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WHAT PRICE FREEDOM?

ASSESSING THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S FREEDOM AGENDA

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Saban Center at Brookings. For those of you who are new to Brookings, I would urge you to begin your lunch. We eat and talk here.

And I hope you don't mind that either, Lorne.

So, please begin. We're very glad to have the opportunity today to launch a new Saban Center analysis paper, which I believe you all have copies of. If you don't, you should get one when you leave. It's called "What Price Freedom? Assessing the Bush Administration's Freedom Agenda," and it's written by our speakers today, Tamara Cofman Wittes and Sarah Yerkes.

Tamara came to us, a product of Georgetown University where she did her Ph.D., and then a product of two other think tanks -- the Middle East Institute and the U.S. Institute of Peace. We were very glad to have recruited her precisely because of her interest in work on the issues of democracy and development in the Arab world. Tamara has also worked on Israeli/Palestinian issues, and that was very helpful

to have her working with me on those issues.

But as the Bush administration geared up for the promotion of its freedom agenda or democratization agenda in the Middle East, Tamara developed this project that we have launched under her leadership, the Arab Development Democracy project, also referred to as ADD, but not to be confused with that other ADD.

Part of the process in this project that Tamara initiated was to start to monitor the way in which the Bush administration was spending the considerable resources that it had mobilized for this democratization agenda in the Middle East. I believe that this part of the ADD project is unique in Washington. And the paper, the analysis paper, is the result of that effort. It presents, I think, a fascinating assessment of how the Bush administration is doing in terms of promoting this agenda and where it spends funding.

Tamara has been helped mightily in this effort by Sarah Yerkes, who came here as a research assistant, rose to a senior research analyst, and now has actually gone off to Tammy's alma mater, Georgetown

University, to undertake a Ph.D. And we're delighted that under Tammy's tutelage Sarah has played such an important role in helping to write this paper and do a lot of the analysis involved.

We're also delighted to have Lorne Craner here to respond. It's a real honor for me. I've known Lorne in his various capacities, but in particular he has a rich experience in the effort to promote political reform in the Arab world through his role as the president of the International Republican Institute. As I suspect most of you know -- all of you may know -- IRI is a companion organization to NDI, the National Democratic Institute, both of which are funded by the NED, the National Endowment for Democracy, as the two operating branches of the common effort, bipartisan effort, to promote our democratic values around the world, and IRI has done a terrific job in this regard under the leadership of Lorne.

He has a distinguished career in public service, starting out as a foreign policy advisor to Jim Kolbe and then Senator John McCain. He served as Deputy Secretary for Legislative Affairs, in the

National Security Council under Brent Scowcroft as Director of Asian Affairs, and then in the first term of the Bush administration as Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor under Secretary of State Colin Powell. So, he brings a very rich experience, practical experience, to the discussion today.

And we're very grateful to have you here, Lorne.

Tammy, the floor is yours and Sarah's.

MS. WITTES: Well, thank you, Martin, and thanks to all of you for coming. This paper has been a long time coming, but I feel like we've done a good interim job on collecting this data. When we started the Democracy Assistance Monitoring Project about a year and a half ago, it was clear to us very quickly that even the parts of the U.S. government that were responsible for spending this money didn't have a very good handle on the big picture of who else was doing this and where and for how much. So, we hope that this monitoring project, by pulling together all the pieces from MEPI, from DRL, from AID, and eventually from the

other bits of the U.S. government that engage on democracy and governance issues in the region, that we'll be able to paint that bigger picture and help improve the policy discussion and policy implementation as a result.

What we tried to do in this paper and this snapshot is to answer two key questions. First, how institutionalized is the Freedom Agenda at this point within the U.S. government? And, secondly, how well structured are these new institutions for the Freedom Agenda to help it achieve its goals? And we wanted to focus on these two questions at this time, because it seems to us that the last few years have been eventful. The coming two years are, in many ways, a crucial phase for the Freedom Agenda and for progress toward democracy in the Middle East.

From a United States perspective, you can see that there has been some progress over the last few years. I guess I would say an initial credibility barrier for the United States in undertaking this policy shift has been overcome, first in launching the Middle East Partnership Initiative in December 2002, a

new U.S. assistance program specifically targeted at advancing reform in the region and closely tied to policy -- U.S. policy in the region through the Near East Affairs Bureau; secondly, launching the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative, which did, at least at the level of rhetorical commitment, corral members of the G8 into supporting the goals of democratic change and to figuring out a way -- and figuring out a way to work toward this goal even though there were disagreements on other crucial issues.

And so if you look, for example, at when the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative was first leaked to Arabic press in February of 2004, at that time the president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, had no trouble kind of standing up and rejecting the thing out of hand as irrelevant, as imperialist, as an external imposition. And today every Arab state is participating in one or another forum in one of the BMENA programs, so there has been some progress there.

And you've seen Arab states compelled by these diplomatic initiatives to respond in some form and embrace at least the rhetoric if not the practice

of democratic reform. At the same time, the efforts lost momentum recently, I think. Actual reform efforts in the region have hit a wall in many places, largely as a result of some of the outcomes of the past years' tumult, victories by Islamist parties in some countries, strong showings by Islamist parties in others, fears of instability, and stoked most recently, of course, by the crisis in Lebanon, and the prospect that given the pressures building in the region, a tide of radicalism may overcome any attempts at more gradual and more progressive or moderate reform.

I think, too, when we have been around the region and had the opportunity to speak to activists and to our government officials on this question that the depth of America's commitment to reform is still an open question for them.

In essence, what the Freedom Agenda is, is a compellence strategy. It's trying to compel Arab governments to shift their policies, their domestic politics, in ways that they simply would not do if left to themselves, and I do believe that that's in U.S. interest, but it requires that the United States

effectively demonstrate not only its clear intent but also the will and the capability to carry out its policy goals in the region, and that means that it has to demonstrate its ability to change the cost benefit calculus for Arab leaders.

I think that at this point the U.S. government has persuaded Arab governments and local actors of our sincerity, the sincerity of our intentions but not necessarily of our will and capability.

Now, why -- if this is the issue we want to focus on, why look at detailed democracy assistance spending, little programs here and there? Why get in the weeds? I think it's important to get into the weeds when assessing the prospects for policy success in this area, because I think you can lose track of the real direction of U.S. diplomacy if you focus only on the high levels, only on the presidential statements or the speeches by the Secretary, only by the statements of criticism that might come from the State Department spokesman's podium. Those things are going to be dictated by a number of factors that may or may not

have anything to do with the merits of the case at hand, so I think it's important to look beyond those high-profile but essentially rhetorical policy statements.

Another reason is that leaders and activists on the ground in the region notice more. They do notice those public statements, and they matter very much, but they also notice things that are going on at the micro level.

There was an excellent series in the *Washington Post* last year that won a Pulitzer Prize, looking at democracy assistance in Yemen, and one of the things that became clear from that series was that President Saleh knew very well what was going on in his country, what programs NDI was implementing there, and whether those things made him uncomfortable or not. So, the micro level, the programming level, is important to local leaders and does affect their sense of what the United States is up to. These details matter to their perceptions of U.S. credibility, and therefore they have to matter to us.

So, if you're trying to see whether this

freedom agenda, whether this policy has a long-term future, you have to see not only what's being said but what's being built, what's being built within the foreign policy bureaucracy to support and sustain this policy over time. So, let's take a close-in look at that. I will talk briefly about the first two initiatives that you see -- the Middle East Free-Trade Area, or MEFTA, and BMENA, the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative, and then Sarah will talk about democracy assistance.

The Middle East Free-Trade Area initiative was set up -- it was actually one of the first reform initiatives set up by the U.S. government in the wake of 9/11, and the idea there was not simply to advance free trade between the U.S. and the region and not simply to advance thereby economic liberalization and economic development in the region but to do that toward a further goal. The hope was -- and I think it's very explicit in the policy statements and in the way the policy has been implemented -- that advancing free trade with the Arab world would do something similar to what happened in the East-Asian Tigers. It

would help to build an independent middle class that would then begin to demand its property rights and eventually its political rights from its governments, and so there's a clear premise in the MEFTA initiative that free trade and economic growth will have over time a positive impact on democracy in the region.

However, I think there are reasons to wonder whether that premise can hold in the states of the Arab Middle East, and specifically in the states that have so far been the focus of MEFTA attention, which are mostly the oil-rich states of the Gulf. Political scientists who study autocracy in the Middle East focus a lot on what we call the rentier state problem, the problem that these governments don't rely on taxation for revenue, that they enjoy revenues from oil rents from selling their natural resources on the world market, that they enjoy strategic rents from economic and military assistance from major powers, mostly the United States at this point, so that they don't have the same kind of incentive structure with respect to citizen demands that states that rely on taxation do. Moreover, because so much of the money in these

national economies is generated by external rents and so much of that money is held by and manipulated by the governments, the middle classes in these countries tend to remain dependent on government contracts, on government activities, government infrastructure building projects, and so on, and that keeps middle classes in states that have high rents from gaining the kind of independence that would allow them to move in the direction that middle classes did in South Korea or in Taiwan and begin to demand democracy.

So, I think that's one fundamental flaw with looking on something like MEFTA as a thin edge of a wedge to promote democracy in the Middle East. It doesn't seem to have the same kind of potential that it might have in other regions.

Now, another issue with MEFTA is the strategy that's been employed -- building free trade in the Middle East not through a regional free-trade agreement -- something like CAFTA or NAFTA or the EU -- that would then link up with the U.S. economy but, rather, building a series of bilateral agreements between the U.S. and individual Arab countries.

Now, when this strategy was devised, I think the idea, as far as I can understand, was to kind of set up a competitive dynamic and say well, you want to play, you know, show us what you're willing to do, and the states that were willing to move farthest fastest are the ones that we moved to FTA's (off mike). That's good at the outset, and it did secure a number of agreements with Morocco, with Bahrain, with Oman.

But there are limits to that effort. First, once you pick the low-hanging fruit, how do you incentivize reform for the rest? The UAE basically just walked away from FTA negotiations with us. They decided that it's just not worth it, worth the price, in terms of the domestic changes they would have to make to sign that agreement. So, what do you do after you pick the low-hanging fruit, number one; and number two, if you're building bilateral agreements, they're not going to create the kind of regional economic growth that regional economic integration can provide. They will have a limited effect on poverty rates, on basic developmental indicators, on the increase in wealth in the region that might eventually have broader

political implications. So, I think MEFTA is blunted in its impact by the strategy that it has embraced.

A final point on MEFTA before I move on to BMENA, and Sarah will talk about this more in detail, but MEPI, from its inception, has committed significant chunks of its funding to supporting the MEFTA effort and supporting free trade in the Middle East, and as Sarah will show you later, I think over time that has a detrimental impact on MEPI's ability to do other things.

Now, let me turn to the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative, which, as I think all of you know, was launched by the U.S. when it had the presidency of the G8 at the Sea Island Summit in June 2004. As I said earlier, I think BMENA did kind of force Arab governments to sit up and take notice, and those responsible for implementing BMENA have spent a lot of time and energy getting Arab states to come to the table, participate in BMENA activities, most notably the Annual Forum for the Future, which was designed as a conference that would kind of compel Arab government to sit in a room with their business and

their civil society groups and listen to their concerns and demands with regard to reform in the region.

A lot of attention has been given to getting those Arab states to the table, and they are all at the table. But I think we have to ask what's happening substantively now that they're there, and my question about BMENA at this point is whether it, especially the U.S. diplomatic investment in getting them all to play ball, has produced any payoff in terms of substantive progress in dialog between government and civil society, government and business, or in terms of getting Arab states to see the need to move more seriously and more quickly on reform. I don't see that that has happened so far.

Now, the other aspect of BMENA is that it was meant to help bridge gaps between the United States and mostly its European partners but others who are involved in assistance in the region and try and bridge the gaps in our approaches to promoting reform, and if you look substantively at the European -- democracy assistance programs in place today and the American democracy assistance programs in place today, you don't

really see any convergence, and the European states have gone along their independent track of the Barcelona process and the partnership agreements, and the U.S. has gone along its own tracks. So, it hasn't really served that secondary purpose.

So, summing up, I think the important concern is that the U.S. investment in MEFTA and BMENA hasn't produced much in the way of substantive results so far, and I think given the way these two initiatives are structured, we can't anticipate that we're going to see significant results from them in the years to come.

And with that, I will turn it over to Sarah, who will talk about the democracy assistance piece.

MS. YERKES: Okay, thank you. Hope you can hear me.

Okay, I'm going to focus on the first question that we addressed: Is the Freedom Agenda well structured to achieve its goals? On the positive side, the administration has persuaded Congress to devote new resources to the Freedom Agenda despite budget constraints. As you can see from this table, overall U.S. government democracy spending in the Middle East

has increased considerably, almost 700 percent in the past four years. It should be noted here that the figures in this chart do not include spending on programs in Iraq, which I will address in a minute.

But looking back at this table, while the individual programs -- MEPI, USAID, DRL -- have each fluctuated somewhat, there is an apparent trend toward increased spending on democracy and governance in the region or, at the very least, in maintaining relatively high levels of funding for the Freedom Agenda.

While the increase in U.S. spending on democracy and governance has been impressive, it is important to note that it pales in comparison to previous efforts. In the former Soviet Union, for example, as you can see here, the United States spent $14.60 per capita in the first five years following the end of the cold war. That's 18 times the 80 cents per capita we have spent in the Middle East in the first five years following September 11.

Turning back to Iraq for one moment, the reason that we do not include Iraq in our analysis is that including spending on Iraq distorts the broader

picture of U.S. government spending on democracy and governance in the Middle East, although we do include Iraqi individuals who participate in some MEPI programs and other region-wide programs.

As you can see in this chart, USAID, the main agency responsible for programming in Iraq, has spent 71 percent of its D&G money on Iraqi programs but only 29 percent of its funding going toward the rest of the region. Additionally, it is difficult to determine from public sources how much of the money is going toward democracy assistance versus how much is going to physical or institutional reconstruction of government offices.

Now I'm going to take a look at MEPI as a cornerstone of the freedom agenda.

Now into its fourth year of existence, MEPI has made significant positive changes since our last report. When evaluating MEPI spending, three trends become apparent, some of which are positive and some negative. The first trend is that MEPI has made a shift toward more political projects, reversing its earlier trend toward economic projects. As this table

shows, there's a gradual increase in political pillar funding and now an overall balance between pillars. The numbers here are slightly misleading. As you can see, the Political pillar has only increased 120 percent compared to 200 percent for the Woman's pillar and 283 percent for the Economic pillar. However, FY04 and '05 grants in other pillars have more political content than in the past up in the numbers.

For example, the Education pillar now has several programs aimed at educating youth on civic rights and responsibilities, such as the Arab Civitas Program, and the Women's Empowerment pillar has several politically focused programs, such as strengthening women's NGO networks in Egypt.

A second trend is that MEPI has achieved success in outreach to local activists, an improvement of allocation of grants to Arab NGOs. As you can see here, 11 percent of MEPI's grants are now aimed at Arab NGOs with an additional 21 percent geared toward individuals. And while a full third of MEPI's grants involve Arab governments or Arab government officials, that number has decreased considerably from MEPI's

first two years of operation.

Another trend is an increased use of short-term training and education programs. As you can see here, the largest chunk of MEPI programs falls into the training category with 39 percent, with another 12 percent categorized as exchange. While these types of programs certainly do have some benefits, they can also be seen as a double-edged sword. Both exchange and training programs tend to be short in duration with perhaps little long-term impact. While they do manage to introduce many individuals to MEPI and its programs relatively quickly, the reality is that unless MEPI follows up with the participants after their two-day training workshops or two-week trips to the United States, the initial impact of these programs will be unlikely to carry over once the individuals return to their daily lives.

I would like to call attention to the fiscal year '05 MEPI program, the Alumni Network and Outreach Program, which creates opportunities for MEPI alumni to share their experiences with one another. We encourage MEPI to continue with this kind of programming and

focus its resources on maintaining contact with expanding follow-up programs for MEPI alumni in order to increase the impact of these shorter term projects.

Finally, we turn to look at MEPI's budgetary force in regard to other projects of the Freedom Agenda. Tammy referred to this earlier and, as you can see, MEPI's funding has been increasingly siphoned off to support other political and economic reform initiatives, such as BMENA and MEFTA.

In FY06, so far -- and I want to emphasize that this third -- one-third figure in FY06 is incomplete. We do not know the full numbers yet, but so far a full third of MEPI's funding will go to support the BMENA initiative, calling into question MEPI's ability to achieve its goals and provide the best support for its programs, given this lack of full funding.

Additionally, MEPI's ability to achieve its goals is challenged by the fact that MEPI is still trying to take on a wide variety of projects in areas with a very small pot of money.

So, taking all of this into consideration,

then, the two key questions the Freedom Agenda faces in regard to spending are, first, whether the budgetary force can be concentrated rather than dissipated for the sake of efficiency and better program management and whether the increase in spending can be matched by diplomatic efforts to support programmatic efforts.

And with that, I'll turn it back over to Tamara.

Tamara Wittes: Okay, let me just -- let me finish up with a couple of points regarding the challenges ahead for the Freedom Agenda in really determining whether over the next two years the policy infrastructure can be put into place so that this agenda will outlast the Bush administration's term in office. And I think that's our key question at this point.

The first challenge, which has been discussed over the course of the summer in Washington, with respect to Russia and the former Soviet Union, as well as the Middle East, is the increasingly hostile environment for democracy assistance, and you see that in the Arab states learning from the Russian example of

new NGO laws being passed that give governments more explicit ability to monitor and constrain the operation of NGOs and other associations within their countries.

Now, how do you counter this hostile environment, which is shifting all the time? The first is to get a good handle on the nature of the problem, and there was a very good study put out earlier this summer by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, which surveys NGO laws in Arab countries and gives you a pretty good indicator of the barriers the NGOs there face. But I think, most fundamentally, overcoming this challenge is a diplomatic issue for the U.S., pressing for basic political freedoms, most importantly, freedom of association, in our diplomatic dialog with governments. And this gets to an issue of policy coherence, which I'll talk about in a minute.

The second challenge is balancing a sort of constant tension between going for programs that have short-term payoffs in terms of public diplomacy, in terms of being able to demonstrate impacts to Congress or to other outside audiences, and things that might be a little less showy but that have greater long-term

impact on the environment for reform in the region.

I think this is an understandable tension, but if you noticed in the pie chart that Sarah showed you a minute ago, the tremendous proportion of MEPI programming at this point that's going to things that just last a couple of days or a couple of weeks, and you manage to get a lot of program alumni very quickly, and you can show those numbers and all the concluding conference photographs to your congressional appropriators, and that's a great boon. But the question is whether those short-term training projects really give people the tools they need to push the envelope when they get back home.

An example of a longer term but much lower profile effort over the last year or so has been an effort by MEPI to help a series of human rights NGOs in North Africa to build a coalition, a cross-national coalition that can then set priorities and work together to push their governments on certain issues. Now, that's the kind of thing you don't want to have the MEPI label on or an American label on at all. You're just getting these guys in the room and helping

them figure out how to work together. But that is a sort of thing -- or another example may be training local NGOs in the legal constraints that they face and how best to manipulate a very constrained legal environment to do as much as they possibly can. How do they respond if the government issues them a letter saying we're freezing your assets. That kind of training might, in the long run, be of more assistance in pushing and opening up room for civil society and alternative politics in these places.

The third challenge I think is in some ways one of the hardest, and that's improving policy coherence bottom up the way policy is implemented, down at post out in the region and also across USG, and it's that latter piece, helping all of the departments and agencies of the U.S. government get fully onboard with this project in all of their contacts in the region. That's where MEPI's budget allocation becomes important, and let me take you back to that slide. When MEPI has a bigger slice of discretionary funds, that garners the attention of other U.S. departments that might be running programs in the region already

whether they're judicial training, judicial assistance things in our Justice Department, police training that the FBI might be doing, commercial law programs that the Commerce Department might be doing, even military training that the Pentagon might be doing. When MEPI has more money to give away to other parts of the U.S. government in a tight-budget environment, that attracts attention and it creates focus, and it allows policy coherence to be created and implemented. But when MEPI's budget gets committed to these other projects and its discretionary pot goes down, I think it loses the sort of gravitational attraction that perhaps would help develop policy coherence across USG, so I wanted to flag that for you.

Finally, and most fundamentally, there is a real policy dilemma here for the U.S. government, and all of you know this. I think the difficulty that Sarah and I have seen in doing our research for this paper is that there hasn't been a lot of progress in moving toward closure on some of the -- on the two key dilemmas that the United States faces in implementing the Freedom Agenda: How do you balance democracy

promotion with other core U.S. goals in the region and how do you interact with Islamist groups? What is the American government's attitude toward different types of Islamist movements and how do you judge them?

On balancing democracy with other strategic goals, really this is important not just at the level of consistency in American statements and rhetoric, but if you're the political officer out at a post somewhere in the Gulf, you have choices to make every day about what issues you're going to prioritize and what you're going to get done. And if you're incentive structure is not set up so that you feel you have a positive reason to do democracy promotion, and you're going to get the backup from Washington when you try to do it, then you're more likely to help that big U.S. corporation that's trying to land a government contract, and that's -- you know, that's a choice I think that our embassy officers face every day, and it's something that can only be resolved at senior levels here. But until it's resolved, I think it will be difficult for the freedom agenda to demonstrate, as we say, the bottom here, the capacity, and will

necessary to change the thinking among Arab leaders and to get done what needs to be done in the long term.

Thank you.

MR. INDYK: Thank you, Tammy.

Lorne, the microphone is yours.

MR. CRANER: Ambassador Indyk, first of all thank you very much for the invitation to appear today.

Ambassador Indyk remains one of the most insightful analysts of Middle Eastern politics, which is why you really can't turn on the radio or TV without hearing him speaking.

I also want to commend the work done here at the Saban Center on some of the most vexing problems facing our country today.

I particularly want to thank Tamara and Sarah for their insightful and objective analysis of promoting democratic transformation in the Middle East. This report raised important questions about the survival of President Bush's democracy agenda through the future administrations and in the face of some resistance to the program, and it also provides some good answers.

I should mention this is a topic of great interest to me personally. Owen here and I made a trip out to the Middle East in the mid-1990s before it was cool. IRI was already doing democracy programming in a number of countries -- Oman, Kuwait, Morocco, etc. When I interviewed with Colin Powell and he asked me what I wanted to do if I came to the State Department, I mentioned three things -- this was in February of '01 -- and one of the three issues was increased democracy work in the Middle East.

Right after 9/11 a number of us noted that draining a swamp, which many of you will remember was the phrase at the time, could not just consist of killing terrorists but that people had to be offered some more hope. And even before MEPI existed, we in DRL came together with NEA to start putting money, funding, into the Middle East democracy effort in the fall of 2001. So, I take more than a little bit of interest in what I think we can correctly characterize as a young policy.

I often have to remind myself that this is a very young policy. I often remind people that if we

had examined Jimmy -- the results of Jimmy Carter's human rights agenda or Ronald Reagan's democracy agenda just five years after they had first spoken about them, we would have had little to show. And at the time, there were many experts -- Soviet experts, Latin American experts in the case of Jimmy Carter, South Korean experts in the case of Jimmy Carter -- who said it can't be done. And I'm very glad that Tamara and Sarah have not recycled those very shop-worn arguments. We're certainly hearing them more and more today, especially since the victory of Hamas and Hezbollah. My problem with those arguments is that they present no alternative other than the one that we had before 9/11.

I do think we have embarked on a long-term strategy in a world or for a world where democratic norms are commonplace. This whole debate, this recent debate, by the way, seems to have, as one might expect, provoked little difference in President Bush's views on democracy building in the Middle East. I've been in a number of occasions with him where he's talked at great length and with some emotion about this issue.

That said, we all recognize he has only two years left in this office, and as what price democracy states, the policy must be better institutionalized in the next few years. The discussion -- and I'll get into the weeds immediately -- of instilling a culture of democracy promotion among day-to-day practitioners is absolutely critical.

This paper raises the dilemma that FSOs at all levels often face of choosing between short-term goals, as you said, and the longer term work that democracy and human rights involves. I would say, based on two tours at the State Department -- I was there under Baker and under Powell -- that in general within the State Department the climate for democracy and human rights has improved greatly. I always attributed this to two things. One was, first of all, a generational change, that those of us who were in our 40s or younger just as we learned that you cannot throw candy wrappers out of cars, like we did when we were kids, that you have to care about the environment, have grown up in an international situation where you have to care about human rights and, even now, democracy

issues.

I think the other important factor in the State Department, especially at the higher levels, has been that you've now had three Secretaries of State in a row -- Madeline Albright, Colin Powell, and now Dr. Rice -- who cared very much about these issues. So, I found a great difference in attitudes in my two tours there. The one exception, I would say, was the Near East Bureau. And I don't -- I think it would be a caricature to call it the home of the Arabist, and I would say there are some notable exceptions. I enjoyed very much working with guys like Bill Burns and Ron Newman. But given 50 years of policy, it's not difficult to see that something like MEPI is a foreign organism in the Near East Bureau, and it is often treated as such.

As Tamara and Sarah have put it, U.S. democracy assistance in the Middle East has increased considerably, but diplomatic efforts to support democracy development have lagged.

There are some -- Tom Carothers among them -- who have suggested pulling MEPI out of the U.S.

government, and I think that is a tempting alternative. I kind of view it as a good medicine at NEA and not as a foreign organism, so I think that it is something that should remain there.

The regional bureaus have a center of gravity in the State Department that you just can't replicate, and if you can, you have to be able to integrate democracy and human rights efforts into day-to-day diplomacy. I think removing MEPI would only harm that.

I will also say, however, that an initiative like MEPI, or any of these democracy and human rights initiatives, requires assistance from the top, and by that I mean the Assistant Secretaries, the (off mike), and the Secretaries of State. Again, without getting too far into the weeds, this is a subject that, in a more general manner, is being addressed by some congressional legislation called the Advance Democracy Act that Congressman Lantos, Congressman Wolf, John McCain, and Mr. Lieberman are addressing. But it is certainly the case that all of these incentives have to come from the top and the support has to come from the top.

I think "What Price Freedom?" correctly notes the change in character in MEPI's focus, the focus of the grants. I think early on they were tilted quite heavily toward working with governments. I will say I think there's also been a change, however, in the character of MEPI grants. If you look in the Political pillar, if you look at grants when Liz -- while Liz Cheney was there when she was running MEPI the first time, there were -- it was definitely centered on countries already taking reform, I think, to begin picking the low fruit. But I found the political programs rather incisive and sharp. I think after she departed, that quality went down a little bit. I think it has picked up since she came back, and I think it has stayed at a very high level, high quality since she again departed, and Scott Carpenter continues to work on this.

I will tell you, with full disclosure, Scott Carpenter and I worked together at IRI, but I do think he's doing a fine job.

The issue of the nature in terms of showing results I'm afraid, having worked on Capital Hill and

in the administration, you do sometimes have to have the photographs of the meetings, etc. For reasons that elude me, on the House side in particular MEPI has not been a popular project, and I hope that that will change in the future. But, unfortunately, it's the same everywhere.

An early criticism of MEPI that's addressed a little bit in this report -- and I think your second or third graph comparing it to Central Europe assistance was the level of funding. Early on we heard from a lot of people in the Middle East. You know, there had been this big buildup from MEPI, and then when they saw the dollar amounts they said that's it? That's all you're giving?

But I will also say, as a practitioner you face an issue of absorptive capacity, and this is something we, IRI, and other groups have faced in China, for example, a huge country where there's an immense amount to be done. But if you start too big, too fast, frankly, you're squandering money and it is not usefully spent, and that certainly, in terms of your funding agencies, has its penalties afterward.

So, I think MEPI's done it about right.

Having said that MEPI should remain in NEA and that MEPI has a good -- has a capacity issue, I do think their efforts can be complemented very well by the Foundation for the Future, and this is a point that I said I was going to make, again a point made in your paper, I think, that more can be done in that area.

I also think -- you mentioned the Europeans. I dealt a lot with them when I was in the State Department in the beginning on issues of Middle East democracy. Again, they looked at us like the poor naïve little Americans who hadn't been around long enough to understand what the world was really like. Over the last two years I think their attitude has been more well, if you really believe this we can help you on it. And over the last year in particular, again as a practitioner, I have found them far more willing to be involved than they were even two or three years ago, and I think the Foundation for the Future is a really important mechanism to be able to involve them in that effort.

I know I'm supposed to find something to

disagree with or I wouldn't be -- no I will.

So, on the economic issues. I will tell you, first of all, I have never been a big theory of the old -- I've never been a big fan of the old theory of democratization, which is get an economy, get a middle class, get a democracy. I think that you have to treat the two at the same time. On this issue, it is certainly true that the support for economic reform in the Middle East has been expressed as a function of trying to increase democracy in the Middle East. But I think that is in part because democracy is the issue right now. You find when you're on the Hill or in the bureaucracy or any political environment you kind of have to -- you try to express your program in the great objective of the administration: How is it going to help that objective? But I think there's a separate issue here, which we need to remember, which is that even setting aside democratic reform, we're trying to address hopelessness in parts of the Arab world, and part of that is economic hopelessness.

I heard on the radio the other day -- I think it was on NPR -- that Egypt's unemployment rate, which

is officially 10 percent -- it's actually more like 20 percent; that there is great underemployment for college graduates; and that the Egyptian economy has to generate half a million jobs every year just to take care of their graduates. It's clearly not doing that, and it's clearly leading people to think about other lines of work and certainly about populist solutions, and we all know who the populists are in the Middle East.

Let me -- I think I'll just conclude here by saying there are a number of governments in the Middle East that have also begun noting that President Bush has only two years left, and they've certainly even begun saying that to foreign service officers in the region. I think they believe that after he has moved on that they will be able to get back to business as usual in Washington. I think they're making a mistake, for two reasons. The first was that in general democracy and human rights has become a facet with different degrees of emphasis for every administration since Jimmy Carter, so I think they will be unable to elude that. I think the fact that this administration

has made a special point of the Middle East is going to make it difficult for any future administration to try and sweep it by the boards. But I also think if you look at the two top contenders for the next presidential election -- John McCain and Hillary Clinton -- both continue to speak of their belief in an emphasis on democracy and human rights. Again, these issues have been at the fore of our foreign policy for about a quarter of a century. Whoever succeeds President Bush I think will have a very difficult time putting these issues in the Middle East back into the box.

Let me conclude again by thanking Tamara and Sarah for a very valuable contribution, for the debate and some good ideas on how to carry a point.

Thank you.

MR. INDYK: Thank you, Lorne. Thank you all.

Just to pick up on your last point, Lorne, which was really -- my question, just to be a little more specific to both -- to all of you in effect -- given this President's -- the strength of his commitment to the Freedom Agenda but given the -- not

just the fact that his administration has only two years to run but that the Republicans could well lose control of the House where I heard you say that it doesn't have that much support, and given the heavy weather that we're running into in the Middle East itself and the way in which that other approach, which focuses on stability rather than democratization, is likely to become of greater concern in the next two years. In other words, we're going to see greater instability, and therefore the argument that we need to depend on these regimes for stability and therefore ease up on pressure for democratization is likely to come to the fore. So, what do you do in the next two years to make sure that your judgment is basically correct, that it will remain institutionalized as part of Middle East policy?

MS. WITTES: Well, I guess I would say two things, one at the structural level and one at the budgetary level. I guess at the budgetary level I'm a little less worried simply because for the reasons Lorne stated, it's difficult to imagine that a future U.S. President would go up on the Hill and say you

know, I think democracy in the Middle East is a bad idea. I want to dismantle this office and zero out this account. And I actually think that members of the House, no matter which party controls it, would also have a difficult time walking away from this longstanding bipartisan tradition in U.S. foreign policy.

But what the levels will be is an important question. Assuming that there is money to spend, as Lorne said, the absorptive capacity of the region is not huge. I hope it will be growing. But MEPI can still do a lot with less if it's focused. So, I would say even with reduced budgetary resources, MEPI can still do important work in laying the foundations for institutional change and changes in the political culture of the region.

At the structural level, though, you have -- these next few years I think are much more important, because there you really have the success or failure of this transformational diplomacy initiative. Is the State Department going to be able to change the way in which it trains and assesses and promotes foreign

service officers to reflect democracy promotion as an essential part of what they do? And this is -- you know, this is a struggle that's ongoing within the department. As you say, NEA is a bit behind the curve of some of the other regional bureaus, but certainly in my conversations I see the generational difference even within NEA, and I think in NEA it's driven also by those younger FSOs who spent time out in the field over the last, you know, five to ten years -- have a much better handle on the demographic problems in the region, the youth unemployment, and some of the other pressures there that really demand a change in U.S. policy. So, you know, when MEPI was announced, there were a number of younger FSOs who said to me thank God, it's about time, and, you know, I hope that will make a difference. But it is a question of incentives, and those incentives have to come managerially from the top of the State Department, and they also have to come from a clear sense for every FSO in the field that the policy consensus here is strong and that they'll have backup when they do what they're supposed to do. And I think right now that really doesn't exist.

MR. CRANER: Let me get to the structural issues again and treat them -- issues in the same order.

One of the pleasures for me of being in this field is that it is a bipartisan issue. As you heard, I always give credit to Jimmy Carter basically for starting this movement. I think President Reagan pursued it in a different way.

I was told, when I went into the State Department this time, by -- I can say his name because he's gone now -- Penn Kimball that my best friends would be on the Hill, and to a degree that was true, but my best friends were folks like Tom Lantos and other Democrats very often on these issues. I do worry a little bit that in a -- and, again, I don't mean to sound partisan by saying this, but I do worry a little bit that the issue, in the minds of many Democrats, has become so identified with President Bush that they therefore feel compelled to be against it because it's an issue by President Bush. And if you actually look at these German Marshal Fund pollings on support for democracy in the human rights work within the United

States, Democrats are coming in in the low 40s and Republicans in the low 70s, which I think is a real cause for concern again because it has been a bipartisan policy. I'd worry very much if a Republican wins the next election, that that will continue escalating. So, you know, my plea to all my democratic friends is please keep plugging away on this issue.

I'm not sure that the problem on the House side in terms of funding is a Democrat versus Republican issue. You know, I think it centers around the subcommittee -- the Foreign Affairs subcommittee. But, again, it's, you know, as somebody who has worked on the Hill when Republicans were in the minority, it's a lot easier to be in the minority. You get to throw stones instead of proposing solutions. So, I'm hoping that should Democrats win the House that they would feel a sense of responsibility on these issues.

On the incentives within the Foreign Services, I said I could not agree more. I think it's a real -- it will be a real achievement for this administration if they were able to install such incentives, and it's not very difficult to do within

the Foreign Service. Again, complemented by help from higher ups, that helps a lot.

I used to argue with my old boss, Paula Dobriansky about how much the culture had changed. You know, I said the under 45s I think felt differently. And for reasons I couldn't discern, Assistant Secretaries and above were often more sympathetic to issues of democracy and human rights, and I asked Mark Grossman, who was the number three person there, why that was, and he said well, they have to get confirmed.

(Laughter)

MR. CRANER: So, the Hill has another role to play in this issue, and hopefully that window between the Assistant Secretaries and the 45s will eventually close up.

MS. WITTES: I think Sarah wants to add.

MS. YERKES: I'd like to respond to one of Lorne's points, which is that we do agree with the issue of absorptive capacity that -- or the point of showing the former Soviet Union comparison is not to say we should be throwing more money at MEPI. From people we've spoken to on the ground, they don't want

more money. They can't necessarily do what they want to with money they have, but it's more an issue of gravitational pull that MEPI has very little money. It's being siphoned off more and more.

MR. INDYK: Okay. Yes, please.

Since I don't know all of you, would you mind identifying yourselves before you ask your question or make your intervention?

MR. DAVIDSON: Jonathan Davidson with the European Commission Delegation. Thanks for the very insightful report and presentations.

I was intrigued to learn the Europeans were corralled into supporting BMENA, the G8.

(Laughter)

MR. DAVIDSON: I guess you won't be surprised that I have a slightly different take on that.

What actually happened, according to my recollection, and this is important not to nit-pick, but -- because it has important implications for the role of the Europeans in partnership with America on this whole business. When the thing was first leaked and launched in that way that you mentioned, Tamara,

there followed six to nine months of very intensive brainstorming across the Atlantic -- Lorne will remember some of it -- at all levels -- ministerial, political directors, (off mike), everything. It went on very intensively, and it was, to my mind, one of the more productive EU or European/American exchanges, and the upshot was this, that what looked like being a stillborn initiative when the Arabs rejected it out of hand was saved. Now, I would argue that the Europeans pulled your chestnuts out of the fire, but you can disagree if you like. But the points the Europeans were making were three. One, yes, we have been in this business for ten years or so.

I hope we didn't say it patronizingly, Lorne, but --

MR. CRANER: Thousands of years.

MR. DAVIDSON: Thousands of years -- okay, yeah.

(Laughter)

MR. DAVIDSON: I don't think even we would claim to have been --

(Laughter)

MR. DAVIDSON: But it's true, in fact, that although nominally this was the Barcelona agenda, not very much had been done in terms of conditionality and insistence on democracy and human rights and the political dossiers of the Barcelona agenda, and just about the same time as BMENA was being launched, so the Europeans were looking to sharpen up their political agenda with Barcelona and the European (off mike) initiative which followed.

The points we made were that we do it in partnership. We have the global partnership of 27 countries, and we have contractual relations with all the countries, so anything we do, Europeans, in conjunction with the U.S. or parallel with the U.S., need to take into account that different environment we're working in. We also brought -- we highlighted what, to the Europeans' mind, was crucial in the Arab approach to this, which was their insistence on putting the Israel/Palestine dispute on the front burner and that you won't get anywhere in this direction without at least acknowledging that.

And the third point we made was that we can't

go into joint programs with the U.S. on this but we can be -- we can have a very valuable partnership, complementary relationship, push for these things together but in a parallel way, not in a joint way. And over that six to nine months I think we forged a very relatively productive relationship about how to pursue together our mutual goals in improving governance in the Middle East, in strengthening civil society, in institution building, and in the narrower agenda of democracy promotion where we have programs of about the same size and scope. We also have about a $3 billion investment in the region, which isn't dedicated to democracy building but it has a large impact on strengthening governance and civil society. So, that's a long way of saying that I tend to agree with Lorne, but we do actually work quite well together, Europe and America, in this agenda. The origins are a bit different, and I'd be glad to discuss that in more detail with you, Tamara, if you want to take the project forward. We can talk about it separately.

MS. WITTES: Well, thank you, and I'll

certainly take you up on that opportunity. What struck me about the BMENA project when it was launched -- and I think I wrote this at the time -- is that it had -- it did a lot of good things in the declaration, the principles, and it was clear the European influence on --

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through the principles and the way in which certain issues we dealt with, among them the issue of the Arab/Israeli conflict, the idea that they couldn't be -- you know, that these two tracks had to go -- these two trains had to run simultaneously, and also the idea that, you know, every country is different and you have to have country-specific projects but that particularities of culture or environment shouldn't be an excuse. And so I agree with you. I think a lot of very constructive work was done on that declaration of principles. What really struck me was the vast chasm between the declaration of principles and the programs that were put together to support that declaration, which, in the case of BMENA there were some processes set up -- the Forum for the Future and the democracy

assistance dialog -- and we can, you know, talk in more detail if you want about the content of those, but in terms of actual programmatic initiatives, literacy, micro-enterprise, and business financing, and, you know, it was like this. So, I think as a perceptual matter, the message was not sent to the region, either to governments or the activists, that this is a united front and everybody's on the same page, or if everybody's on the same page, it's we just want you guys to create more jobs so you stop coming here to look for jobs.

MR. CRANER: You know, again, I would say I think we have found more and more overlap not only diplomatically when I left the State Department but also practically doing work at IRI in terms of -- literally in terms of trainers and where we were doing it. I think in this case, as in many other cases, it's really important if the U.S. has a certain feeling about a foreign policy topic, whether it's Burma or Cuba or the Middle East. It's very, very helpful if we have a real overlap with the Europeans, the West Europeans who can bring their weight on the

international stage to these issues.

Something else that at a practical level I think is really important where the EU has an advantage over us is their new states. It's one thing to go over and talk about the practical aspects of democracy as an American but people look at you and say you don't understand, you've been a democracy for 200 years, you know, you're very wealthy, etc., whereas if somebody from Poland or Serbia or Slovakia comes in, it's a whole lot more relevant. They look at somebody from those countries and say I remember reading just five, ten years ago what you have been through, and I have found many of those Central European countries, you know, as eager as we are on these issues. Sometimes you almost feel like you have to hold them back. Groups -- new NGOs in Poland, Slovakia, Serbia are -- half of our staff in Baghdad is Serbians -- are doing a tremendous amount of very relevant work. It's almost poetic that it's only 15 years later and they're already doing it. But they bring a real relevance that I don't think anybody else can.

MR. INDYK: That's fascinating.

Robin Wright, from the *Washington Post*.

MS. WRIGHT: I want to do a bit of a reality check here. I'm very interested in this program, and I commend your work. I was with the Secretary of State last November in Bahrain for the Forum of the Future, and it was quite striking that the Egyptian foreign minister just got up and walked out, and as a result they weren't able to come up with a common consensus statement. You know, it's fine for the President to give a speech and to throw some money at the issue of democracy, but unless they -- there is some kind of follow-up in saying to a government, you know, we mean business or criticizing them publicly when they engage in election fraud or that kind of thing, it's very hard for other governments and for civil society to take a forum like that seriously, and I think there's a real danger that unless -- you may have one more go at it. Iraq has made it harder. Lebanon's war will make it harder. What happened last year is going to make it harder. They have one, maybe two more chances to make this work before everyone starts laughing at it.

The other thing is on MEPI. Having toured

the region extensively and talked to a lot of democratic groups over the last eight months, I've been struck by the number who increasingly want to stay as far away from U.S. money as possible. I cannot believe that MEPI will ever function effectively with the kind of groups we really want to see a part of the system, leading the way because they're doing good work -- I'm not talking about Islamist groups, you know, I'm talking about quite secular, sometimes slight leftist groups -- unless it moves outside government. I think it's been so discredited. Good people not wanting to get near money because it's American money. If it's outside -- I talked to a group in Egypt doing very important work with the judges, and they take Ford Foundation money, European Commission money, but they will not touch MEPI for the mere fact it's MEPI, even though they work in terrible offices, have fax machines that don't work, have one computer that they share among five of them. And it's really pathetic. These are people who could use our money, and it strikes me that the danger is that unless we shift focus, we put more action behind it, that both of these efforts are

going to, at some point, atrophy, and it's not an issue of Democrats or Republicans. It's not an issue of two more years in a lame duck President. It goes much more to the willingness by anybody to actually match words -- or deeds with words.

MR. CRANER: Robin, it's nice to see you again.

I'm not sure I disagree with you on the diplomacy part. I mean, I've been disappointed on some of the -- you know, some of the actions particularly with regard to Egypt by the -- you know, by the highest levels of the administration, and people in the region do note when we are and aren't critical. I think, for example --

I think I remember the chronology, right, Tom, that Mrs. -- that there had been a series of statements by Dr. Rice that greatly heartened a lot of the people we worked with in Egypt, and after that there was a series of nonstatements that greatly disheartened them, and that certainly takes a toll.

On the -- again, on the question of MEPI inside or out, as I said, I think the foundation should

be getting more funding, because it doesn't have as much of an American face and therefore I think has the freedom to do more. It's another reason why I think it's important for the Europeans to be involved. But one of the things I found out when I was at the State Department was that -- and we -- right after 9/11 we started doing quite a bit in Central Asia, and I was out there on a trip and I went by a project that we had funded, and I remember talking -- I think it was in -- actually, it was Uzbekistan -- to some dissidents there and they said well, this is great, you know that -- Freedom House was the group that we had funded -- but the U.S. government isn't doing anything. And I said well, who do you think paid for this? And so I think it's really important that not only NGOs be funded from the outside if need be but that the U.S. government also be able to have the credibility to do exchange programs, which I think are valuable over the long term and to actually fund projects. And, yes, there are going to be people -- and we see it all the time -- who say they don't want to take MEPI funding or some don't even want to work with Americans. I think that ebbs

and flows. But that's another reason why I think it's important to at least have some level of funding come straight out of the U.S. government so the U.S. government can put its money where its mouth hopefully is.

MS. WITTES: Just quickly on Robin's second point. I agree, there are lots of people out there who don't want to take U.S. money, but I do think there are things MEPI currently does that we don't know about and can do that we don't know about that don't have the U.S. label on them, and we don't see those things because they don't have the U.S. label on them, and I think that goes back to our short-term/long-term point also, that some of these programs that we're never going to see pictures of, we're never going to hear stories about, are some of the more important programs, and those kinds of things can be encouraged and don't necessarily have to have a great big seal of the U.S. government on them.

MS. STOCKMAN: Farah Stockman from the *Boston Globe*. I just wanted to follow up on that point as somebody who's been following these issues. I've come

across the idea of secrecy, secrecy surrounding the Iran funding, and I just wanted to ask you whether you felt there was too much secrecy surrounding some of the programs, and I understand the reasons for it, but you could even find an example where the State Department will announce that a certain group got funding and then months later they won't tell you that that group had -- you know, had the money. And it was -- it's very hard to track where the money goes to evaluate the programs if they're going to turn around and declare them to be secret. So, I'm just wondering if you, in your research, came -- you know, came across that and what effects you think it has.

MS. WITTES: Well, I -- you know, I think that the main priority for MEPI has not been transparency to an American audience. But that said, I certainly think that there's a value in being aboveboard. Look, MEPI doesn't engage, as far as I know, in any covert funding. It's a question of whether they make an effort to publicly release this information or not, and there's certainly been, you know, cases where press releases have been put out.

Well, Saudi or Saudi groups are going to be getting X-million dollars and MEPI grants, but then you don't know who the grants are going to or for how much, and I think there -- you know, there was even a question from the foreign press corps at that point saying why are you putting funding into Saudi Arabia, it's one of the wealthiest countries in the would, and so, you know, then MEPI just has to explain again well, you know, is this government funding, is it nongovernment funding, and it just raises a whole set of credibility questions for the program that it wouldn't have to face if it were completely transparent about what it was doing.

Now, that setting aside the issue of funding in difficult environments, like Syria or Iran, where, you know, I think the U.S. government, as it has in previous eras and in other areas, had to be creative about how it's going to provide support material, diplomatic or otherwise, to democracy activists. But the fundamental point I think with regard to, you know, whether it's okay for the U.S. to put its "kiss of death" on democracy activists abroad, it's their choice. It's their choice in the end whether they're

going to apply for this money, whether they're going to accept this money, whether they're going to choose to stand next to a U.S. official or meet with a U.S. official, and I will tell you from experience that there are plenty of democracy activists or people that I would consider friends of democratic reform in the region, some of whom who have government positions in their home countries and some who don't who are perfectly happy to see the support go in and accept the support. They just don't want their picture on the front page of the newspaper. And, you know, that's an understandable position. But I also see a number of people who are willing to stand up and take the funding, and when they get criticized by domestic audiences for accepting that, in Egypt for example, they say well, if the government gets $2.1 billion a year from the United States, why can't I get $50,000, and, you know, it's a choice for every one of those individuals who operate in difficult environments whether they are willing to take that on or not. But what I see empirically, looking at the numbers, is that more and more of them are. So, I understand what Robin

is hearing from people, and I understand this sort of perception problem, but what the numbers tell me is that more people are willing to engage with the U.S. on this issue.

MR. MALLORY: Charles King Mallory from Bureau of Near East Affairs.

MR. INDYK: Of the Bureau of Near East Affairs but not with the Bureau of Near East Affairs.

(Laughter)

MR. INDYK: I'm also from the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, so welcome.

MR. MALLORY: I have -- I think your presentation's been fascinating, and I'd just like to sort of dwell on maybe two or three points.

From my perspective where we're dealing with individual posts in the region and trying to coordinate action on moving this agenda forward, it frequently seems that the FSOs, particularly the younger ones, are not where the challenge lies. The challenge lies, in my view, and I'd be interested in your reaction, in kind of getting the administration to put its money where its mouth is. If you vocally advocate a certain

agenda, then there are consequences that flow from that for the bilateral relationship if they don't -- if things don't go in the direction you hope to see them go. And certainly my perspective is that there's a reluctance at the higher levels to grasp the nettle in a way that would actually give the entire agenda some credibility.

I must defend my colleagues in NEA, although I'm the one who's batting my head against the wall most of all, but the fact of the matter is you can have as many well-motivated people as you like in the field, but if, at the highest levels of government, people are not willing to make the really tough calls or want to shove it aside because there are so many other fish to fry or fires burning, Ms. Wright is quite right, the agenda will lose credibility.

In terms of the EU, having spent a year working on the issue, I must say there are some bright spots and some less bright spots. We have had tremendous cooperation with the Commission and the Council and the presidency on Lebanon, for instance. We've had, I think, a very useful dialog on Egypt. I

think, however, I would say there is plenty of room for improvement. There are areas where the Commission and the European union as a whole have potentially much better leverage than we do. I would just mention Tunisia in passing. Question: Do they have the political will to do something about it? And I think that it would be really useful to get much deeper into what we are actually both doing in individual countries, because the sort of mapping we've seen from Tamara and Sarah of our programming I don't think we have a grasp of how we really interlock on a country-by-country basis. So, maybe with those two comments I'd be very interested in your reaction.

MS. WITTES: I'll just say as far as I know, we are the only such kind of monitoring and information collection and analysis effort on this side of the Atlantic, and I have one counterpart in Europe that I know of, so there's a similar dearth of this kind of analysis, and I certainly agree with you that that would be a worthwhile effort. Indeed, I hope that we're going to be able to collaborate on some transatlantic democracy assistance monitoring analysis,

so I'll just leave it at that. Thanks.

MR. INDYK: Let me just add a couple of buzz words. On the question of corralling, I think it is fair to say that we were corralled into supporting the Forum for the Future and we went along, so I should just put that on the record.

In terms of country-by-country work, I'm not involved in it myself, but my understanding is that there is actually a whole agenda of country-by-country cooperation on democracy work, which is conducted under the summit framework and usually takes the form of a video conference across the Atlantic, so some of that work is done between state and the Commission and the presidency, but there's certainly scope for a whole lot more cooperation.

MS. WITTES: One more quick note, which is that when BMENA was set up, one of the I think potentials of the democracy assistance dialog is that it would serve this purpose of creating a place where European donor countries, America as a donor country, and regional NGOs and democracy -- Western democracy implementers could all get in a room and figure out

what should be the priorities, where are the needs, and where to direct the funds, and as far as I know, and, you know, Laura can correct me if she wants to, I don't think that has done that at all. It's done some other things, but it hasn't served that function. I wish that there were a body that could serve that function.

MR. AMIN: Thank you, Ambassador. I would like to appreciate --

I am Bakhtiar Amin from the BMENA Foundation for Future, and I was recently elected as the president of this foundation. I'm here, actually, to open an office for the Foundation in Washington, and I was selected with Anwar Ibrahim, deputy -- former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, and Rahma Bourgia, president of a University from Morocco, to select the board of this foundation, and we did it, and we have an excellent board from the region of personalities of diverse background. We will be talking about this foundation next Friday at CSIS, and I hope to see many of you there and to explain with the executive committee members, who are going to be here for the first meeting we have being hosted by Justice Sandra

Day O'Connor, who is a board member of this foundation. We have Europeans also, and we have European contributors. We have actually from Turkey to Greece to UK, European Commission, Hungary, Denmark, Spain, Switzerland. They are all contributors to the Foundation. And we have also regional donors, as Qatar and Jordan, and we hope to expand that and to expand the -- our outreach campaign for contributions from countries in Europe plus in the region and to the private sector as well. The U.S. is the main donor, of course, and we -- they have pledged about -- all these countries, $55 million up to now, and we're -- I thank you, Lorne for saying that it is important to put a regional face to the Foundation, and the Foundation has a regional face and can absorb more money and can play an important role in promoting democracy reform, human rights, and fundamental freedoms in the region, and to assist civil society organizations and individual academic institutions -- individual academics and academic institutions and others to -- with that goal. So, I hope that -- we shouldn't be discouraged in terms of promoting democracy in the Middle East. It's a

tough region, as you all know, but being a democracy and human rights activist for three decades in that region, and knowing most of the activists and civil society organizations and participating in most of the activities in that region, I think that there is an enormous progress. That process in itself, that for the first time -- I mean, I have been calling on, for example, getting together NGOs with the governments, and I told (off mike) on several occasions -- he said I cannot do this. I mean, I said look at the Barcelona process, look at the OSC, European Union, American states organizations. There are, I mean, summits of NGOs paralleling with the heads of the states. There's an interaction. Why do you push all of us to be in a hostile position -- either we are with you or we are against you. Let us build bridges and interact. And today, thanks to that process and this process, I mean, MEPI -- I mean, this freedom agenda that you are talking about it and the G8 initiative of the Future Forum, that for the first time NGOs are sitting with the government representatives. You saw that in Manama. You were here -- you were there. And we have

that in Rabat. We had a wonderful meeting in July in (off mike). It was June. June in (off mike) -- 800 activists and 50 governments from the region and Europe and U.S. They got together and they interact. They tried to solve the problems of the region. So, it's going to take time. I mean, 60 years of references or analogy. I mean, give us at least 16 years and be patient with that and don't discourage.

And there are forces that -- (off mike) forces. Also they use mosques. I mean -- and it's difficult to close down a mosque. But it's easier -- much easier to close down an NGO by despotic regimes. We are suffering from despotism in that region. We have lost 20 times or 30 times more people in internal conflicts in that region rather than in a conflict between Arabs, Palestinians, and Israelis. So, I mean, if we look at Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Egypt, Yemen, etc., I mean, for the last five, six decades, I mean, we have lost 20, 30 times more people in those conflicts and also in repressive policies -- as the result of repressive policies of these regimes in that area. So, thank you, and please do not discourage, and

I think that there is a hope that there are obscurantist forces and radical forces, extremist forces, despotic regimes, all together. I mean, they have an agenda there to -- basically to regress the region, and they -- as you very well know, I am from Iraq, and we are suffering from these forces, I mean, in Iraq, but there is a struggle between moderate voices, moderate forces, and these forces and moderate forces need to be supported, to be assisted, and our hope is you, and don't think that there are people -- I mean, they might say that we don't want to have your money, but it's not always true what they say.

(Laughter)

MR. INDYK: Thank you, Bakhtiar, and I hope you'll come back and speak to the forum as well.

It being past 2 o'clock and we always finish at 2 o'clock, I think it's a good note to close on and just to thank Tamara, Sarah, and Lorne for their -- not just their contribution today but for all the work that all of you are doing in this noble cause.

Thank you all for coming, and thank you.

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