THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

THE UNITED STATES AND EGYPT: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Washington, D.C.
Friday, March 16, 2012

PARTICIPANTS:

Moderator:

DAVID BYMAN
Senior Fellow and Director of Research, Saban Center for Middle East Policy
The Brookings Institution

Panelists:

KHALED ELGINDY
Visiting Fellow
The Brookings Institution

SHADI HAMID
Fellow and Director of Research, Brookings Doha Center
The Brookings Institution

TAMARA COFMAN WITTES
Senior Fellow and Director, Saban Center for Middle East Policy
The Brookings Institution

* * * * *

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BYMAN: My name is Dan Byman. I'm the director of research at the Saban Center here at the Brookings Institution. And thank you all very much for coming out on a somewhat spring-like if a little cloudy day to join us. One of the unfortunate side effects of the crisis in Syria has been that in the last several weeks at least and even before that it's monopolized much of the attention in Washington as well as world capitals, the crisis of the day. And that's understandable given the horrors happening in Syria. And I will add the plug while also very importantly Brookings event on Monday morning at 10 o'clock on Syria.

But while Syria understandably deserves attention, it's crowded out much of the space diplomatically and politically for other important issues in the region. And perhaps the most important one and in my view perhaps the most important one being neglected is what's been happening in Egypt in recent months. If you recall, after the fall of Mubarak last year there was emphasis on Egypt not only because of the importance of Egypt itself but because of what Egypt meant for the region. And attention in Egypt has been at times intense and at times much more limited. And in the last few months we've seen again a series of fairly dramatic events and changes in Egypt that to me at least pose very serious questions for the future of Egypt and also for the proper U.S. policy in the region.

That's why I'm delighted that we at Brookings are able to have an event on Egypt, and in particular bring together three very distinguished speakers for you this afternoon. Our first speaker today is Shadi Hamid. Shadi comes to us from our Brookings Doha Center where he is research director. We're delighted he'll be spending a little time in Washington and able to talk to us today. He will be speaking on events internal of Egypt and their implications for the United States.

After Shadi is Khaled Elgindy, who will be talking about Egypt from a regional context looking at relations with Israel, in Gaza, and elsewhere and trying to expose what this means for U.S. policy.

And I'm also delighted to have back with us Tamara Wittes, who is the director of the Saban Center and who joins us after having spent several years in the Obama Administration where she worked directly on these issues as well. So I think it's going to be a very rich discussion today and I'm looking forward to the remarks.

So without further adieu let me ask Shadi to kick us off, please.

MR. HAMID: Great. Okay, thanks, Dan.

So let me just start by laying out some of the context. I don't think it's a secret now that U.S.-Egypt relations are at an all-time low. This is really an unprecedented crisis that we're seeing around the attack on Egyptian and American NGOs.

Let me just kind of first start by saying that before the Arab Spring I think there was a tendency to dismiss anti-Americanism as inevitable or at least something that had to be managed or ignored. And that's why I think there was also a preference to work closely with autocrats because they could do what they did without really consulting their own people. And it also gave us a clear address of who to work with.

But unfortunately, that policy of decades of focusing on autocrats at the expense of the people put us in a bad position after the Arab Spring because the more democracy you have, the more governments have to be responsive to public opinion. Right? And not just in Egypt but throughout the region. So if anti-Americanism is at very high levels in Egypt, that's going to have an effect on whoever is in power but also the opposition, and people are going to compete with each other to see who can be more nationalist, who can stoke more anti-American sentiment. And that's more or less where

we are today.

And I think it's also worth mentioning that it got quite bad under the Bush administration and that saw a decrease in American popularity actually but what's less remarked upon is that according to several polls, U.S. favorability ratings in Egypt under the Obama administration were lower than under the final year of Bush. So in some ways it kept on going worse. I mean, contrary to the perception that the Cairo speech brought about this new beginning, this new era in U.S.-Arab world relations in the region, that's not quite the way it worked out.

So we're in a position now where the last five decades of a certain policy of privileging stability over democracy, that's part of the reason why we are where we are now. So right now we have in Egypt a struggle for legitimacy and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which I'll just call SCAF, Egypt's ruling military generals, they've stoked anti-American sentiment at levels we didn't even see under Mubarak. And this is, of course, somewhat ironic because the military receives $1.3 billion annually from the U.S. But even with that they feel very comfortable using ant-Americanism as a card to play against their opponents.

Now, SCAF has in some ways manufactured this crisis but they're also tapping into something that's very much there in Egyptian society. So yes, it's true that most Egyptians hadn't even heard of the NGOs, of IRI or NDI a year ago. And SCAF put that on the agenda. But SCAF is building on something that's already there. And in terms of understanding what the revolution as about, it wasn't just about bread or freedom. It was certain about that, but I think more broadly the best way to understand what this revolution was about is dignity. And I was in Tahrir Square on February 11th when Mubarak stepped down and what was the chant that everyone was saying? "You're Egyptian; raise your head up high." So it's broader than just being about the fight

for freedom or unseating Mubarak; it was about being proud to be an Egyptian. That Egypt could return to its traditional role of leading in the region.

So this is important because part of it was about distancing Egypt from foreign influence. So as much as we say that it wasn't focused on America or wasn't focused on Israel, that's true; but there was an undercurrent in the revolution which was very much about freeing Egypt from the external influence of various factors including the U.S. So I think that's very important to understand because right now being pro-revolution in Egypt is tied to being as far away as possible from U.S. influence.

Now, this leads us to a situation where everyone is accusing everyone else of foreign funding, of being American stooges, so you have this very odd situation now where even liberals who you'd think would be more sympathetic to the U.S. are accusing the Muslim Brotherhood of being American stooges. So I actually -- we met with the -- I won't say who, but a top Egyptian official in January, and I thought he was joking at first, but he essentially said that he believes that the U.S. has this grand master plan to install the Muslim Brotherhood and ultraconservative Salafis into government. So I thought he was just kind of messing around with us. So we pushed him a little bit more and he was serious. He was like, you know, we have evidence. This is true. It's happening as we speak. And this is a new narrative that you hear a lot more in Egypt; that the Muslim Brotherhood and the U.S. are now in cahoots and are working together. Now, the Brotherhood accuses the U.S. of backing liberals or backing the SCAF so every, you know, the U.S. is backing whoever your opponent is. That's essentially how it works in Egypt now.

And I actually had a personal experience with this kind of culture event, of Xenophobia or whatever you want to call it. I wrote about this elsewhere but during the elections in November my cab driver actually attempted a citizen's arrest on me and

essentially dragged me into the police station and I was detained briefly. Why? As he later told me afterwards after he felt bad, he thought that I was, believe it or not, an Israeli spy who had learned to speak Arabic. And my Arabic is slightly accented so he was very suspicious, like where is this guy actually from. And I've been conducting research in Egypt from the Mubarak regime on. I never feared for my safety under Mubarak but now foreigners are going to Egypt, journalists are going to Egypt and they're getting beaten, they're getting surrounded by crowds. So that's the kind of context that we find ourselves in now.

Now, moving on. Well, this is important because I think it makes the task of reorienting U.S. policy to Egypt much more difficult because of the toxic nature of American influence, but I think it also makes it more urgent. Something has gone very much wrong now and I think it's time for us as Americans to kind of step back and reassess and rethink what our relationship with the Egyptian government but also the Egyptian people should be.

So just a few thoughts on that. I think the key now is for the U.S. to regain credibility and leverage, especially with Egyptian government and now it's the military, but in the future it'll be someone else. And that's where this NGO crisis becomes so important. And some of you may have seen the New York Times article today, but it seems like the U.S. is backing down and is going to resume military aid to Egypt even though the NGO crisis hasn't really been resolved. Yes, the six Americans were airlifted out so that seems to have addressed it to some extent, but no, the charges are still there. American NGOs can't reopen and the vast majority of NGOs that are under attack are not American; they are Egyptian. So this is not really -- this is beyond just some American citizens, as bad as that is. This is about the very life of a democracy, the future of Egyptian civil society. And nothing has changed in that respect. So I think it sends a

very dangerous message that right now we're going to resume military aid even though Egypt is essentially waging war on civil society. And that certainly sends in my view precisely the wrong sort of message to the hundreds of NGOs that are now being targeted. They feel that they've been betrayed, and rightfully so.

Now, I think the other thing here though is that there's a sense that the Obama administration, when push comes to shove, it'll back down. And the Egyptian military is right in thinking that because we are about to back down. So it's also the kind of precedent this sets for future governments that if you confront the U.S. enough it's not going to be a big problem because U.S. threats are hollow; that the U.S. can talk about withholding or cutting aid all at once but it's not actually going to follow through on the threat. The threat is not credible. So I think in terms of understanding the longer term implications, I think that's very key here.

So in the short run there's still time. The Obama administration doesn't have to resume aid. Even though they seem to be planning on it, there's still a time for them to hopefully think again about this and reconsider that position. But that decision will have to come probably later this month. So I think that's the biggest short run issue.

Now, to just close with a couple words about the longer term aspects of the bilateral relationship. For decades, 85 percent of our aid went to the military; only 15 percent went to economic assistance. And in Fiscal Year 2010 it's slightly higher now; only 1 percent of the total aid that we gave to Egypt went to democracy and governance programming. And I think that shows people where our priorities were for a long time. Now it's starting to kind of go up a little bit but I think we have a long way to go on that. So we have to think is the balance between military aid, economic aid, and democracy and governments programming, is our current balance the right balance?

I think we also shouldn't repeat the mistakes of the past because under

Mubarak we engaged primarily with the government. We didn't have good relationships with the rest of the opposition. So there were no formal contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood for almost 20 years. And there were a lot of us, including I think most of us on this panel, who were calling years ago for the U.S. to engage with the Muslim Brotherhood. And it would have been much better if that process started years ago. Now we're coming at it very late. To its credit though, the Obama administration has started to engage and more and more officials are going to meet with the Brotherhood and talking to them, but it's come a little bit late. And now we have to essentially build these relationships from scratch because we neglected them for the 30 years under the Mubarak regime.

So instead of repeating that mistake, not only should we deepen our engagement with the Muslim Brotherhood, but we should also engage with other parties in Egyptian society. And that should actually include Salafis as well, as uncomfortable as we may be with them. They did win 25 percent in the Egyptian elections. And I think what's encouraging about engaging with a group like the Muslim Brotherhood is because they are sensitive to international opinion, when certain liberals refused to meet with John McCain because of his role in the Iraq War, the Muslim Brotherhood met with him. The Muslim Brotherhood has been very comfortable meeting with U.S. officials. Of course, it does engage in anti-American rhetoric at the same time and this is the kind of difficult dance that the Brotherhood is doing. But I think what's reassuring is that the Brotherhood does want to engage with the U.S., so we should make that a top priority, is how can we build a strategic engagement with these popular forces that are not only influential parties in their own right but they also have influence on the grassroots level and that's a way to reach towards the Egyptian people.

And lastly, I'll just close by saying I think there is a real opportunity when

we talk about engaging with Islamists here. I think we're seeing the emergence of the Sunni-Islamist block all across the region and not just in Egypt but Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and possibly even Syria. And it's interesting that there's this kind of love-hate relationship that Islamists have with the U.S. And I remember under the Mubarak regime, Brotherhood leaders would say privately but sometimes publicly, "Why isn't the U.S. doing more to support our democratic aspirations?" They didn't want the U.S. to remove itself; they wanted the U.S. to engage, the play a role, but a positive role. And I think in all this talk of U.S. decline it's still worth mentioning that there is still a desire for the U.S. to be more of a leader; to actually live up to its own rhetoric.

I'll just close there. Thank you.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Khaled.

MR. ELGINDY: Thanks, Shadi.

Before I get into the regional dynamics of Egyptian foreign policy, let me just outline a couple sort of scene setting points. The first is, and I want to echo actually a lot of what Shadi said. The first point is that the two extreme scenarios that were put out there early on a year ago about Egypt's orientation after the "revolution" haven't panned out. The first one being that, you know, since these revolutions weren't about the U.S. and Israel, they weren't burning American and Israeli flags in Tahrir Square, therefore, you know, we're good to go and, you know, the fact that those things didn't happen doesn't mean that foreign policy doesn't matter to Egyptians. And it certainly doesn't mean that Egyptian foreign policy won't change.

The other point is that just because Egyptians voted overwhelmingly for Islamists parties doesn't mean that they're turning away from the United States, notwithstanding the current crisis over the NGOs or that they're going to cancel the peace treaty with Israel and so forth. The point I would actually argue is that notwithstanding all

of the drama that we've seen over the last year, but particularly in recent weeks, I think overall very little has changed in terms of Egypt's foreign policy. Certainly its role in the region hasn't changed very much, although there have been some surprises. But the basic point is that there's more constancy than there is change

Even though we haven't seen these sweeping changes, however, foreign policy is a force now in Egyptian politics in a way that it has never been before. It matters now and it ought to matter also to the United States. We saw a little bit of this in populist. Most of what we see is sort of the populist expressions of this phenomenon like the storming of the Israeli embassy. A lot of the sort of vitriol and anger in the press, particularly recently over the Israeli attacks in Gaza, and we had, of course, a Parliamentary vote to expel the Israeli ambassador. It was a symbolic vote. The Parliament doesn't have that authority, but one day it may have that authority.

So these are all things to take note of. That said, however, I would just say that obviously things continue to change and evolve and Egypt is very, very full of surprises. And it's impossible to know exactly where things are going to end up. The only thing that we know for sure is that the way the transition is handled domestically will, of course, have an impact on foreign policy.

In terms of the peace treaty which is a core issue for the United States and much of the Western world as far as Egypt's foreign policy, the peace treaty with Israel, the SCAF said very early on that they would uphold the treaty. We've seen in one form or another the Brotherhood and even the Salafi party has said that they would hold -- they would abide by Egypt's commitments. But what we've heard from both officials and non-officials, government and nongovernmental types in Egypt, is that they will do it with more reciprocity. They'll uphold the peace treaty but they want to see more reciprocity. They want to see maybe to insert some more equity in terms of the terms.

The Sinai deployment of Egyptian forces. They may want to renegotiate some of those terms. The natural gas deal with Israel is certainly something at a popular level that Egyptians would like to change because it's also associated with graft and corruption in Egypt and the overall lack of transparency.

So that is a constant. Egypt's role vis-à-vis the Palestinians is also pretty much the same as it has been, maybe slightly more successful. Perhaps the role that the regime is taking now is a little bit more balanced. It's still the primary backer of the Palestinian authority politically, but in terms of the intra-Palestinian dynamic it might be a little more balanced, vis-à-vis Hamas in particular. That is a reflection, of course, of the changes happening in Egypt and that the ascendency of the Islamists in Egypt, I think, has tipped the scale in that direction. But we haven't seen any strategic change at that level. Egypt still supports a two-state solution. Egypt still supports a return to negotiations, maybe under different terms. I think in this case they back the Palestinian view. They would like to prevent wars from happening, particularly on their borders in Gaza. And we saw recently Egypt brokered the latest truce between Gaza and Israel.

So, you know, if anything, actually, the changes that are happening in Egypt might have added a bit of a -- have become sort of a stabilizing force in that because of the unpredictability of the situation and because there is more of a reflection of public opinion in foreign policy making, that may have acted as a deterrent in terms of the Israeli offensive in Gaza. It might have lasted longer had it been otherwise or the previous one might have lasted longer. Of course, it's impossible to prove a counterfactual or a hypothetical but it certainly hasn't been a destabilizing force. If anything, I think you can make a case for it being a stabilizing force.

In terms of public opinion, I think we see a similar phenomenon where Egyptians are generally split for the most part on whether they think the Camp David

Treaty is good or bad for Egypt. There are polls all over the place on this but I think most polls show generally a majority or at least a plurality of Egyptians favor maintaining the treaty. Not that the treaty would, as a matter of policymaking, be put to a referendum. That's not how these decisions are made. But obviously, public opinion does matter.

A recent poll by Gallup showed that overall Egyptians, about 48 percent of Egyptians generally think the treaty is good for Israel; about 40 percent say it's bad. I'm sorry; it's bad for Egypt, not for Israel. And what's more interesting actually is that the numbers are pretty much the same for Islamists and non-Islamists alike, for supporters -- for people who voted for the Salafi newer party, for example, 51 percent say that it's good and 42 percent say that it's bad. For supporters of the Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party, 46 say it's good and 45 percent say it's bad. The Free Egyptians, which is the largest secular party in Egypt, 48 and 46. So very, very, and all of these are sort of within the margin of error. You have this deep split and it's not along ideological lines. There is a general sense with regard to Israel.

Looking, sort of panning out more broadly in the region, Egypt hasn't yet emerged as the regional leader that it once was. Excuse me. Or that many Egyptians aspire to be. And unlike 1952, it certainly is not a revolutionary force in the region. There was some hope I think early on that there would be major changes or at least there were some signs that there would be major changes in Egypt's foreign policy. One of the first, one of the early post-revolutionary foreign ministers, Abu Daladadabi had talked almost about a year ago had talked about normalizing relations with Iran. Iran is not an enemy of Egypt, permanently opening the border with Gaza and even joining a seating to the Roman statute, the International Criminal Court, which is something that Tunisia did. All of these things didn't actually happen. And of course, Abu Daladabi did not remain in his post for very long. He was later appointed to become secretary general of the Arab

League.

Egypt has maintained a fairly low profile on Libya and Syria, has not been really at the forefront in either direction. Unlike also Tunisia, where Tunisia has, I think, really sort of punched way above its weight in regional terms, whereas Egypt continues to punch well below its weight regionally.

The picture with regard to the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia in particular I think is an interesting one and a mixed one. Of course, they were alarmed. The Saudis, in particular, were alarmed by Mubarak's removal and later by the trial, or at least the charges that were made against him. And that continues to be a sticking point I think and has caused some tensions. But we've also seen tensions with the Brotherhood. The UAE recently had a tiff with Egypt. There's been a back and forth between the Egyptian Brotherhood and UAE officials over a prominent Islamist preacher, Yusuf Qaradawi who has his own program on Al-Jazeera. So there is some weariness, I think, on the part of many in the Gulf of the Brotherhood in particular. On the other hand, they're very supportive of the Salafists, which is not that surprising.

If there's any change in terms of Egypt's regional outlook at all it's been on the Africa front, interestingly enough, where we've seen more of a, you know, more engagement and more priority on the Nile Basin in particular which, of course, is Egypt's lifeline. The Nile headwaters are Egypt's -- is an existential issue for Egypt. And it was an issue that was sorely neglected for many years and now is being, you know, reprioritized, but not because of the revolution. The revolution might have opened up, sort of diffused power a little bit in a way that allowed that to happen, but it wasn't primarily because of the revolution.

I would say the NGO crisis and the Xenophobia that has been stoked over recent months has also hurt Egypt's international standing regionally and certainly

internationally. And both of these, I think, to a great extent are functions of the SCAF. I mean, the SCAF is not solely responsible but they have -- I agree completely with Shadi, they've manufactured this crisis. And they've used it to stoke anti-Americanism and to stoke Xenophobia in general, which for a country that relies on tourism is not the most responsible thing, I think, to do. And, of course, all of these things have consequences.

On that front though, in terms of U.S. Egyptian relationship, obviously there has been a real deterioration. The U.S. now finds itself in a situation where it has very little leverage with any of the three sources of centers of power in Egypt. The SCAF. The Islamists, it certainly doesn't have much leverage with them. And even with the Tahrir protesters and the pro-democracy movement in general or the activists or however we want to call them. But I would argue that all of what we've seen is actually less a shift in U.S. Egyptian relations than a deepening or an acceleration of pre-existing trends or pre-existing trajectories. All of, you know, the revolution didn't add anything new; it just accelerated a process that was already happening. There was already, I think, tensions in terms of pro-democracy work, you know, that would, now and again, that would come to the surface.

We still have very close military ties and a strategic partnership. That hasn't been affected. I personally don't believe that that $1.3 billion was ever in serious jeopardy. I think the rhetoric on both sides got ahead of where either side wanted it to be but I think they were able to pull it back. Aid has become ironically an issue and a source of great tension as opposed to something that is of mutual benefit. That's the original purpose.

So what does all of this mean? I agree with Shadi. One of the things that we have to -- there needs to be a rethink in how the United States deals with Egypt. One thing is we're going to have to take Egyptian public opinion and even in its more ugly

forms, like the populist sentiment, we're going to have to accommodate that somehow. We're going to have to find some way to work that in.

Another thing that we've learned is that the United States' influence may be even more limited than we thought it was. And I think we've seen the limits of aid conditionality.

One thing -- another thing that we're going to have to rethink is our approach to foreign aid, not just in terms of the structure or the types of programs that we do but the role that foreign aid plays. And I think we have to become much more creative and find ways to, for lack of a better word, indigenize somehow the foreign aid. Somehow we need to make it not such a -- we need to soften the impact of this foreign -- what looks like what we see as leverage or assistance, Egyptians see as manipulation. And large numbers and large majorities of Egyptians oppose American economic aid in general. And even larger numbers oppose the kind of aid that goes to these civil society organizations.

So overall I think we're going to have to see a real rethinking of the strategic partnership with Egypt, one that may be is based on a more equal footing between the two sides, more exchange and more reciprocity, and one, as Shadi mentioned, that includes the people, a relationship with the people and not just those who govern them.

Thank you.

MR. BYMAN: Tamara, please.

MS. WITTES: Thanks, Dan. Good afternoon, everyone. It's great to be back.

Well, I think it's inevitable that a revolution in Egypt would demand recalculations and major adjustments in the U.S. Egyptian relationship. That's inevitable.

But in many ways the turning point for the relationship did not come last year with the revolution itself. It's coming now as this transitional period comes to a close with the presidential elections and the anticipated handover of executive authority to a civilian president before the end of June in Cairo. And as Dan mentioned in his introductory remarks, this is just a central relationship for the United States in the region. It's been an anchor for the United States in the region for over 30 years. Egypt, not only because of that relationship but because of Egypt's history, because of its size, because of its cultural impact on the Arab world, because of its geostrategic location. Egypt is a dominant actor in the Arab world and it's going to remain one. And so how the United States engages with this central pillar of the Arab world is going to have a tremendous impact not only for historical reasons but for all of those really important structural reasons.

Now, American interests in strong U.S.-Egyptian ties I think are largely the same as they have been. And I think both Khaled and Shadi discussed this in terms of having bilateral cooperation to support our Israeli peace, to support counter terrorism efforts, to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region and I believe to contain Iran in that regard. And I want to emphasize that I think these are shared goals to a large degree on both sides.

And how can I say that? This is a little known fact but Gallop does polling all around the world on a wide variety of topics, and one of the questions that they ask globally is about public opinion with respect to terrorism, with respect to the use of violence against civilians. And what's the country in the world with the highest rate of rejection of terrorism as a way to achieve political goals, it's Egypt. Egypt has suffered tremendously from terrorism over the years. And so -- and the Egyptian people reject terrorism at incredibly high levels. And so counterterrorism is a strong shared interest.

It's not a U.S. interest imposed on Egypt; it's very much a shared interest.

Arab-Israeli peace I think is another one, and I think as Shadi and Khaled have described, we've seen significant indications that those emerging Egyptian political actors as well as those who worked under the previous government understand well the benefits that Arab-Israeli peace brings to Egypt and to Egyptians. And to the extent that any democratically elected government in Egypt is going to be focused on providing for the needs of its own people, building democratic institutions, strengthening itself internally, regional stability, not only in the Arab-Israeli domain but in the neighborhood as a whole is absolutely crucial.

So regional stability on the border with Israel or on the border with Gaza, but also supporting the stability and success of Libya, worrying about the situation in Sudan to the south, these are factors that are strong in the calculations of any Egyptian politician, I think, if they're thinking about how do they create an environment in which they can succeed at their domestic political goals.

And then finally, I think Egyptian politicians, those who are competing and taking office in this new environment have as their primary goal delivering for Egyptian citizens. And they know that means that they need to be connected to the world, connected to the global economy, open for tourism, open for trade. And all of that demands a strong relationship with the biggest economy in the world, which is the United States. So I think for all these reasons there are strong underlying factors that should sustain a strong U.S.-Egyptian partnership. And I think that the United States is going to want continued close cooperative relations with Egypt and specifically also with the Egyptian military. And it's true; military-to-military cooperation has been ongoing without a break in the midst of all the (inaudible) of the past year on counterterrorism, on border security, on all of these important issues.

And for all -- in order to pursue all the interests that I just noted, it's important that that relationship continue too. And so I think it's important as we contemplate this relationship going forward that we think about the military-to-military relationship and we don't sort of weigh it down with all of the baggage that we may have about the SCAF. The military and the SCAF are not the same thing, and the SCAF's leadership of the transition, however troubled, should not implicate the entire military-to-military relationship.

However, the United States faces a real turning point right now as I said, and it has to fundamentally decide whether it's going to go back to doing business in the old way through elite bargaining, essentially switching out one set of elite leaders on the other side that you bargain with for another. Whoever wins the presidential election, the guys who are the majority in parliament today, or whether the United States is going to build its strategic cooperation with Egypt on a different basis. Whether it's going to build a longer term foundation for more meaningful cooperation with Egypt that I think would be rooted as Khaled and Shadi were suggesting, much more in a people-to-people relationship in a sense of common endeavor and in institutions, activities, other ways of building a partnership that are more peer-to-peer.

Now, to do that would be, indeed, a major transformation in U.S.-Egyptian relations, but to me this is the strategic opportunity presented for the United States, not only in Egypt but across those countries in the Arab world that are in transition today. The strategic opportunity of the Arab Spring is for the United States to build a foundation for its engagement in the region, for its cooperation with others in the region on the basis of common understanding and broad public consent.

Now, to build that kind of partnership, that has to be built with the Egyptian people. That takes time. It also has to be built with a government that answers

to the Egyptian people. And that's the challenge of the moment we're in right now. The United States is still dealing with a transitional executive authority headed by the SCAF that is not democratically elected. And that as Shadi noted, a number of political actors in Egypt have doubts about its intentions to abide by the outcomes of a democratic process.

I think the United States has done a reasonable job over this transitional period of what I would say is preserving the possibilities for that broader partnership with Egyptians going forward by maintaining and indeed increasing its economic assistance to Egyptians, its aid to civil society, and by a couple of things that I think haven't gotten a lot of notice but that are worth noting -- reaching out countrywide, getting well outside Cairo. Ambassador Ann Patterson, since she arrived in Egypt last summer, has done a lot of trips all around the country to really repair what I think was a shrinking down in some ways of American-Egyptian engagement over the last few years of the Mubarak government. In the '80s, in the 1990s, the United States had a consulate in Alexandria. It had a much broader presence engaging with people across the country. It lost some of that in the last 10 years or so and is now beginning to rebuild that. I think that's been an important achievement over the last year and I would also note the outreach by the U.S. government to emerging political actors, including the Muslim Brotherhood.

Now, I don't expect that the United States will get or even should get a lot of credit with the average Egyptian for having taken those steps. Indeed, I would say that the United States has pursued those goals on behalf of a broader partnership with the Egyptian people understanding that it's not going to get much credit. If the U.S. government is lucky, if it makes good choices, it will have the ability to positively influence and support a democratic transition in Egypt, but to get credit with the Egyptian people for that, given the history and given the anti-colonialism, the nationalism of the post-revolutionary environment that Shadi described, I think that would be an unrealistic

expectation.

Now, although the United States has, I think, managed to, as I said, preserve the possibility of a broader partnership during this transition period, it's done that in the face of a lot of countervailing pressures. And I think over the course of the transitional period it's been increasingly difficult to sustain the momentum in this direction. There are a lot of short-term imperatives for specific types of U.S. Egyptian cooperation that have to some extent forced the United States to act in certain ways or make certain decisions that push against that broader relationship. And I think the controversy over NGOs and especially the impact of the crisis on FMF, on the military assistance to Egypt is, you know, the paradigmatic example.

The fact of the matter is that there's a civilian government coming no later than July 1st. That's the commitment of the SCAF. That's the commitment of all the political actors on the ground. It would take, I think, extraordinarily events to violate that commitment. So ideally the United States would restart its military assistance in accordance with the legislative provisions in the bill Congress passed last winter. It would restart that assistance with a new government, a civilian government on the basis of the beginning of writing a new chapter in the relationship.

But in the meantime, we have the crisis in Gaza over the last week. We have border incursions in Sinai, including another one this week. We have the challenge of managing the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation. And we have a whole host of other regional security challenges that are constantly popping up on the agenda that are demanding very close, cooperative behavior by the United States and this transitional Egyptian government. This military-led government. And that, I think, has made it very difficult for the United States to navigate this period.

Now, for better or worse, I think in many ways the assistance

relationship, both military and economic, has become the focal point for both Egyptians and for Americans in defining our partnership. And I think what that means is that the decision I talked about earlier, the choice that the United States has to make about how it's going to build its partnership with Egypt going forward, very much comes to focus on decisions about assistance. Those are going to be the near term decisions that will symbolize for many people, I think, both here and in Cairo, where the United States is headed in this relationship.

And, you know, the controversy over U.S. support for civil society in Egypt I think in many ways gets to the heart of the issue because the intention there, making the decision in the wake of the revolution to provide increased support to civil society in Egypt, both international groups and American groups, was really about shifting an assistance relationship that was very much rooted in government-to-government bargains. It was very centralized through the Egyptian government to an assistance relationship that was much broader. That was engaging much more directly with the Egyptian people. And that was not only on the democracy assistance side by the way but also on the economic assistance side. That the USAID mission in Cairo opened up requests for proposals to Egyptian groups working both on economic development and on democratic development.

And the question is: is the United States going to stick with this? Are they going to keep moving down this road? The government-to-government partnership is important. It should be important and needs to be sustained. Assistance is one means but certainly not the only means by which that government-to-government partnership can be defined, shaped, and bolstered. But in building a broader partnership with Egyptian society, assistance is also a very important tool. It can't be the only tool in that domain also but it is a very important and as I said, a very symbolic one. And so the

United States needs to really determine if it's going to continue down the road of building a broader partnership with the Egyptian people by using its assistance in a broader way.

Now, I don't think that there should be any inherent conflict or zero sum game between government-to-government assistance and assistance that goes more directly to social organizations. The Egyptian military certainly should have no reason to doubt the sincerity or the strength of the American commitment to a robust partnership which is manifested, as I said, not only through the FMF but in a huge variety of day-to-day activities. But the partnership between the United States and Egypt must now extend beyond that government-to-government relationship to political actors who are still in emergency within the Egyptian political system and to Egyptian society and American society more broadly. And in order to do that I think that those who are shepherding this relationship, especially at this particular moment as we sort of bumpily make our way toward June 30th and the deadline that it represents, those responsible for shepherding this relationship really need to use a lot of strategic patience and to think beyond the period we're in right now, to think about the relationship as we want it to be a few years down the road and then work backwards, how do we get from point A to point B?

Thanks very much.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. I think we've gotten three great sets of remarks to start us off. Let me kick off questions by asking each speaker one question. Shadi, if I can begin with you. Let me ask you, one thing I was distressed to hear in your remarks is really the lack of American stooges in Egypt. And I'm saying that rather glibly but it really does seem that there is no strong co-American constituency of the major actors. And if you include the Egyptian people among those, that's yet another one. And I may be overstating it slightly but from your remarks I got even more depressed. And what I was wondering was, is there a way to kind of change U.S. popularity in the near

term that, you know, Tamara has called for strategic patience and all that and so maybe a generation from now things might shift. But is there something in the next, you know, two years you could see the United States actually being reasonably popular?

Let me ask you to kick off and then I'll hand off to Khaled and Tamara, please.

MR. HAMID: There's no way in the near term unfortunately.

MR. BYNUM: That's good to know.

MR. HAMID: I mean, even if the Obama administration did my dream list it wouldn't be enough but it won't do anything close to that. I think there are steps that it can take to start moving in that direction and lay the foundation for a better relationship down the road. But I think it's more than just Egypt. I mean, we're talking about five decades of anger and frustration at the U.S. and no one should underestimate how deeply felt that is. And a lot of it is going to hinge on things that happen outside of Egypt. I mean, Israel-Palestine, even though it's sort of dimmed a little bit and isn't as major as it once was, that is still a very important issue that Egyptians care about. And it doesn't seem like U.S. policy is going to change very much on that anytime soon.

So considering that, I mean, I think the long-term approach in a place like Egypt has to be abiding by the principle that engagement -- the key criteria in the U.S.-Egypt relationship has to be the health of Egyptian democracy; that Egyptians have to feel that we are really committed to seeing that happen and that we're not going to betray reformers or go back to the old habits of supporting people who aren't committed to democracy. So I think that principle has to be there. I mean, what I've advocated elsewhere is also coming to terms with the past. I think if Americans are going to have a public diplomacy campaign and a broader outreach strategy with Egyptians, I think there has to be some acknowledgement of the role we played in the past. It doesn't have to be

an outright apology. I'm not sure that domestic situation here would really go for that but I think saying that we made a mistake, we got it wrong, and this is why we did that. We've learned our lesson and we're going to try to fashion a new kind of relationship. I think having that kind of frank discussion with Egyptians and coming to terms with our own past I think could help clear the air a little bit because I think up until now Egyptians don't feel that we're sincere. We can have all the pro-democracy platitudes that we can come up with but there's still a sense that we don't really mean it. That when we have to choose between ideals and interests, we're going to choose interests.

MR. BYNUM: Khaled, let me ask you, I got a sense of actually almost surprising continuity from your remarks based on some of the turmoil frankly that people expected looking at Egypt a year ago. There was one thing though that people looked at a year ago which was hope that Egypt would serve as a leader of a democratic camp in the Arab world and especially that this might realign diplomacy within the Arab world. Perhaps in an unstable way but in a very different way. Do you feel Egypt could move in that direction or is it going to be focused really too much domestically for the next couple years to have a very robust, aggressive foreign policy in terms of pushing a democratic agenda?

MR. ELGINDY: Well, I think the latter will be a function of the former. I think Egypt can't be a robust force in the region, whether for democracy or anything else until its internal house is in order obviously. And that's both on the security front and economic front. I think, you know, Egyptians have hugely high expectations and, you know, the last year has not really, I think, panned out the way a lot of people had hoped. So there's a huge amount of skepticism. I think Egypt could potentially emerge. I mean, a lot of people -- the Turkish model I know is overused but there are some real fundamental differences with Turkey. Turkey is an economic force; Egypt is not. Egypt is

on the verge of economic disaster. Turkey is a strategic force and has a strategic partnership with the United States that is, you know, that is at a different level than what Egypt has with the United States.

But Egypt has far more potential than Turkey does in terms of influencing the region but it won't get there until, you know, it won't get there until the internal situation is under control. Whether it's going to be something democratic or the direction that I think the SCAF is moving things, which is something resembling more like an authoritarian democracy or majoritiarianism, you know, tyranny of the majority or something, something less than democratic but that allows for a façade of democratic participation. Even under those circumstances Egypt could still be a force but it needs to decide. It needs to sort of complete this transition.

MR. BYNUM: Tamara, let me ask you a question before I open it up. One thing that Khaled had mentioned was the possibility of economic failure and Shadi talked about the idea of the risk of betraying reformers. When we talk of democracy, one area that's been contentious at times has been the rights of religious minorities and women's rights. And that's something where polling actually is different. What is an appropriate role for the United States in this agenda, especially given that if there are economic problems, if the United States and other countries do push for foreign policy moderation, that there will be a political incentive to enact more conservative social changes just to do something because other fronts are not as productive.

MS. WITTES: Yeah, I think that's an excellent question and I think it's also an important question, I mean, not only in terms of how does the United States or how does anyone from outside engage on that set of very fraught domestic social issues but also it's a very important question with respect to how does Egypt or how do other countries in the region who are confronting similar issues really interpret and implement

principles of democracy like equality under the law? What does that mean for these societies and what commitments are all political actors willing to make about that core principle? Because it is a core democratic principle and that's not about American preferences or American values; that's pretty universal and pretty fundamental. So if you believe in equality under the law, then that inevitably puts boundaries around what you're willing to do or able to do in terms of creating preferred status for people who identify in a certain way or people who have certain characteristics.

The other thing that I think is really important here is that to the extent that Egypt successfully finds a way forward on the issue of minorities or I would say the issue of equality and equal citizenship which applies both to minorities and to women, that's going to determine the strength of another core characteristic of successful democracies, which is the strength of pluralism within Egyptian society. And because you can't -- you cannot have a successful democracy if you devalue or marginalize people who are too far from the majority. You have to have room for different perspectives, including different religious perspectives in a healthy democracy.

And because I think this issue gets to such fundamental issues about the success of democracy in Egypt, I actually think that the way for the United States and anyone else from outside who wants to engage on this issue to engage on it is not through, well, what about the Christian minority or what about women's rights and why don't you have more women in the cabinet, but through the lens of these universal principles of democratic success -- equality under the law, pluralism, toleration. This is the way to talk about these issues; this is the way to engage on these issues.

Now, on the ground, and this is the other element. There are a lot of folks within Egyptian society who are working on behalf of those constituencies or those communities and just like any other organization of citizens with their own organized

interests who want to advocate in democracy on behalf of those interests, they deserve support in their efforts to do that. So I think the way to do it is number one, through the lens of universal principles; and number two, through support for civil society and indigenous citizen-based action.

I think that's the only way to be effective and historically this is important, too, because traditionally in the Middle East, as in a lot of places, these issues are dealt with not in terms of individual rights but in terms of group rights, in terms of the rights of specific communities. And in a democratic context -- I don't want to be absolutist about this because there certainly are democracies that make space for group rights, but the most natural way in my view in a democratic system to deal with these issues is through the lens of individual rights rather than putting it in the context of special pleading, if you will, by one group or another.

MR. BYNUM: Thank you. Before I take questions, a few reminders. First of all, wait for the microphone which will be coming around, before you talk. Second of all, please identify yourself. And third, and perhaps most important, please ask a question. And I will say "a" question, not questions. We have a fair number of people who would like to speak and I'll try to honor it. Should you ask more than one question I will pick the easiest one and ask the panelists to respond to that. So, please, sir, in the front row.

MR. SHINO: My name is Mohammad Shino, the Voice of America. My question is how do you envision the future strategic cooperation with Egypt at the time of anti-American sentiment rising?

MR. BYNUM: Shadi, can I ask you to kick us off on this one?

MR. HAMID: I'm not sure I understand the question. So what are you getting at exactly?

MR. SHINO: How do you envision the future of the strategic cooperation between the United States and Egypt at the time of anti-American sentiment rising?

MR. HAMID: Okay. Well --

MR. SHINO: Anti-American sentiment?

MS. WITTES: Yes, that's what he's saying.

MR. HAMID: Islamists are going to be in power soon, you know, whether it's June, July, or in the fall. The Muslim Brotherhood is going to be the dominant political power for the foreseeable future and, I mean, Islamists altogether won close to 75 percent. So even if Islamists lose support they have quite a bit of margin of error. So I think the question is what will an Islamist government do on the issues that the U.S. cares about? And I think what's reassuring about the brotherhood is that they're extremely pragmatic. And I don't think ideology is the best way to understand or predict what they're going to do. And the Brotherhood does what's in its interests at a particular time. If it's in the Brotherhood's interest to engage strategically with the U.S., it will do that. And I think it's reassuring that senior Brotherhood officials have actually warned against a reduction of USAID and said the U.S. should be supporting us more and continuing to provide aid to atone for the sins of supporting Mubarak. So there's even a desire on the part of Islamists to keep that relationship because they're focusing on building the economy obviously. And as Tamara said, that's not going to be possible without a close relationship with the largest economy in the world. So and that's why I think U.S. interests and the interests of the Brotherhood actually dovetail more than we think because both have a strong interest in seeing the economic revitalization of Egypt. And interestingly enough, the Brotherhood, contrary to what some people might think, is actually quite free market-oriented. And I think there is another commonality as well.

MR. BYNUM: Tamara, please.

MS. WITTES: Mohammad, I just want to make one small point which is that I actually don't think anti-American sentiment is a very good indicator of anything with respect to U.S. relations in this part of the world in general, Egypt in particular. And that's not because the United States roots its cooperation in bargains with autocrats. It's because strategic cooperation where it exists should be rooted in mutual interests. It's not about doing us favors because you like us and you want to do something nice for us. And that's not why we should be doing things for people in the region. We should be doing it because we have mutual interests and we want to cooperate to fulfill them. And so to me the sort of public opinion metric is perhaps the worst possible metric to use when thinking about this.

MR. MALIKI: My name is Abdul Maliki. I'm from the American Islamic Congress. And we are one of the 400 organizations under release in Egypt.

So I want to take the question a little bit out of Egypt. Since Egypt has been a leading power in the region, what and how do you see the future of NGOs in that region if Egypt succeeds by shutting down most of the liberal world? What will be the domino effect -- what is going to happen with Tunisia, Yemen, Bahrain? I can go on -- when Egypt succeeds by doing what they're doing so far?

MR. BYNUM: Tamara, please.

MS. WITTES: Yeah. I think you're asking a very important question and not only because Egypt is an important country and what it does is going to have echoes, but also because the efforts to crack down on civil society in Egypt are of a piece with a broader global backlash by autocratic governments -- Russia, Belarus, China, Burma -- against civil society. It's important to understand what's happening to Egypt as part of that broader pushback. The briefly put forward draft NGO law that came up earlier this year is, you know, a copy of the Russian law. So there's global learning going on among

enemies of democracy and civil society. And those who understand the essential role of civil society and holding governments accountable need to have a globally consistent set of principles and practices that are applied.

MR. BYNUM: Great. In the back.

MR. AFTANDILIAN: Yes. My name is Greg Aftandilian with the Center for National Policy. My question is for Shadi.

In terms of the constitutional writing process ahead and the powers of the presidency versus parliament vis-à-vis foreign policy. Obviously, the Brotherhood now in parliament wants to flex its muscles in the formation of Egyptian foreign policy but this is a little bit of crystal ball gazing, but how do you see the new Egyptian presidency as an institution? Will they have a lot of say or most of the say in the formation of policy as they've had in the past? Or will there be this tug-of-war between the two over the formation of foreign policy? Thank you.

MR. HAMID: Okay. Well, I think the Brotherhood kind of prefers that division of power to some extent because they don't want to take full responsibility over the transition period. I mean, now the consensus is around kind of a mixed French model where the president would have more authority on foreign policy. And again, the Brotherhood doesn't want to be front and center on foreign policy because then they have to deal with challenging issues like do they meet with Israeli officials when they come to Egypt? I think for now the Brotherhood would like to postpone some of those challenges because they don't have an internal consensus necessarily about how they're going to deal with that. I think it'll come in time.

So that said, I think the one thing that everyone in Egypt agrees on is how much they dislike Israel. So whoever the president is going to be there's going to be a lot of anti-Israel rhetoric, a lot of anti-American rhetoric. So I don't think it matters a

whole lot. I mean, it's really remarkable how much agreement there is on foreign policy. You don't see a lot of divergence. That said, the president will have to be pragmatic, so you'll see a lot of rhetoric on one hand but when it comes to actually implementing policy the foundations will still more or less be there. I think the model there is Turkey. So Erdogan and the rest of the AK party do engage in a lot of anti-Israel rhetoric but there still is that military relationship between Turkey and Israel. There still are diplomatic ties and cooperation. So I think that's the model that we're going to see. I think the Brotherhood is going to try to act as a pressure group from parliament so through parliament putting pressure on the president, embarrassing him in some cases. So I can envision a situation where the president somehow gives in to some Israeli demand and then the Brotherhood uses that as a card to build popular legitimacy against the president. So I think you can see there will be a lot of competition in that respect.

MR. BYNUM: Khaled, I know you've thought about this issue as well.

MR. ELGINDY: Yeah. I generally agree with Shadi, although I'm not entirely sure about -- I'm not absolutely convinced that the Brotherhood will be the -- I don't think we know who or what -- what combination of forces will be ruling Egypt in the coming period. I don't see the SCAF leaving major issues to the parliament or an elected cabinet or even an elected president. There are certain areas that the SCAF will try to retain and I don't see the Brotherhood really pushing back that hard on certain areas. And those areas include foreign policy and national security policy and intelligence. Those areas I think will probably be -- continue to be the purview of the military. And in that sense I don't think we'll see a genuine handover of authority to civilian rule because you'll still have military involvement in these areas that will by definition implicate other aspects of governance -- trade policy, other aspects of the economy. You know, the fact that the military will remain the one institution that will remain somehow above the law.

And there is a lot of talk right now. Of course, no one knows what will happen but there is a lot of talk about an accommodation between the Brotherhood or the Islamists in general and the military, some sort of a deal whereby there would be some power sharing but also generally immunity. So I don't think -- I think when we talk about civilian rule we have to keep that in perspective on what exactly that means. We're talking about areas of civilian rule and areas where the military continues to be involved in ruling.

MR. BRODER: Hi, Jonathan Broder from Congressional Quarterly.

I'd like to get Shadi's opinion on this. You talked about with the decision by the administration today to go ahead and give the Egyptians military aid, that the Obama administration had caved in. I did some reporting on this this morning, spoke to some people on The Hill and the administration and it seems that it's not quite a cave-in. That what they're going to do is all of the 1.3 billion is not going to just go to the Egyptians. It'll be dribbled out; my assumption is, according to the behavior of the Egyptian government, the SCAF. So there seems to be an attempt to try to sort of split the difference here. Not give them all the aid but signal to the military that Hilary will use the waiver and not abide by the congressional conditions that prevent, you know, that require certification.

My question is, is that the kind of thing that's going to fly with Egyptians as they watch the Americans renew the military aid but not give them all of it? I mean, is that kind of parsing? Is that going to make a difference?

MR. HAMID: Well, first of all, I don't think Egyptians will -- I mean, I barely -- that's a tough -- it's tough to even understand what the Obama administration's position is. If that was, in fact, their position where they'll be dribbling it out, I have trouble following that myself. So I'm not even sure if that's going to register with Egyptians. But I think the major point here is that Secretary Clinton will most likely use

the national security waiver and that's what's going to get the headlines both here and in Egypt, that aid is being resumed. So I think that's going to be the major takeaway for people.

That actually may be what most Egyptians prefer. There isn't a large -- I think there's anger at the U.S. for threatening to cut aid. But I think the bigger issue here as I was saying earlier, is what this means for American leverage. And that's what really worries me. However you want to phrase what the Obama administration's position is. And if it is, in fact, splitting the middle, I think that's a general problem with a lot of president Obama's policies in the Middle East that you don't take a clear position one way or the other; you split the difference. You take the middle route. Then you end up offending everyone. It's the same thing that, you know, dictators think that we support the revolutionaries and revolutionaries think that we support dictators in the Arab world. And that's why both sides are angry at us. So it's about time that we have clear positions and we explain them clearly to Arabs. We're not doing that.

MR. BYNUM: Yes.

MR. DAVIS: My name is Jason Davis and I'm with the Institute of International Education.

The question I have for the panelists is I'm curious to obtain your opinions. Near the end of the discussion we were speaking to laying the foundation for new, creative, robust, bilateral relations with Egypt. So in your opinion, could the U.S. hasten that process in the near term by, I suppose, tapping into soft power reservoirs by promoting educational cultural exchanges with the significant youth demographic in Egypt? Is that a viable or prudent option in your opinion?

MS. BYNUM: Please, Tamara.

MS. WITTES: Thanks. And I certainly -- I think education and

educational cooperation has been an important component of the U.S.-Egyptian relationship for years. And I think it will continue to be one. The U.S. has invested not only in helping promote reforms within the Egyptian education sector but also helping build parent-teacher associations and a major scholarship program for deserving Egyptians who are underprivileged who attend AUC, the American University in Cairo. And all of that is reflective of the fact that there is a much broader -- historically a much broader people-to-people relationship, you know, through education, through cultural institutions, through tourism. All these ties that, you know, I think to some extent both sides at the government level took for granted. And I think what's important now is as we seek to build a relationship that, in which strategic cooperation rests on a broader consensus about the value of our partnership, that we think more coherently, more consciously, and more strategically about all those other ties that already exist and how we can build them further.

I think there's an important economic component here as well and, you know, not to dismiss education. I think there's a lot of potential there. But I think that, you know, as has been noted already in our discussion, the primary concern of Egyptians today is their economic welfare and their economic future. And for young Egyptians it's whether there's going to be a future for them that is at least as good as the ones their parents had and not worse. And that's a real worry. And so the extent by building our trade relationships, by building business-to-business ties as well as by building educational partnerships, we can help provide opportunities for young Egyptians. I think that's what's going to be meaningful, not whether we do education stuff together but whether -- whatever we do together results in meaningful new opportunities for young Egyptians.

MR. BYNUM: Yes.

MS. BARROW: Laci Barrow, Arab Cities from Georgetown University and I have a question for -- sorry, I forgot your name.

MS. WITTES: Tamara.

MS. BARROW: Tamara. So you mentioned that there's a lot of -- it seems like there were a lot of grassroots efforts going on in your foreign policy and then you sort of discounted the idea that Arab public opinion would matter. So how can you reconcile those two objectives? Thank you.

MS. WITTES: Sure. It's not that Arab public opinion doesn't matter but the question that Mohammad asked was about what's the relationship between Arab public opinion and strategic cooperation. And I said strategic cooperation isn't about how you feel about us; it's about whether we have interests in common. Okay? When it gets to grassroots action, really what I'm talking about here and, you know, in my work in the administration this wasn't just manifest in what we were trying to do in Egypt but indeed in our approach to supporting political and economic change all across the region through the MEPI program which I supervise, fundamentally the agenda for change is a local agenda and it has to be a local agenda if it's going to be a meaningful agenda. Okay? And so how do you make sure that from outside you're providing support for political and economic change in a way that's reflective of local priorities and local demands? You do it through local organizations. Okay.

Now, for the United States that's not our traditional way of doing assistance. And it's not our traditional way of engaging. And it required over a period of years adjustments and building new structures and building new capacities within our embassies to reach out to local civil society organizations to start that conversation to do a lot of listening to them about what they were trying to do and why it was important to them and how it fit into a broader agenda, and then what we might be able to do to help.

And to be honest, in a lot of the conversations I had, sometimes the answer to what we could do to help was nothing. And you have to respect that when that's the answer. But when there are ways in which the United States government can be supportive of locally driven change, that's something I think that we should be proud to do.

MR. BYNUM: That's great. Yes.

MS. CUNNINGHAM: Hi. Susannah Cunningham from POMED, the Project of Middle East Democracy. Previously before that I was in Cairo for four years, most recently at the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies.

Shadi, you said that there's really no way to win over the Egyptian public, but when Obama came and made his Cairo speech there was a large amount of somewhere between ambiguity and sort of positive feedback at his speech, believing that, okay, he made a really good speech but now it's time to walk the walk. And afterwards the most -- the biggest rebuke you could hear is that he didn't leave Afghanistan earlier or after the revolution that they were really glad that he came out and said yes, it's time for Mubarak to step down but after the revolution not saying like military trials of civilians is not okay. Mass killing of Christian protestors is not okay. October, November, it's not okay to allow these mass deaths of civilians. And part of it, a part of things that every protestor is waiting for, including the Muslim Brotherhood and the Free Egyptian party related to progressive in Egypt is whether or not they would continue aid to the military apparatus that is using the very tanks that run over civilians. So the question is could you actually win over Egyptian people if you didn't provide aid until a parliament and a president -- voted elected president came to power in Egypt?

MR. HAMID: Okay. Okay. Just to start with Obama's speech, I agree. There was a lot of potential with that speech. Unfortunately, there wasn't follow-up as you're alluding to. And I actually remember that in 2010, it seems like an eternity ago,

but there was this kind of odd current of Bush nostalgia going on in some quarters of the opposition. And I remember Brotherhood members telling me before they Arab Spring that why isn't Obama putting more pressure on Mubarak? Why can't it be like it was in that brief period in 2005 where the Bush administration seemed somewhat serious about democracy? And I think that contrast became clear, not to the average Egyptian but to leaders in the opposition who did benefit from the opening that was there in 2005 because of, in part, the Bush administration's pressure. So I think a lot of the disappointment about Obama's policy was that Obama wasn't good on democracy before the Arab Spring. That wasn't a priority. It was pushed very much to the side and the focus, at least for a time, was on Israeli Palestinian conflict.

Now, I think you're right to point that even after the Arab Spring the Obama administration has not been as vocal as protestors probably want. And I think it's interesting to note now that the U.S. only threatened to cut aid when Americans were charged and put under trial. But when innocent Egyptians were killed by the military there was no threat to cut aid then. So I think, again, that kind of feeds this narrative that we care when American citizens are threatened but when the SCAF was involved in repressive tactics time and time again killing dozens of Egyptians, why didn't the U.S. take a stronger stand and put aid on the table? I think you're right. And that's why I don't think there's been a clear break with the past. Yes, I think rhetorically the Obama administration is saying the right things but in the actual policies there is still this -- SCAF is a source for stability. We know them. We can work with them. So again, that's what -- we're repeating some of the mistakes of the past certainly.

So what do you do about that? I'm not very hopeful.

MR. BYNUM: Khaled, did you want to chime in on this?

MR. ELGINDY: Yeah. I mean, I generally agree. I think the first thing to

keep in mind is the reservoir of anti-Americanism or, you know, skepticism of U.S. intentions runs very deep in Egypt and as it is in the whole region. And it has to do with Palestinians, with the Iraq war, with the other Iraq war, with Iran, with interventions here and there. It has to do with a lot of, as Shadi put it, you know, five decades of American policy. Against that backdrop then you throw in the mix how the U.S. has responded over the last year. And if you compare the response during those 18 days I think a lot of people would argue that the position that the U.S. has taken over the last 12 months is strikingly similar to the position that was taken during those 18 days but sort of just protracted, you know, stretched out over time. And, you know, to their credit I think the administration has made very important modifications to their policies, particularly with regard to dealing with Islamists and recognizing them as a force on the ground, as a reality.

On the other hand though, I think a lot of people are baffled by the really unwarranted confidence that was repeatedly shown in the SCAF in the statements by the administration even after things had gone terribly wrong and were continuing to go wrong. In the summer and the fall there was this constant refrain of these expression of confidence and it became very much -- it looked to a lot of people like the push for an internal kind of regime-managed reform that they were pushing for back during those 18 days with Oman Suleiman was being repeated now under the SCAF. It was just another form of regime managed reform, nothing too crazy, nothing too radical. You open up a little bit here. Open up the system a little bit. But there wasn't an actual revolution that took place. And I think a lot of the revolutionaries saw that, saw the U.S. response was actually not pro revolution. It was pro whatever happened after the fact.

MR. BYNUM: Okay. I am going to with apologies make this our very last question because we're nearing the witching hour so I'll ask an indulgence to go over

just a little bit because it's been such a rich discussion. Please.

SPEAKER: Adel Aladow, an Egyptian student here in D.C., interning for the Middle East Institute.

My question is for you. And you had mentioned that the United States has to make a decision now and my question to you is will SCAF let the United States deal more with the Egyptian people? Will the military allow the U.S. to change its foreign policy towards Egypt?

MS. WITTES: Well, I think that's a good question to ask. I think that's a question -- I wouldn't say just the SCAF or just the military. I think that there are a lot of political actors in the Egyptian system today who have a stake in the way things have always been in the U.S.-Egyptian relationship. And I think that there are a lot of people, both in Cairo and in Washington, who are very used to the way things have been done. And change is hard. And, you know, you just heard the criticism of the administration from two of my colleagues for the way the Obama administration adapted to the change over the last year. Change is hard and it requires adjustments.

So is there the capacity for any Egyptian political powers that be to constrain the ability of the United States or any other outside government to relate to the Egyptian people? To speak more to Egyptian society? To engage more directly with Egyptian society? Sure. There are all kinds of ways governments can try to interfere in that process. But to me, you know, one of the clear lessons of the past year is that governments cannot truly prevent this if it's what people want. I think, you know, the Egyptian -- the Mubarak government tried very hard over many years to constrain the ability of Egyptian civil society groups to work with their colleagues in the rest of the Arab world and in the rest of the international community and was never able to fully shut that down. They weren't able to shut down the impact of satellite television on the Egyptian

public. They weren't able to shut down a lot of influences from outside and a lot of ways of engaging across borders.

And, you know, I know in the course of the Arab Spring there was a tremendous amount of communication across the region between young Arab activists who had, you know, Tunisians who had brought the revolution there and Egyptians who had worked for the revolution there, talking to their colleagues in other countries around the region. That kind of engagement is, I think, fundamentally unstoppable. But so as long as the demand is there on the societal side I think that there are people outside who want to engage and want to be supportive. And so, you know, it's fundamentally -- changing the basis of the relationship is, I think, fundamentally up to the Egyptian people. Is this a relationship they want to build?

And, you know, what I think we heard from Shadi is that there is an interest in reaching out and there is an interest in learning more and there is an interest in talking about the tough issues. And there is an interest in gaining from some of the things that they admire about American society -- our educational system, our economic system. And I'm glad that you're here to be a part of that. So, you know, to me if the demand is there we can build the partnership.

MR. BYNUM: It's been an excellent discussion and I'm particularly pleased that we're ending on a positive note which I did not anticipate. But before we adjourn, please join me in thanking our three panelists for an excellent discussion.

* * * * *

CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

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

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2012