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DREAMS AND SHADOWS: THE FUTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution which I have the honor to direct. I am really delighted to welcome you here today for this very special occasion, the launching of Robin Wright's new book, "Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East." If you want your very own copy, you can get one outside afterwards. And Robin has assured me that if you would like an autographed copy, she will stay behind afterwards to autograph it for you.

I say I am delighted to have the opportunity to host the launching of this book because not only is Robin a friend and somebody whose reporting on the Middle East over three decades have come to greatly admire, as I am sure many of you have too. But also because we at the Saban Center had the honor of hosting Robin while she wrote this book for the better part of a year. I had the opportunity to see that when I went at home late at night, Robin was still working hard on this manuscript and it shows. "Dreams and Shadows" does something quite unique, and I think it is for that reason that it has been universally well reviewed, including on the front cover of *The New York Times* Book Review this weekend.

What it does, in my view, is hold up a microphone to those thin, small, yet hopeful voices of change in the Middle East. One of the

things that I have noticed over the many years since 9/11, that I myself have been involved in dialogue with many of the people in the Middle East and the Muslim world more generally, is that what they want most from us in the United States and the West generally is for us to listen and to hear what they have to say. What I think Robin has done in this book is an immense service to them and to us in having gone out and listened and documented and written up these voices of change.

As she points out in the book, there are both dreams and shadows in the Middle East, that what looked like a spring when she started writing this book when these voices of change and reform from the people began to be heard, has now turned into a long winter in which the shadows are indeed dark and long. I think the point that comes through in the book, that notwithstanding the setbacks, notwithstanding the way in which authoritarian regimes across the region have found a way to co-opt or resist or overwhelm these voices for change that Robin documents so vividly, nevertheless, no matter how long the winter, the spring will eventually come again as we can attest to any party who has come here this morning on foot.

So it is for that reason above all I think that we need to pay attention to this book. I am very proud to ask Robin to talk about her book, and then we will have the opportunity of Shibley Telhami who is our own expert on change in the Middle East, the Sadat Professor from the

University of Maryland and a Senior Research Fellow at the Saban Center at Brookings who will lead our discussion and Q and A. Robin, congratulations and welcome.

(Applause)

MS. WRIGHT: Thank you for coming this morning and helping me celebrate my book. I consider this my swan song to the Middle East. This is the fifth from the Middle East and I think my last.

I first landed in the Middle East on October 6, 1973, the day the war broke out and over the intervening 35 years I have witnessed extraordinary change. When I first landed in the region, oil was $3.12 a barrel. Today it is $100 a barrel and $3.12 a gallon. I witnessed the transformation of Lebanon from the party capital of the region to the site of its most vicious civil war. I remember Saudi Arabia when there was no television, and today there are women newscasters. I also remember in Iran where there was one Islamic channel, and today courtesy of satellite dishes you can get not only CNN and BCC, but MTV and "Oprah."

As Martin said, in 2005 I was struck by the extraordinary change we were seeing condensed into one very brief period symbolized by the extraordinary outpouring in Lebanon when activists forced the Syrians to end a 29-year occupation. The vast numbers for the first time were not rent-a-crowds, they were people who turned out because of their own strong and deep beliefs, and they were peaceful protests in Lebanon.

This in itself I thought was important. We saw millions of Iraqis turn out to vote despite the violence, and the birth of movements like Kefaya in Egypt which means "enough" symbolizing the burgeoning growth of real civil society. Of course, that spring quickly evaporated. But I decided to go back to the region to see if 2005 was simply an illusion or whether it future potential.

For those of you who are my friends in this audience, you will know that I am the ultimate pessimist. I look at glass not in terms of whether it is half-full or half-empty, but whether there is really any water in the glass at all, and when it comes to the Middle East, my projections have normally been pessimistic and I have rarely unfortunately been wrong. What I did for the better part of a year was to travel from Rabat to Morocco and I came way surprisingly buoyed, even a little optimistic, that for all the setbacks in 2005, what we have begun to see is the beginning of a very long struggle, and I stress begun. But I think the seeds have really been planted and I do not think the Middle East is going back to square one where it was before 2005.

I have been struck by the early reviews of my book which have focused just on the dreams, and as Martin point out, there really are shadows. What it is really about is the series of crises of change in the Middle East and the process ahead. I have hundreds of bottom lines, but

since we really want to make this a discussion this morning, I have picked only 10 to talk about briefly.

My first bottom line is that the euphoria from the spring 2005 is clearly over, but it has been replaced by a sobering realism about what lies ahead and the hard slog to produce the kind of change we have seen in other parts of the world over the last three decades with the end of military dictatorships in Latin America, the end of apartheid and minority rule in Africa, the demise of communism in Eastern Europe, and the people of the Middle East are at the end of the day no different in terms of their aspirations and goals. In the early 21st century there really is a budding culture of change that is creatively challenging the status quo and even occasionally the extremists themselves. There is widespread recognition that the regimes are unable to address the needs and the basic rights of their people or even to protect them, and they certainly offer no direction for the future. But regimes in turn have been forced in many ways to address the change in language, the issue of democracy that has been put on the table, whatever their intentions of trying to prevent it and their conniving to hold people back.

Defining reform has become of course the trick of many of these regimes. *Islah* is the word in Arabic for change and it can be interpreted in two different ways, first, to engage in real substantive change as to improve or to overhaul, but it can also mean simply repair,

fine-turning, and of course that is exactly what most regimes are trying to do, and the difference is the abyss between what governments want and what the people of the region are seeking.

My second bottom line is that what makes this juncture so interesting is watching the activists trying to force the hand of governments to act. A lot of my book is about the people who are engaging in change and so I have picked some to illustrate my points this morning. One of them in Morocco is Latifa Jbabdi who mobilized through a new organization 1 million signatures to demand that the monarchy change family law which of course is the essence of the challenge between modernity and tradition in the region, between secular and religious, between the issue of human rights and women's rights. Forty percent of those signatures were men, and she made a point of including men and making this not just a women's phenomena. After an intense and acrimonious debate within Morocco, the monarch did allow a whole rewriting of the *moudawana* or family law so that marriage now is an act of free will, that women can wed without the consent of a male from their family, men and women enter marriage with equal rights and equal responsibility for both households and family, a wife is no longer required by law to obey her husband, marriage is certified by a judge and not a religious cleric, and men can no longer simply abandon their wives. The sense that women now have a stronger place in Moroccan society is

evident in the fact that in 2006 Morocco graduated its first class of 50 female preachers. Like every issue in the Middle East of course this is just a beginning. Up to 80 percent of Moroccan women are illiterate. They have to access to a lot of these laws, much less an ability to understand how to apply them.

My third bottom line this morning is that for at least the next generation the three forces defining change will be what I call the three "crats," the theocrats, the democrats, and the autocrats. The period of change ahead will witness an uneven battle pitting inexperienced democrats with very limited resources and few means of communicating or building a base against the well-heeled autocrats who have no intention of giving up power and the Islamists who believe they have a mission from God and the faithful to tap into. It will be an unfair battle from the start. Nothing is going to happen quickly. As a Lebanese scholar told me, for the time being the trend is toward participatory despotism.

But there are people who are really trying, and one of my favorites is a woman named Ghada Shahbandar who 3 years ago was a soccer mom who was in the midst of a divorce, had gone back to school to learn a profession, had four active teenagers to deal with, and had little time for politics. She had no interest in politics, had never voted, never held a little pink voting card you have to have in Egypt, and had never joined a party, yet she saw on the new satellite television service pictures

of thugs beating up a group of women protestors under the watchful eye of Egyptian police. This so infuriated her that a week later she joined her first protest. I love the story her story that she showed up at a protest and a woman next to her recognized that she was a new face and said to her, "Do you have 100 Egyptian pounds?" and she said, "What do I need money for?" And she said, "Of course you need it. That's for your bail." But she was unflinching and she went on to form a group called We Are Watching You which established a group to monitor elections, the first presidential elections and then parliamentary elections, and with international banned, they were the only ones who got out and documented election fraud. They hired a cameraman to document during the presidential contest some of the specific violations. In Egypt the trick is that they bus in their voters early in the day and then after that police and thugs are positioned around polling stations to discourage voters, to hassle voters, to prevent them from going in, and they captured in film pictures of voters picking up a ladder and going to a school fence and climbing over to get into the polling station. Police opened first with teargas and then rubber bullets and they got it all in film. This is an extraordinary change for Ghada Shahbandar as an individual and for Egypt as a society. The interesting thing is now she is invited to other Arab counties to monitor elections.

My fourth bottom line is that agents of change are not always the ones we anticipate as allies. The shifting winds in the Middle East over the last decade have upended perceptions about who are allies and who are enemies. During the cold war we encouraged Islamic groups to take root as a way to foil communist and leftist ideologies that prevailed in the region. The ultimate irony in the region today is with the rise of Islamic groups, many of the leftist groups, the Marxists, have become the ones most active in putting their necks on the line, writing the most scathing criticism of the regimes and often going to prison. Michel Kilo in Syria is one of the people I write about and I went to see. He was the author of the "Damascus Declaration" which called for a rescue mission to come in and save Syria from totalitarian rule. It outlined a pattern of reform, a series of steps that would be all-inclusive for all the different opposition groups and even though he was a Marxist he called for multiparty and multi-participation in the system, and he called for dialogue and recognition for others. Over 90 percent of Syria's opposition signed it. He has of course since been jailed and charged by the regime.

One of my other favorites is a man named Riad al Turk who is the Nelson Mandela of Syria, an extraordinary man who during his third incarceration was held in a room the size of an elevator shaft with no pen, no paper, no furniture, no toilet, no access to anyone else, and he kept active by taking the small uncooked kernels of rice from his evening soup

and using it during the day to build geometric designs on the floor. This was a man who was held that way for 18 years. What did he do when he came out? He turned around and started blasting the government again and he went back to jail.

Syria to me is in many ways a country we look at only in terms of its importance to the region, its involvement in the peace process, its involvement in Lebanon, its aid and abetting for insurgents in Iraq, but I think it is one of the most interesting places in the region in terms of what is going on inside the country. Anwar al-Bunni is another one of my favorite characters. He is less well known. He is a human-rights lawyer, a Christian, a leftist. He was the lawyer for people like Michel Kilo and Riad al Turk, and he did it all pro bono. He had to sell the belongings to his home, then his car, and then finally he sold his office to survive. When the European Union set up an office in Damascus to establish research on legal issues, studying press laws, women's rights, and the judiciary, they tapped Anwar al-Bunni to head it. The government allowed it to stay open after agreeing with the European Union to let it operate for only 9 days. But al-Bunni persevered and on his own time decided to study Western and Arab constitutions, he monitored the progress in Iraq as it wrote its own constitution, and he came up with his own constitution which he wrote out, a 20-page document, that outlined term limits on leaders, even judges have term limits of 15 years, the right to form political parties but they had

to be based on democratic principles and coexistence, providing equality for all religions and ethnic groups, and guarantees of rights that could only be changed by popular vote of 90 percent of the electorate. Two weeks after I saw al-Bunni he too was picked up and he has been in jail ever since.

My fifth bottom line is that political debate in the Middle East is grounded in its own experience and I think the face of change will be too. The region will not be transformed without tapping into its religious traditions. But I also found that Islamist groups are in the midst of their own transitions and beginning to deal with the realities of earthly issues. In 2007, the Party for Justice and Development in Morocco championed the three everyday issues of corruption, poverty, and government reform to empower parliament. Even Hamas in 2006 had a 20-point platform involving health care, education, and improved infrastructure, and piety was not part of the platform. I do not underrate the potential for all of these groups to revert to Islamic ways once in power, look at Gaza, even to a certain extent Turkey with the return of the headscarf, but I also found that the longer the Islamists compete in elections, the greater the diversity and the greater the divisions. Iranians love to joke that where there are three Shiites, there are four parties, and tomorrow there will surely be five.

Iran's Islamic Republic Party which ruled the revolution for the first decade after seizing power has been replaced. It had to disband

because of disagreements among the clerics and has now been replaced by over three dozen quite different parties that reflect a full spectrum of activism. And the pendulum does swing even among Islamist groups. The ayatollahs, the imams, and the sheikhs, often speak with many different voices. They are competing among their religious constituencies for their visions of the future just as fiercely as politicians do. Some Islamists have even become de fact allies even though they would be the first to deny it. Moshin -- in Iran challenged the very idea of a supreme leader. He said it was as unjust a position as the shah, and this is a man who is a cleric, once a revolutionary. He too went to jail for defaming the revolution. In 2006, Ayatollah Boroujerdi said that the real victim of Iran's revolution was God. He also dared to say that the regime was no different from Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar, pretty tough words coming from a cleric.

Some of the most interesting ideas are coming from those early revolutionaries who are true believers in many ways. Some of you know I have written a lot about Abdul Karim Soroush, a man who has tried to blend the ideas of reform and democracy. He has taken the idea of belief and he says, "To be a true believer you have to have come to your belief of your own free will. Even if you have adopted it from your family, your environment, your community, your society, to be a true believer you

have to have accepted it through your own free will." As a result, he says, "Free will is more important, comes first, before democracy."

I do not underrate the dangers in the shadows, so my sixth bottom line is that one of those dangers is that opening up space does not guarantee who or what will fill it. The coming conundrum in the Middle East is that free elections will not necessarily produce a respectable or viable democracy. After decades of autocratic rule, the political spectrum has become so skewed with the opposition put under house arrest, forced into exile, or even executed, that the choices and the winners may not be peace-loving tolerant democrats or moderates. During political transitions, vacuums are often filled by those who get there first, who have the best organizing principles or the greatest discipline. Change unleashes not only new democrats. The Palestinian election in 2006 was a prime example. I will say that is not a problem unique to the Middle East. The generation after the Soviet Union's demise, Putin has ruled in Russia with an iron hand and on Sunday he made sure that his puppet was elected to replace him.

My seventh bottom line is another danger that democracy is about differences which are bound to flourish once disparate elements in a society are free to speak for the first time. Unity in opposition to tyranny is no guarantee of unity once in power. Opening up politics in a region that

is rife with minorities endangers deepening the problems it is meant to solve. Need I say more than Iraq?

My eighth bottom line is the further danger that the tools of democracy, things like demographics, information technology, and education, can be manipulated. The greater Middle East has witnessed a sevenfold increase in population in three generations, jumping from 60 million in the 1930s, to 415 million in 2006. The majority of that population is young, in some countries up to 70 percent under 30. Many are hungry for change and will begin to define the goals of societies soon, and down the road, redefine political systems. But 1 in 3 of those young people today is unemployed. They are hungry, they are in a hurry, in a region without answers, and the danger is those who are the most organized and the most disciplined are often extremist groups. Information technology has also been used more effectively often by militant groups than by democratic activists, so change and its agents will often produce troubling consequences. Many in the region will question whether the short-term dangers are worth the eventual benefits and the price along the way.

My ninth bottom line is that as I looked across the region at some of the most troubling events in the Middle East, I tried to stand back and put them in broader perspective, and two quick examples. The message of the 2006 election among the Palestinians was not just an election of Hamas, but was also a rejection of Fatah. The passing of the

old guard is a critical part of change. It is what we want to see most, the end of one-party systems and the passing of the old guard that emerged between the 1960s and 1980s and has held on to power ever since. This time voters picked change in part to send a message of what was no longer acceptable. Iran's election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad is clearly the most troubling event when it comes to elections in the region recently. He is clearly one of the most dangerous men in the world. But he was not elected for his foreign policy, and in many ways not even for much of his domestic agenda. Indeed, I think Iranians in their 2-week presidential election actually ended up knowing very little about him. But the fact was they voted for him in large part because of what he was not, a corrupt cleric. Iran made that pivotal transition with that election from a turban to a hat, moving beyond the clerics who have dominated the first generation and a half of the revolution. As bad as he is, it was an important step in Iran's transition and history will look back on that moment I think in part from that perspective.

Very briefly, my final bottom line is that I think it is often worth looking beyond the bad news to figure out the broader trends because it is not always bad news. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. TELHAMI: It is a wonderful book and I urge you to read it. The 35 years of experience of reporting on the Middle East shows.

This is a book that exhibits a sense of history and sensitivity. It is full of details that are insightful and does a service. It does a service to us and to readers particularly here in the U.S. because I think most of the discourse here in the past 7 years has been through the prism of 9/11 and militant Islam and that has colored every interpretation that we have of the Middle East including rightly I think over pessimism and clearly overlooked a lot of trends and tendencies that are taking place in the region. It is far more complex. It needs to be looked at in its multiple trends and also the varieties of experiences in the Middle East, and Robin does that exceptionally well because she travels from place to place and at the same time really showing how different some of the experiences are and some of the movements are that we often lump together.

I think when she writes about the pessimistic aspects, she is not unaware of the trends that lead people to be pessimistic. In particular, the obvious ones, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iraq issue, the blunders of American foreign policy. She describes these and she talks about them often through the words of the people she interviews. They are there. They are present. But I do think she underestimates them and I think what I would like to do here is talk about some of those issues that I feel give more weight to pessimism than optimism even though I think one should always be aware that it is far more complex a picture.

If you look at the basic reasons for optimism, the sense that comes across peoples and movements that Robin describes wonderfully, it really is primarily tied to two things. One is a new perspective on reform that is a function of recent experience, particularly the information revolution, and some of the new tendencies that are tied to economic reforms. I would like to talk about the two trends that I think are exceptionally important in the Middle East that are different from the past that explain a lot of these varieties but talk about what they are still problematic for positive change in the region. I also want to say, first, that when I look at the optimism projected through the words of many people, whether it is in Syria, Egypt or Iran, I am not persuaded that on many scores, not on every issue but many scores, we would not have seen even more optimism in the 1990s if you had gone and done interviews particularly in the mood when people thought the Arab-Israeli conflict was coming to an end where you had far more optimism about reform and change and economic interaction whether you would not have had even more on some scores. But what has happened particularly since the 1990s I think are two trends that potentially are reasons for optimism and those are the ones really that explain a lot of this variety that you describe.

One is the information revolution. It is obvious. We have only had it really since the mid-1990s, and that has been transformative. No one can ignore it. It has really created a new environment where

states no longer have the direct potential to control information, and that has empowered people in varieties of way and it is reflected in the way they understand reform, they see reform, they see potential, they look at issues whether it is foreign policy or domestic. And although it has always been the case in the information revolution that states control directly or indirectly most of the sources of information particularly satellite television which obviously is the most influential instrument in information in the Middle East, all the major stations are owned directly or indirectly or controlled directly or indirectly by states. Still the important thing there was that if there were a story to be told, someone is likely to tell it just for competition reasons, even some state may not care about the other reaction state, and governments tried to intrude into that space by putting pressure on this or that outlet particularly al-Jazeera when they criticized, but they could not ultimately control it because even when al-Jazeera starts to close a little bit or Manar starts putting on more stories that people want to hear, that affected the viewership. It was market-driven. In that sense clearly that is something new in the region. Except when you look at the recent trends and you have to think about what is going on particularly strategically. All states do what they do in the television arena for strategic purposes. In the past few months there has been a clampdown on satellite television in the region. Even more importantly, when states figured out that they cannot coerce one or another station into

changing the momentum, what are they doing? They figured out what is the source of all this, it is the satellites, and they have direct control over the satellites that broadcast. The Arab League is trying now to control the satellites that broadcast television of to stations, their rules and norms, and you can see where that could take you. So the state is still overwhelming even in this information revolution. I do not think that they can ultimately control it fully because I think there is something here that is more powerful, and now we have global information as well. But what we have here is something where the state is asserting itself and we have anyway some backward movement as well as forward movement.

The second big I think important trend in the Middle East that is different from the past is the presence of a significant globalized Middle Eastern economic elite that is largely tied to governments and this is world class. If you look at many of the examples that you have in the book like the Dubai experience and others, they all are reflective of something really new and I think it is profoundly new. There have always been Middle Eastern elites that are connected to the global economy. I think we have a new generation of Middle Eastern economic elites that are world class that are playing not only regionally but globally in a way that is influential and you see them in projects like Dubai, Qatar, the Aqaba project in Jordan, the Red See projects in Egypt, everywhere you seen see them, and they have weight and that weight is coming largely from the excess

cash that is coming from the Gulf that has made the GCC states one of the largest creditors on a global scale. They are playing a significant economic role and that is profound and we do not know it is going to unfold itself. We know that this is very important, this is a new trend, and it is different from what we saw in the 1970s because these elites are more astute, they have more experience, and the amount of investment, the amount of financial power is bigger. With that I think you could expect that there will be some force out here that is transnational, that is power, that is going to have an impact no doubt on change at the level of the public.

But here's the problem. The problem is, number one, it has not trickled down, and we can see these are isolated cases. Much of it is happening in the Gulf, a very sparsely populated region, and in places like Egypt where there is also movement in growth, by the way, 7-percent growth and you see that taking place as well, the gap has actually grown between poor and rich, and despite a GDP increase of some 20 percent, we have seen a very marginal decrease in the poverty. So we have a huge gap still emerging that is problematic. The question is whether this is going to trickle down, that is the big question that we have across the region, but particularly in the heavily populated states.

Second, almost all of that wealth is tied to governments. Almost all of it is tied to governments because much of it is the cash that is

coming out of access oil. We do have these other wealthy individuals and most of them to do business they have to have a strong relationship with these governments, so a lot of that is being driven by governments and is being statist in its nature and defending the existing political order in every single country, and that is a problem.

A third problem is that a lot of this is camouflaging structural problems in these countries. Remember just a few years ago we were talking about the economic problems and the need for economic reform in places like Saudi Arabia which was desperate. Suddenly we have a lot of oil and that excess oil is camouflaging the structural problems. Maybe it will stay with us. Maybe this is inevitable that it is going to be with us, but we have to see all of that as a function of this phenomenon of excess income from oil rather than necessarily big structural, I do not want to say it is the old guard because they have done a lot of wise investment, there is a lot of industry, there is a lot of investment globally and that is why I think this is still very difficult to unfold.

But the bottom line about their trickle down boils down to an issue that I want to talk a little bit here that does not come out as much, and that is education. I think in the region if you tell me what is most depressing to you about the region, I would say education. That is the most depressing thing. Everything else I do not care about because in the end it is about human resources and when we talk about a globalized

world and a Middle East that is integrated globally, a competitive economically, it is in the end about whether they are going to have the human resources to compete and that means a skilled force that is able to compete with everybody else on a global scale. If you look at the educational institutions in the Middle East, they are what I call pathetic, and I am not using that term lightly. Of course we have some extraordinary example. We say what about Qatar importing the Cornell Medical School for a billion dollars to produce 50 graduates a year? Wonderful. I think it is a standard of excellence, but who is going to be able to emulate that? And how much impact is that going to have? Those are wonderful examples of standards of excellence that maybe people can aspire to. But in the end, here is the reality. Egypt which once led education in the Middle East, if you look at their educational institutions, the best-ranked Arab university in Egypt is Cairo University. It is ranked number 28 in Africa. The bottom line of this is that there is no cutting-edge research. There is no cutting-edge research anywhere that adds value and that is a huge problem I think in the end for the region. I applaud, by the way, the World Bank's new campaign on education. But that is something that is troubles me. I do not see a huge move in education that could create change.

Let me make a couple of other points. Islamist movements. I think one of the very good points that is made in the book is that we have

exaggerated the importance of the dynamic that comes out of militant Islam in the region. That is absolutely true and I think that is one of the central services that is made by the book for our discourse because clearly this is not the most important force in the region, it has not been, and certainly it is not now, and most Islamic movements in the region and not militant, most of them are nationalists, many of them have varieties, and some of them are working for reform, and clearly most of are peaceful and there is no question about that. But here is the problem. The problem again is that recognizing to begin with that the only instrument of change in the short-term in these autocratic countries in terms of the political landscape is still mostly Islamic, and if you look at the experience you have to say, what will they stand for? Will they live up to democratic ideals? I do not know. I do not know whether they will or not. But I know one thing and that is that they all advocate the imposition of *sharia* law and even if they do not say it politically they justify it in varieties of ways that we are not going to do it, but internally the rationale is that *sharia* law is the law of the land. How will they behave when they come to power? We used to have this debate when socialism was the issue in schools and saying the Soviet Union and China are not really good examples. We have to see how it works out in reality and when you look at it in reality, we do not have many experiences. We do have a Turkey example that people cite, there is the Iran example that people cite. I think more likely

the countries in the Arab would are going to be closer to Iran's style and let me tell you why, and I am just going to say that knowing that there are varieties of experiences and that will not all be the same. I am just saying that in broader terms and it is going to be obviously somewhere in between.

Turkey's experience with an Islamic group coming to power comes when you have a mature democracy. You have a mature democracy for a long time and this is not a revolutionary change. This is a party change. Yes, there is incremental change. But in the experience of Iran, you are replacing an autocracy with a new system and if that new system is replaced through the agent of an Islamic party, I think we can expect something different. The Mujahaden idea that they can ride on the back of the Islamic revolution in Iran and it will be different, I think that did not happen, and I think that it is not likely to happen in the Middle East.

Democracy. I can tell you that Robin is excellent in her description particularly at the end. She has a wonderful concluding chapter in which she makes clear that our foreign policy particularly with the Iraq war has undermined democracy. There is no question about that. So the recognition is that now we have been set back. And actually she wonderfully quotes an Egyptian woman who says, "We have to do it despite the United States, not with the United States" and I think that is a very important thing to do. But the reality of it is, the vast majority of the

public in the Middle East does not believe there is more democracy than there was 10 years ago in the Middle East. That is the reality. And I can tell you something even analytically among scholars. My students in the past 10 years, students in graduate school, what do they want to study? Democratization in the Middle East, democratization in the Middle East. Guess what they are studying now? The robustness of authoritarianism. That is now the new topic in the region.

That leads me to the final point I want to make which is about the big elephant in the room, that is still the big elephant in the room, and that is the strategic picture that chokes and paralyzes everything else in ways that we often underestimate and we kind of dismiss because we think that is complaining about the outside world when in fact it is not. Let me talk about the two that I see that are most important. One is the Arab-Israeli issue. It is not just, by the way, the fact that it is important psychologically and as to identity and all that, it is, and all the polls show it. But I am talking about in reality look at what is happening. It is obviously involving Israel and the Palestinians directly. It has involved Lebanon. There was a recent war with Lebanon. It still involves Syria because Syria still has occupied territory. And guess what? The two countries that have had peace with Israel, Egypt and Jordan, now are directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict because Gaza now is partly an Egyptian problem, before you know it the West Bank is going to be also

something of a Jordanian problem. So you have Egypt, Syria, Jordan, the Palestinians, the Lebanese, the Israelis, all directly involved with this issue that is one of the priorities, if not the top priority.

Then there is the American presence in the Middle East. We pretend like it is not a factor when in fact we have forces in every single Arab Gulf country, and overwhelming forces, in every single place in the region. Many of the countries when we make a request whether it is small or big, they never turn us down. Our own Congress can turn us down, they do not turn us down. That overwhelming presence is extremely important for the trends because most of what we request of these governments goes against what their people want and that means that the gap between the people and the governments in part because of us, not all, but in part because of us, has only grown over the past decade, and that I would submit to you is one of the most important reasons for the paralysis that we have with reform. Thanks.

(Applause)

MR. INDYK: Thank you, Shibley. I want to give Robin an opportunity to respond to anything that she might want to in terms of what Shibley had to say, but I also wanted to ask you about the unspoken eleventh bottom line. Perhaps you do not feel comfortable doing this as a journalist, but really given the experience and the analysis that you have brought to this problem, the question of what the next president of the

United States should do to advance change is one that kind of cries out for an answer. So if you do not feel comfortable I understand it, but I wonder what your thoughts are about that.

MS. WRIGHT: That is something you are an expert at and I am not sure I want to cross into that territory. I will say one thing about one of the points Shibley made, and that is about the Islamists. It is clearly one of the most controversial issues in this city particularly. I have to disagree with you a little bit. I think the model is not Iran, that most of the Islamist movements realize that Iran went too far into Shiia-Sunni differences. But you look at groups like the Party of Justice and Development in Morocco which recognizes Israel's right to exist has made a point of saying that Jews in Morocco need to have their rights protected. I went to see both the good guys and the bad guys for this book and I spent a lot of time with Hassan Nasrallah as well as Kalid Mashal of Hizballah and Hamas. I was struck at one point when I asked Nasrallah about *sharia*, and I said is this something you want ultimately to see in Lebanon and he said absolutely not. We have a strong Christian community, we have 17 recognized sects, and they must be -- he was not looking for -- I mean, clearly looking for democracy in the sense of one man, one vote, which is not in Lebanon which would clearly skew things toward the Shiites who have the largest single bloc. But at the same time he was not pushing for the Iranization of Lebanon, and that struck me.

I think that there is a greater maturity and recognition among a lot of these Islamist groups now. The Muslim Brother in Egypt also says that a president in Egypt just be a Muslim and not a Christian, and 10 percent of the population at least in Egypt is Coptic Christian. Yes, there are restrictions, but Egypt already says that its law needs to be compatible with *sharia* so that in some cases is not as big a change as is portrayed.

The only thing I will say about the next administration is do not continue the policies of this one.

MR. INDYK: Fair enough. Let's go to the audience for questions.

MR. CUTLER: Robin, congratulations on your book and I cannot wait to read it. I have it but I have not read it yet. I have read the reviews. I am Walt Cutler and I was in the Foreign Service and served in the Middle East too.

I want to come back to the subject that was just touched on, and it may be in your book, Robin, beyond Iraq, but as to the role of outsiders in encouraging these positive trends and particularly our own country, be it the government or our nonprofit organizations. Do you have a sense that what we have seen so far and what encourages you has been influenced positively? Has there been a role by other governments particularly our own in encouraging these trends, or is it in spite of? Let me just mention when I was last in the area I remember in Saudi Arabia

they are very proud of the dialogue that they have going there and the changes that are coming. They may be glacial to others, but still they are proud of it. But they made a point, please, it is important for the success of these changes that they be from us and not from outsiders.

Then I went on to Kuwait and a woman there said, "Thank God, thank God I was invited to observe your last elections. It made me the courage to run for our own parliament." She was not elected, but nevertheless she was very, very grateful for that kind of outside influence and experience.

Robin, how do you see it? Is it in your book? If it is not, how do you see it both from the trends you have seen and the future?

MS. WRIGHT: There is a good bit of that in the last chapter. It is a wonderful question and for us it is the basic question. The bottom line is that the Iraq experience has made it impossible for us to get engaged in any way in any of these countries. I think President Bush actually gave a very good speech in 2003 in which he held Saudi Arabia and Egypt to account. Then as so much with this administration there was no follow through, and in fact we ended up tolerating the stability as much as any previous administration which is what President Bush critiqued in that speech.

I think there are roles for the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, the National Endowment for

Democracy, in training some of the candidates in how do you run a campaign, how are you accountable, how do you develop a platform and those kinds of things. But I think that the U.S. for the time being can talk about what is important to us, perhaps even use our aid at some point more creatively in holding governments to account. In other words, we will give you so much but based on your performance and your opening up of lifting press laws, not banning satellite television. But that we have been so discredited that we actually have to step back, and changes in every society have to be homegrown. That is been true before Iraq and it is true particularly after Iraq.

MR. AL-BARAZI: I am Tammam Albarazi from -- Magazine. I have not read the book yet.

MS. WRIGHT: But you will, right?

MR. ALBARAZI: Of course. But about Syria, I interviewed a couple of the opposition by telephone of course, I cannot go to Syria, but most of them they were like critical of the people you mentioned like Michel Kilo or Bunni or others who they consider American stooges or liberals. The word liberal is really a curse in the Middle East nowadays. I do not know if you mentioned it, but some of the opposition inside Syria even support the Syrian government's for example policy on Iraq or in Lebanon or Palestine, that it is something maybe for us on the outside we do not understand. Even the opposition supports the government's

foreign affairs policies but not inside. But in spite of that that everybody who comes to the United States like Librani or others, they meet with American officials and the Assad regime would never dare to imprison people and they go to prison and nothing happened.

MS. WRIGHT: When it comes to foreign policy issues, particularly nationalism always prevails. And you can hate your regime but you can feel just as threatened as anyone else who lives in that country. I think the majority of Iranians that I have known over the years have deep problems with their government and yet at the end of the day of the United States considered some kind of military action would rally to the cause and probably volunteer to help the government in some way. We saw that during the Iran-Iraq war. Saddam Hussein's invasion was the greatest gift to the survival of the revolutionary retime. I do not think there is a contradiction there.

MR. INDYK: Ambassador Lewis?

MR. LEWIS: Robin, I am going to make a resolution that despite my wife's edict, no more books in our house, I am going to get one more. I did read your op-ed.

Everybody who talks about positive trends in the Islamic world always starts with Morocco, and you did also. I have been to Morocco once for one day so I am a real expert, but the question arises where else do you see trends like the ones that have been on Morocco for

a long time? They have gotten better, but after all, Morocco has been the one country, was one of the few countries, that did not throw out all the Jews and had some kind of connection with Israel all through the last several decades. And beyond that, had more variety in its internal experience even under the previous monarch. Where else do you see the Moroccan trends right now that are optimistic?

MS. WRIGHT: I will actually add a caveat to that and that is Morocco in many ways is one of the most autocratic countries. The king is not only the political leader, he is the religious leader. He has greater power even than Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. So the openings in some ways, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that dealt with the human-rights abuses of the 43 years of the current king's father and grandfather, never ended up with an apology. It found out what happened to a lot of people who disappeared, it offered compensation, but now some of the same practices are being used against the Islamists that were used against the leftists and the opposition under the previous monarchs.

I do not think there is a regime in the region that is in synch with its people. So there is not a government that I write about in a way that is optimistic. It is always the people on the ground who I think are genuinely doing things at their own initiative. That is what is so important. Not because we have prodded them, not because they necessarily came out of American school systems at the college level. That is what is so

different and in the numbers that is striking. But I take your challenge. I do not think there is one out there.

MR. INDYK: Yes, back there, please.

MR. YUKUBIAN: I am Mara Yukubian from the U.S. Institute of Peace. Robin, congratulations on your book. I look forward to reading it.

My question is about current negatives or current shadows that have the potential to become positive. Specifically I am curious as to whether you think jihadist extremism can overreach, is overreaching, and in fact ultimately will be turning people off. Specifically there is a fascinating piece this morning in the "New York Times" talking about youngsters, young men in Iraq being completely turned off now from jihad, from religion, because they associate it with so much negative. We saw similar overreaching with Zarqawi and the hotel bombings in Amman, again civilians being turned off by these grizzly tactics. Do you see that potential trend?

MS. WRIGHT: Sure. I think that that is what turned around the sheikhs at the beginning of the Awakening Councils in Iraq. Is it the beginning of the end of jihad? The "New York Times" had the end of jihad on my review and I looked at it and I said it is like the history, maybe going too far. But I think it is going to burn itself out and the thing that struck me so often in the region is that they are a minority, that they such a distinct

minority and that for so long they have prevailed in terms of the headlines and the movement in the region, the activism in the region, because there were no other alternative, and now you are beginning to see alternatives in virtually every country. They may not happen at a government level, but they are happening on the ground and as they crystallize, as they offer alternative ways of doing something, it is a beginning. Jihad is going to be around with us. We may not have seen the biggest terrorism spectaculars yet in the region and potentially even here, but I think the reaction -- I think that Muslims were embarrassed after 9/11, the process -- because of Iraq that we did not keep the momentum on our side. But I think every poll, and Shibley has carried out a lot of them, show that violence is not what the majority of people want. Even those who do not like the United States, oppose everything we are doing, do not support the suicide bombers who attack our interests. Right, Shibley?

MR. TELHAMI: There is no question. I think that even those who like certain aspects of al-Qaeda, most of it is the enemy of my enemy and only roughly about 6 percent agree with their methods. Nonetheless, we see a different picture toward Hamas and Hizballah and even though they use violence, obviously, but they admire them because that is a conflict they can relate to.

MS. WRIGHT: They do something positive in terms of offering an alternative whether it is a school system or parliamentarians to vote for whatever.

MR. TELHAMI: But I am saying outside the Arab world. So when you have Egyptians admiring Hizballah, they are not really measuring it in the terms of the services they are providing, they think that it is standing up to Israel and the United States and they see that through that particular prism. But in general there is no question that violent methods is not what is attracting people in the region and has never been the case by the way even immediately after 9/11. That is why even to this day actually a majority of people in the Muslim world including Muslims in Western countries do not think even that Muslims carried out 9/11 to this day, and that is true even about majorities of Muslim communities in Britain, France, and Germany. So there is a very paradoxical view of this issue, but that is not what is driving them. That is for sure.

MR. INDYK: A question over here?

MS. FRIEDMAN: My name is Laura Friedman from Americans for Peace Now. I have not read your book yet, but I will.

I want to ask you about the lessons being drawn by Islamic parties across the region about Hamas experience. I and probably others in this room were part of the NDI mission that was out at the elections. As someone who has worked in the region for a long time, it was a

remarkable experience, very genuine grass-roots. Hamas ran not under their own name. They ran as the party of change and reform. And their platform was entirely about change and reform, all their posters, everything, and it was recognized as a clean and fair election.

When you talk to people across the region about these Islamic parties, the discipline, the presence, the popularity, what lessons are they drawing by the experience of an Islamic party winning an election and then essentially being cut out of the process and the people essentially punished for the process?

MS. WRIGHT: I think it is a great question, and the interesting thing was the number of Islamist groups I talked to who wanted to talk about that, again in Morocco, the Party of Justice and Development saying they made a terrible mistake. They went way too fast. They should have done as we have done and the PJD has deliberately only run some candidates and they started out in areas where they knew the government would not object, they were not government strongholds, that they would kind of allow the opposition, and they grew and grew gradually and that has been very interesting to watch. I had a very interesting discussion with Khalid Mashal about this very subject and he talked about the debate within the party about how many to run, how to run, which surprised me a great deal. I talked to Nasrallah about it and their sense that Hamas may have been to ambitious as well. I think in the same way

you saw the Iranian revolution become the benchmark that people did not want, the Hamas election may provide the same kind of example in saying too much too far too fast. They were not capable. They did not know how to rule. They knew how to be in opposition potentially, but that is all.

MR. INDYK: Yes, please?

MR. WANJAB: I am Leon Wanjab, a former member of the U.S. Foreign Service. I would like to ask a question about Dr. Telhami's last point about American presence in the region. We have seen in the Bush administration some efforts most noted for their lack of success by Karen Hughes and by later other emissaries of the administration to attempt to do something about the failure of American interests in the region. Since these two efforts have been a disaster as far as I can see, are there any other strategies or processes you think that might be a bit more helpful?

MR. TELHAMI: I think all research has shown, and including actually administration commissions like the -- Commission on which I served on public diplomacy, recognize that most of the perceptions of the United States around the world and certainly in the Middle East are a function of policies and not a function of public diplomacy. So your ability to affect is really in a very small percentage. You cannot explain Abu Gharib through public diplomacy, you cannot explain anarchy in Iraq through public diplomacy, you cannot explain the violence in Gaza through

diplomacy. That is what is driving people's perceptions and I think that is clear.

Having said this, I do not want to say that there is nothing you can do on the margins, and the margins are sometimes very important. Number one, part of the problem for the U.S. is not just that we have policies that are not popular, we are always going to have some policies that are unpopular, that is just a function of particularly being a superpower, is that there is no trust and credibility and there is no reservoir of support of people who even are prepared to give you a chance. Even now we say give us a chance and maybe in 6 months we can get a peace agreement. Nobody is going to give that chance. So public diplomacy in some ways helps in the long-term build bridges with constituencies that are prepared to give you the chance in crisis situations and that is usually more done I think through exchanges and building across society. In our public opinion polls, for example, we find the segment that has the most favorable views of the United States are people who have spent time in the U.S. or who have studied in the U.S. or have interacted with Americans, just like the other way around. Not because people like us or they love us, no, they see us, they know we are complex, the good and bad as opposed to the one distorted prism that you always get particularly when your image is negative. It just makes it more complex and therefore more normal in the perception, and that happens.

But I want to also give one more point, a plug to my colleague Tamara Wittes who is here from Brookings because I think there was a question from the ambassador about what could we do in the Middle East. We just had a panel on the Doha Conference that Martin and I and others co-convened in Doha, Qatar, and we had a whole workshop for 2 days on the issue of what outside parties can do on reform and we brought some political scientists from other institutions who have studied this. The conclusion is that you cannot do it militarily and the historical evidence is that democratization through military intervention fails. But there are many other things you can do short of military intervention and I think that Tamara has a knew book on this which I urge you to look at when we are talking about Robin's excellent book, but there is also another book that Tamara has on this issue.

MR. INDYK: We will bring that book to you just like we have brought Robin's to you in the near future. Robin, do you want to respond to what Shibley had to say?

MS. WRIGHT: No.

MR. INDYK: Down here, please.

MR. SMITH: David Smith from the United Nations but speaking purely in a personal context. Robin, thank you for writing the book. I would urge everyone who has not seen it, go back 25 years and

Robin wrote a book called "Sacred Rage," and the journey from then to now is a dramatic one for anybody who is daring to point out the positives.

When I heard you I could not help but feel on one person, one vote, in Southern Africa and I wonder where you think that process is when you see people in Egypt climbing over the wall getting into an election that has probably been fixed. Or to pick up on a colleague's point about Hamas and Gaza. Where do you think our idea of one person, one vote is in this sort of democratic spring that you are identifying because it is surely not what we think it is, i.e., that one person, one vote is the solution?

MS. WRIGHT: You are talking about the Middle East though? I talked about Russia earlier. South Africa is another example. You and I were both in Southern Africa at the same time and there were a lot of blacks in South Africa particularly in Zimbabwe who are far worse off today than they were even in minority rule. That is the sad reality. One person, one vote is going to produce God only knows what. I think that what I try to say in this book is that the interim is going to be very turbulent. We saw it with the Palestinians. This is where you have to step back and say what is it they are trying to achieve. I went around talked to literally over that week because I was at the elections as well thousands of people what are you going to vote and why, and these were predominantly secular people who did not want an Islamist party but did not want Fatah.

The first rounds of elections are going to produce not what people want, but what they do not want, they will be voting against something, and that is why it is unpredictable. That is why it may produce a lot of parties that we do not particularly like. Particularly because there are so few options out there, that so many of them are Islamist, that they may end up being groups -- the trick is during the transition holding these groups to account. If they are going to be international players and qualify for aid, they have to meet certain criteria whether it is the United Nations, the United States, or the European Union and we do have leverage over them. With all these groups I have been struck, and again I go back and one of my favorite chapters is about Hizballah because I remember as you do having been in the Middle East as well the emergence of this underground movement that was engaged in some of the bloodiest acts and I live in Beirut during them, the first targeting by suicide bombs of American interests, and yet you have a movement that is today running for parliament in Lebanon, had a cabinet minister. Yes, it still does outrageous things like kidnapping Israelis and engaging in war with Israel and taking very dangerous arms from Iran, but at the same time it has in 25 years evolved and it is that evolution that is going to take so long and be so difficult for us, even more difficult than it is going to be for those in the region. One person, one vote, I am convinced that we have reached a stage that most in the region do not want to see one person, one vote, one

time. I think that is an illusion anymore. And I think that people have already proven that they are creative with their votes, they think for themselves often. I found in the Palestinian election husbands and wives who voted for completely different parties. I thought that was terrific.

MR. INDYK: Just as a quick comment, I think one of the principles of democracy that seems to get overlooked that it is not so much one person, one vote, one time that needs to be avoided, it is that one gun in the hands of the accountable government needs to be preserved. The problem we have with Hamas, Hizballah, and of course in Iraq as well is that these parties have militias and if they have the ability both to run in elections and to use the gun, the whole system is really undermined in a very negative way and that is something we should not forget about what Hamas did with its guns in Gaza.

MS. WRIGHT: I agree completely, but I also think that we have reached a level of sophistication that while Americans do not know what civil society is, there is an understanding that the period between elections counts and that is when you actually end up engaging in societies in ways -- civil society everywhere in the Middle East is in trouble. There is no question that government does not want them to operate and is not helping them in any way and oppressing them whenever possible. Yet there is a recognition that that is the space you want to take. It is less the electoral period and more the everyday

experience where people are trying to change the dynamics on the ground.

MS. WITTES: Tamara Wittes from the Saban Center, and Shibley, thank you for the plug. Just to clarify, my book will not be out for another 6 weeks or so, so watch your email and we will be having a lunch event here.

Robin, I wanted to ask you about a question that I think a lot of us who have followed the developments in the region, some with hope and expectation, some with tremors, have struggled with and that is whether these individuals, these brave individuals who are you describing in the book who are working on women's rights and human rights, who are struggling for accountable government, whether they are really speaking to the needs and the priorities of the broader public, in other words, whether they can develop a mass following. One of the arguments that people make especially in an environment as difficult as today's Middle East is that the priority is security first and then jobs and maybe sometime down the list education and you get to democracy, but democracy really is not the priority for Arabs today or Iranians today, actually it is about security first. How would you respond to that argument?

MS. WRIGHT: I'd say that democracy is something that is our lingo, that is our frame of reference and so that is the frame of reference I would talk about, when in reality you are absolutely right, it is

those groups, those issues that deal with the everyday things and that is why it has forced the hand of the Islamist groups to run on platforms of economic reform or health care for everybody. If you listen to some of their campaigns and you think it sounds familiar. In many ways a lot of the people I write about do not represent mass movements. They represent small groups that have become engaged, but they are building on them. I think of places particularly in Egypt, even in Lebanon, where the way the movement of Rafik Hariri's assassination took off is when a group of people on text massages were down at Hariri's gravesite and called for people to come down and the text messages kept going out and out and out and out and they got down there and then they started speaking to each other. This was not a terribly well organized at least outset phenomenon. It became organized rather quickly as people set up tents, brought in Port-a-Johns decided they were not going to leave until the Syrians left. It just escalated into something.

What strikes me is that you have the genesis of the beginning of something that can move and become bigger when there is a broader catalyst, when there is an event that mobilizes them, but you have to have those who are willing to engage and that is what strikes me.

MR. INDYK: We have many other questions, but I want to as usual give the last question to Gary Mitchell because he does such a good job on asking the last question.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, I think. Robin, Gary Mitchell from "The Mitchell Report." I was struck by a comment of Shibley's when he said the dream factor might have been high in the 1990s. It is a two-part question. One is, is it your sense that that might be true, that the dream factor was higher in the 1990s? Second, going back to Martin's opening question to you about what should the next administration do, I want to imagine that it is December 2000, the five/four vote went the other way, and all we did was attack Afghanistan, get rid of Osama bin Laden and we did not do Iraq. If the dream factor was moving in the right direction in the 1990s and if we had not invaded Iraq, what is your sense of where the dream factor would be today which is another way of asking what is the most helpful and significant thing that this country can do in the Middle East to make that dream keep moving in the right direction?

MS. WRIGHT: That was not a great last question. Who knows? Too many hypotheticals in terms of what would have happened. If everything were different, I am not sure I believe that the 1990s represented any great hope. There was maybe on Arab-Israeli. But I think what makes this period so interesting is that this is post-9/11 and where the political spectrum in the Middle East is broader than it has ever been with al-Qaeda way out there on one extreme and a group of new activists willing to take really brave action, that kind of spectrum you did not have in the 1990s. I am not sure how I answer your question.

MR. INDYK: I will answer it.

MS. WRIGHT: Good.

MR. INDYK: What I learned from reading Robin's book is that it is important not to lose hope, that there is reason for hope even in such a dismal situation, such a dismal place that the Middle East often looks like. And my own experience in the Middle East is that change when it comes is quite unpredictable. Nobody has ever I think predicted accurately war or peace in the Middle East and I doubt that anybody can accurately predict when real political change will come. But Robin has succeeded in doing is to identify and give a real human face to those people who are working for that change and that is a great service and it is a great reminder that it is possible. And I think in the words you quote at the end of the book, it is that we should never give up on that.

MS. WRIGHT: Thank you.

MR. INDYK: Robin, thank you. And if there is one thing you do now, it is to follow Sam Lewis's brave decision to add another book to his library and you should do too and you would be well served by buying this one. Thank you very much.

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