us. The days when the QIZ concept did not face any competition in the area are over. Now we have competition from others, and we have to really evolve to the free trade agreement with the United States and make use of the free trade agreement slowly rather than keep our dependence predominantly on the QIZ approach.

MS. WITTES: Thank you.

George Hishmeh?

MR. HISHMEH: Hi. I am just curious. How are you going about telling Jordanians about this issue in the country? What do you do? Do you hold rallies? Do you hold conferences?

The other question is, being in the media, I am curious, how are you tackling the issue of media and self-support of the media? Media in many parts of the world, Jordan, Israel, is government-supported. Are you doing anything about advertising, encouraging advertising, and things like this, especially -- I always have this point I make -- advertising from foreign sources like American companies, British and European companies, things like this in Jordan to encourage them to support the local press? Thank you.

SEN. MUASHER: Well, on the issue of advertising and self-support, it has been quite a while since the state media

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outlets have been operated on a rather commercial basis. So now, the news is riddled with the advertisements, the nightly news. This was unheard of a few years ago to put advertisements during the nightly news shows. Now it is commonplace.

Competition from the private sector is forcing the state media organizations, and when I say state media, I mean TV, radio, and to a certain extent, the news agencies, but TV and radio in particular are now run with independent boards on a commercial basis and are administratively disengaged from the government.

Does the government still exercise editorial supervision? Of course, of course. This is the next step which is we want to disengage state media from direct government control and have it maybe operate in a model similar to the BBC, and allow private TV and radio to operate freely. We have, like I said, this month we will see the first step in TV.

As far as the press is concerned, the press is totally private in Jordan, and in fact, we have more than our share of the tabloids and the weeklies, and they are quite vocal.

But I will tell you, to be candid, officials in our part of the world are not used to being criticized. I mean, by officials, not just government people; Parliament is the same. When Parliament members are criticized in the press, they raise hell. So this is a culture that needs to change. If you are a public official, of course, you have to be criticized. Of course, you are going to have to face scrutiny. Some of it might be sensational, yes, but that is part of being a public official. That concept, that culture is still slowly coming in. We still have people that are otherwise very open-minded and very forward-looking, but when it comes to the media and when they are criticized in the media, they become reactionaries almost. That culture, unfortunately, will take time to evolve.

MR. HISHMEH: How do you go and tell about this?

SEN. MUASHER: Several ways; of course, we have a web site. We hold -- I can't say we because now it is not my responsibility, but it is the government's responsibility -- talks at political parties' headquarters, at union headquarters, at clubs around the country, at universities. We do this, and I think we should do more of it, frankly. I don't think it is enough. I think the debate is just starting in Jordan about the National Agenda, and people are just warming up to it, to the contents.

The debate, last year, was one that did not care about

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the contents. It was about the concept. The political elite was not ready to discuss the concept because the concept to them meant change, and change to them meant being robbed of privileges. So they did not even care to read the agenda. In a similar way, the public did not, many times, care to read it because they said, "Well, we don't really believe you are serious about this. So why should we even bother looking at the document when we don't believe you are serious?"

Both sides, I think, are starting to calm down and look at what is in here, and what is in here is truly -- this is a biased opinion because it is not developed by me. This is developed through a national consensus. Everybody who has any bearing on any of the areas of the agenda participated in it. So, really, there is no person that will agree to every single part of the agenda, including myself. There are many things in here I don't agree to, but this is not my document. This is a document that represents a national consensus. You need to look at it not just at each of its parts; you need to look at the concept and the approach that it presents in transforming Jordan to a modern country that does things efficiently and in a modern way and according to merit. That is really what the agenda calls for, regardless of the individual recommendations that it has in it.

MS. WITTES: Thank you.  
David?

MACK: If I were a Jordanian official concerned with state security, I would argue very strongly that this is the worst of all possible times to be engaging in political and economic reforms. I mean, look at the United States. Since September, 2001, we have started chipping away at individual liberties, and we are postponing dealing with our huge and growing structural and economic problems like our gigantic deficit. I think it is typical of any state, that they say, "We are at war. We are not going to proceed."

Now you have a very, very large and volatile Iraqi population. You have probably people in your Palestinian community, some of whose loyalties go to Hamas, others' loyalties go to the PLO. And yet, you are talking about going ahead. It seems to me, how do you deal with this argument that must be coming from Jordanians who have responsibility for your security at a time when you have already had some serious terrorist problems in your country?

SEN. MUASHER: Well, first of all, political reform

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does not mean that security agencies should stop doing their business of fighting terrorists. The two are not in contradiction. For the longest time in the Arab world, this notion was not accepted. No one is asking the intelligence services, the security's services to stop doing their work.

What we are saying, though, is military solutions alone do not work. I think I need not point out the mess in Iraq today to prove the point. Military solutions do not work alone if they are not coupled with a holistic approach to the problem of reform. If you don't make people comfortable and happy, and if you don't encourage breeding grounds for terrorists, then you cannot employ just military means. Frankly, this argument is being accepted by our security agencies. I cannot tell you that it is being universally accepted, but a few years ago, this argument had no place in the political discourse or the security discourse of the country. Today this argument is being accepted and acknowledged that you cannot just keep on working on military solutions in the absence of also worrying about reform in a larger aspect.

MS. WITTES: Did you have security people involved in this committee?

SEN. MUASHER: No, we did not, but they were informed of the developments because you wanted a buy-in from everybody. These are important people. They have a say in what goes on. And so, they certainly were part of the discussion, many of the discussions about the National Agenda, but they were not part of the committee itself.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. I have eight people on the list, and I want to make sure I get to you all. So I am going to take you in pairs. The first pair is Jonathan Davidson and Rafi Danziger.

MR. DAVIDSON: I am very happy to be paired with Rafi. I don't know that my views necessary accord with his, but we agree on a lot of things.

My current ambassador is John Bruton who presided over that Celtic miracle that you quite rightly pointed to. I don't think he is here, but I think if he were here, he would agree with all the things you said about Ireland because he was responsible for a lot of them. But one thing you left out, and I think he would add this, is that a lot of the Celtic miracle was due to Ireland's membership of the European Union, and that required a lot of the reforms that you mentioned, and it also brought with it a lot of goodies in the form of pump-priming of

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the economy, massive resources transfers. Now that, obviously, cannot be replicated in the case of a country like Jordan.

However, you can look around the neighborhood of the E.U. and see a lot of other examples where the projection of self-power or the carrots and sticks or European Union power do, in fact, promote reform of the type that you are describing. However, it can only have a dramatic effect when the enticements are attractive enough. Namely, in the case of Turkey, the membership prospective has produced dramatic political reform and economic reform, too. There are a lot of other examples of countries around the Mediterranean.

So that view is a little bit at odds with another argument you presented quite rightly, that reform can only be homegrown. It can only be viable if it is a domestic consensus, which is obviously true, and it can't be due to outside involvement. But the question is, if the outside involvement is attractive enough, if it is powerful enough, if it is influential enough, it does, in fact, seem to have a dramatic effect. So the question is how much is enough? How much is too much from the outside world?

MS. WITTES: Let's take Rafi also for the sake of efficiency. Go ahead.

MR. DANZIGER: Marwan, at the beginning of your talk, you mentioned the law against terrorism is one of the six pillars of your National Agenda. Now we all know that al-Qa'ida has zeroed in on Jordan for quite a while, and I think it is quite understandable. Recently, I think, to the surprise of many of us, Hamas which has traditionally focused on Israel and the territories, suddenly also focused on Jordan, and we have the story of the cell that you captured. Could you explain to us why you think that suddenly Hamas, precisely after they came into government, they suddenly go after Jordan, and can you give us some more details about the cell that you captured there?

SEN. MUASHER: With respect to the first question, outside involvement is fine. I hope I didn't give the impression that I was against outside involvement, but I wanted to caution against outside pressure that attempts to do things by brute force. That doesn't lead to results.

I will take the E.U. case in point with Jordan because I think we have a very successful relationship with the E.U. in that we also were one of the first, if not the first, Middle East country to sign a neighborhood, not just a neighborhood, I mean an action plan within the neighborhood policy of Europe.

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That action plan involved initiatives, specific initiatives with timelines that Jordan would undertake and that Jordan would get rewarded for by the E.U., but these were all initiatives that we jointly agreed on. These were not brought to us by the E.U. and said, "Okay, you need to do this or else."

That doesn't work. These initiatives that we sat together and agreed jointly on and put up a roadmap for their implementation and the monitoring mechanism. That worked, and that worked fine, and we have no problem with that. That is, again, an example of a successful relationship with the E.U.

I happen to believe that outside aid in general in the world, not just in the E.U., is going to be increasingly tied, from now on, to reforms. The world is not as generous as it used to be. Outside aid is doing things rather than the opposite, and many more countries are competing for this aid. In order to get your fair share, you have to be convinced yourself that you need these reforms, and if you don't do them, you don't do them at your peril. That is how it should be done rather than the brute force approach.

MR. DAVIDSON: If I might just say, I couldn't have asked for a better answer.

SEN. MUASHER: On Hamas, Rafi, I am not an official anymore. I can tell you this is not the first time that we have caught arms, not just by Hamas but by several other groups, trying to be smuggled into the country. I don't have the details on these particular cases. I am out of government. I don't have the details to share them with you, other than to say this is real and ongoing and has been ongoing for quite some time.

MS. WITTES: The next set of questioners is Walid Maalouf and Jess Hordes.

MR. MAALOUF: So nice to see you, and I always enjoy your common sense that you talk. I just want to ask you this. I don't know, maybe it is a wide question or something that --

MS. WITTES: See if you can ask it narrowly.

MR. MALLOUK: Well, I didn't mean in talking too much. I just want to see. I respect your opinion, and I want to see how or what would you do, or what should be done to go over this hurdle in the Arab world of accusing open-minded democratic free spirits of being agents. Is it only a responsibility of the United States to do something, or also are there some local thoughts from friendly governments? In your opinion, what is it that they could do?

SEN. MUASHER: Lots of things.

MS. WITTES: Let me just take Jess first.

SEN. MUASHER: Please.

MS. WITTES: Thanks.

MR. HORDES: Marwan, congratulations on an impressive effort. You talked about reform and that the real issue is what pace the reform occurs. I am wondering in the area of political reform, who makes the decisions? What are the benchmarks? How does one know at what point one moves to the next phase in opening up the system even more?

SEN. MUASHER: We are getting into the difficult questions.

Walid's question, there is no easy answer because certainly this is an evolutionary process and requires, frankly, an overhauling of the education system in the Arab world. For a long time, our education system focused on direct learning, memorizing issues, did not encourage critical thinking, did not encourage research methods, did not encourage creativity, and that cannot bode well for a thriving society. In Jordan, we are now in the process of overhauling our education system, not just in terms of computerizing the system, not in terms of allowing free access to the internet, but also in terms of changing the curriculum that would allow for these processes to become part and parcel of our culture. This is, again, an evolutionary process. I have no way of telling how many years this will take, but it does require a sustained and consistent effort by the government to keep encouraging this kind of system.

Who decides political reform or the pace of political reform? It is a difficult question. It is not just the government. I will give you an example. Certainly, the political will in Jordan, the King plays a big part, the government plays a big part, but Parliament also plays a part. I will give you an example on women's empowerment. Many of the initiatives that we had on women's empowerment were killed in Parliament. So it was an example of an issue where the government was ready, but Parliament was not. Now what do you do? This is your Parliament. You need to work with it.

I will tell you we are now debating a law of financial disclosure where, like the United States, every official at a certain level has to file their net worth and assets and all, and it faced a lot of opposition in Parliament. It has finally passed, but a lot of Parliament members did not want themselves to be included.

It is a difficult question to answer. It is a combination of the existing conditions. Like the Hamas victory today, as I said, it is making people in the government worried about political reform. I am one of the people who are arguing the opposite. Because of such victories, we need to do something. We cannot just hope that the problem will disappear by itself if you just continue status quo policies, which in my opinion have proved a big failure. This is still a debate. I will tell you I am a minority. If you can consider me from the political elite, I am a minority.

MS. WITTES: Next pair is Sam Lewis and then Marvin Kalb.

MR. LEWIS: Marwan, I think the answer is just to clone you, several times actually. I take it, from what you said, that His Majesty is strongly in favor of this agenda. I just assume that from what you have said.

Secondly, is the new government strongly in favor of this agenda? You have turned the problem to them to carry out, so that is a very important question. How does this government in particular regard this program?

But third, a question that relates to we have had a lot of experience with wonderful programs presented by national commissions, and what happens to them? Is there any arrangement so that those 29 people continue to meet periodically and to be a lobby, if you will, to push the government to carry out what they recommended. Do you have any such continuing role and do the others, and if you don't, why not?

MR. KALB: You used the term, I believe, "the mess in Iraq". I wonder if you could give us a bit of a definition of the mess. That is to say, do you see a civil war unfolding now in Iraq, and what is it that you would feel the U.S. ought to be doing there?

SEN. MUASHER: I know how to get myself in trouble, I guess.

Let me say, first, a continuous role by either the National Agenda Committee or by a similar group is necessary because obviously a lot of the assumptions made, mathematical models used, numbers used are going to change depending on developments. The policy direction might not change, but the actual numbers will. Sometimes even the policy direction might need some changes. So there is a need for a continuing role of some sort. That role has not been yet put in place at least not in a very clear manner.

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Two things have been put in place. One, the government has now a unit at the Prime Ministry whose sole function is to monitor the progress and report to government, to Parliament, and to the public on the implementation of the agenda. So there is such a unit in place. That unit is now working with the other departments in the country in order to establish subunits in each of these departments, so that they can carry out the monitoring process. The other thing is many of the members of the agenda have become senators. The King appointed them as senators in the new Senate, me included, and we now have a committee in the Senate chaired by myself to monitor the implementation process of the agenda.

That is not enough. It is not enough, but at least we are starting to do it. I imagine in a year or so that the agenda will need to be updated, and I imagine the committee might be called up again to do that, but I mean that is not decided yet.

You don't need to me to list the specifics of the mess in Iraq because I think everybody knows them more than me. I don't know if we are heading toward a civil war. Civil war is a big word and sometimes is used rather loosely. We have a major problem in Iraq, certainly. Whether that is heading towards a civil war or not, in my personal opinion, I doubt it, but that is my personal opinion.

I think that if the Iraqis succeed in forming a government because let us remember, first of all, the elections were fair, were not boycotted by any group and so produced what you can say is a fairly representative Parliament. That is a strong and positive development. Now there were practices before that were clearly partisan and clearly contributed to the worsening situation, not just by the armed groups like Zarqawi and others but even by the government itself. You know that the Minister of Interior, for example, was under heavy attack and criticism because it was not seen as fair; it was seen as very partisan.

To the extent, I think, that the new Prime Minister can form a government that is truly representative of everybody with an Interior Minister and a Defense Minister who are truly nonpartisan and strong, and to the extent that they can integrate the militias into the army, I think that we would be on our way at least towards a serious recovery process. There was a time when this was a big if. It is still an if, but I am more optimistic than I used to be on the chances for at least

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forming a stable government.

What about the U.S.? Look, if you are talking about withdrawing now, it is a disaster. Withdrawing now will create a big vacuum, frankly. I know the Jordanian position is not in favor of a withdrawal of U.S. troops, but we have to talk about the process. I mean the Iraqis also need to know that you will withdraw, that you are not staying forever. You know this; you don't want to stay in Iraq, but many people in the area don't know this or don't believe this, that you don't intend to stay, and need to be reassured that there is a process that will end in troop withdrawal from Iraq and will end in Iraqis taking care of their own problems. Jordan, at least, and I know many of the countries in the region are not in favor of an immediate withdrawal before the mess is taken care of.

MS. WITTES: Khaled (?) and Julia, briefly, please.

DAWOUD: Thank you very much, sir. Comparing to the Egyptian experience as well and hearing you repeatedly saying we have to encourage the creation of political parties or encourage parties, but parties are a reflection of the ground, so where are you going to get these parties from? We know things are in the Arab world either Muslim Brotherhood, Liberals, or Nationalists. So what do you mean by that? Thank you, sir.

MS. WITTES: Julia?

CHOUCAIR: Yes, thank you. You mentioned the whole question of whether the Arab-Israeli conflict can be used against reform. You said that there has been a shift and that this discourse can no longer be used as an excuse. I think that is true in some countries more than others, but in the particular Jordanians' case, I have the impression that many Jordanians continue to believe that, in fact, this conflict is behind much of the resistance to reform in Jordan, particularly on the issue of electoral reform. Even the most reformist of Jordanians will argue that it is premature to ask these questions about representation and about changing the districts without before having final status negotiations because the nature of the state itself is divided between East Bankers or West Bankers. I was hoping, now that you are outside the government and able to answer more candidly, how you see this issue.

SEN. MUASHER: I agree that political parties are a reflection of what is there on the ground, and in fact, that is why we don't have, at least in Jordan, political parties to speak of. But I also will argue that what is on the ground is

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also partly in response to government policies and that government policies have made the status quo what it is today or at least contributed to what the status quo is today. I will further argue that governments in the Arab world today have an interest in proactively encouraging political party development. The argument is reverse. Whereas the governments were happy in the past in not having an active political party life because they could do what they wanted to without headaches, the headaches today are coming because they are not doing what they need to do with political parties. The headache is at the door.

So, what I am arguing is the Arab governments have a stake in encouraging political party development rather than acquiesce in whatever political parties are formed or not formed. How do we do that? Well, the electoral law is a start. If you change the electoral law in a way that encourages political party development, you can do stuff to do that. Of course, the rest depends on the ability of these political parties to have real programs and win popular support. But you need to be a catalyst whereas the state was not a catalyst in the past in terms of this issue.

Electoral reform in Jordan, look, the agenda is aware of all of these sensitivities. In fact, what the agenda proposed on electoral reform did not really address, at least in full, the question that you refer to, but, again, this should not be an excuse for doing nothing.

Many people in Jordan speak about <Inaudible>, that if they do anything about electoral reform, it is like -- what is it English -- settling refugees in Jordan. They conveniently forget the refugees in Jordan. First of all, we don't have, I mean we have in official statistics about 2.5 million who were registered refugees. How many of them are still living in refugee camps? Less than 200,000. So we don't really have a refugee issue like other countries.

They conveniently forget that all, every single one of them is a Jordanian citizen. It is not a refugee in Syria. It is not a refugee in Lebanon. These are people who vote, who have full constitutional rights. So we cannot talk about *pultween* (?) in Jordan in the same sense that we talk about it in other Arab countries. These people have been <Inaudible>. They have been settled 50 years ago, not today. Their children and their grandchildren are born in Jordan, and the intermarriage rate between them and East Jordanians is extremely high. I doubt that you can point out to one family in Jordan

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which does not have an intermarriage. I doubt.

MS. WITTES: I can't thank you enough for coming over today, for giving us your thoughts, your views, your candid assessment of the situation, and I want to thank you for your tireless efforts to pursue the Jordan for which you are striving, as the National Agenda says.

Thank you all for coming, for your excellent questions and comments. I hope we will see you again very soon, Marwan.

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