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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. GERSTEIN: Hi, everybody. Welcome. My name is Josh Gerstein. I'm a White House reporter for Politico and I want to welcome everyone to this Brookings Institution campaign 2012 discussion on terrorism issues and the 2012 election.

This is a part of discussions Brookings has been having, moderated by Politico, talking about a variety of different issue areas that are coming up or in some cases maybe not coming up in the presidential election and exactly why they are and what points they're of the most interest in the campaign. The format for these discussions has been to have a paper written by one of the scholars here at Brookings usually, as well as a couple of responses laying out sort of questions or thoughts or critique of the initial paper.

So we're joined here today by, starting to my immediate right, Ben Wittes, who is a senior fellow here at Brookings. He wrote the main paper we're going to be talking about today, along with Daniel Byman, a fellow at the Saban Center. He's best known to me, however, as the founder -- one of the founders of the *Lawfare* blog, which is sort of required reading for anybody like me who does a lot of writing about national security and terrorism issues.

To his right we have Stephen Grand from the Brookings

Institution, another fellow here who works in the area of U.S. relations with the Islamic world. And then we have Hafez Ghanem, who is also a senior fellow at Brookings and is basically standing in for a couple of other people who wrote some of the -- one of the other responses to Ben's paper offering a critique of how the U.S. should go forward on some of these terrorism issues especially in the next term, whether that be one that's second term for President Obama or a first term for President Mitt Romney.

We thought we'd start off the discussion today just sort of talking about how we got to this place in the presidential campaign and to the discussion of terrorism. I imagine you can always find just about someone who predicted just about anything, but it would have been hard to predict that we'd be right where we are right now in terms of where this issue is in the campaign and how it's playing. The general consensus at the moment is that national security and terrorism are an issue where President Obama has a pretty substantial advantage over his challenger, Mitt Romney. There's a debate about how significant the issue rates compared with other issues like the economy, but most folks seem to feel that it's an area where Obama feels he has a pretty strong advantage, which is a pretty surprising development if you think about where we were just about four years ago -- three to four years ago. I've covered these

issues over the course of the first term and terrorism is really an issue where President Obama was on the ropes for the first couple years of his administration. His plan to close Guantanamo sort of was thrown back right off the bat by members of Congress and never really recovered its footing and it was eventually sort of quietly basically disposed of by the administration. By the end of 2010, the beginning of 2011, there was sort of a public relations debacle over the effort to try terrorism suspects in New York City, and there were some pretty close calls in the terrorism area, particularly the Christmas Day bombing attempt of a flight inbound to Detroit that could have been a very, very serious disaster, and one where the administration's reaction was not seen as particularly sure-footed.

So it's pretty amazing that we're here just about, you know, two months before the next election and it's somehow seen that the president has an advantage on these terrorism issues. I guess the main event that hasn't been mentioned would be the killing of Osama Bin Laden in May 2011, as well as basically the president abandoning some of the policies that were so controversial earlier in his term.

But I thought we'd start with you, Ben. Maybe you want to add some other factors about how we've gotten to this place where the democrats seem to think that terrorism and national security issues are such an advantage for them that they can basically waive them like a big

flag at their convention, and it often seems that Mitt Romney and the republicans are, if not quite on the run over these issues, silent to the point where Mitt Romney didn't mention Afghanistan and seemed to basically gloss over this whole area that was seen for decades as a real advantage for republicans.

MR. WITTES: Well, thanks, Josh. And thank you all for coming out. It's kind of heartwarming to see a large group of people get together to talk about an issue that actually isn't playing significantly in an election because there was a time when we actually all thought counterterrorism was kind of important.

Jokes aside, I think Josh has really hit on the sort of central paradox for both parties of the way this issue is playing in the election, which is, you know, I think three years ago, three and a half years ago, none of us would have predicted that this would be an issue that the president would be talking about at his -- in his acceptance speech at his convention, and the republican candidate would not be talking about in his acceptance speech at his convention. I don't think any of us -- I certainly would not have predicted that and I don't know a lot of people who would either.

When you look at the poll data, it suggests, first of all, that this is an issue that the president's handling of foreign policy in general but

terrorism in particular, terrorism he pulls much, much more strongly on terrorism, handling of terrorism than he does on handling of other things, including the economy. So when one poll, for example, 60 -- nearly 65 percent of people said they approved of his handling of terrorism, it's a very substantial strength for him. He tends to pull before than Romney on this specific question, and again, he also tends to pull in absolute terms rather high. And so it's become an area of real strength for him. Now, this is a problem for the Republican Party in the sense that running candidates who were supposedly tough and campaigning on the basis of the supposed weaknesses of democratic candidates is kind of a mainstay of republican presidential campaigning. It is very awkward for the Republican Party to be sort of outflanked on this.

On the other hand, I also think that there's a paradox in it for Obama and one that is -- has governance implications in going forward should he be re-elected. And they are as follows. You know, Obama came into office wanting to make a big change and to make a big splash on this issue. But the splash he wanted to make was that he was going to be the guy who closed Guantanamo, restored the rule of law, got us out of Iraq, ended torture, and did counterterrorism according to our values. Right? Now, he did a lot of those things and we can talk about that. There's a lot -- he has some sort of solid accomplishments along those

lines, but those are not actually the reason why he's polling at 65 percent on this handling of terrorism. And the reason he's polling that high and the reason that he's talking about it at his camp, in his convention speech and his opponent is not, is that he launched -- he's launched ramped up drone strikes -- that he's killed two particular people in particular. One is Osama Bin Laden and the other is Anwar al-Aulaqi. And the second of those people is a U.S. citizen and the result of the aggregate of these very strong and very aggressive actions is that he's come off as a tough guy.

And so you have the Republican Party has been sort of deprived of its -- the place that it expected to be. But in a significant respect, Obama is also not talking about this issue the way I suspect he suspected he wanted to be talking about it at this point either. Now, I don't mean to say that's an unfortunate position for him to be in in the sense that you'd certainly rather be the guy who got Osama Bin Laden than not. On the other hand, what it does -- what it does highlight is that his record and operational counterterrorism is dramatically stronger than his record in doing the set of things that he came into office wanting to do in this space. And those efforts, which Josh alluded to in his introduction, bring up a real area of failure on the part of this administration, which is that it came in wanting to fundamentally change the framework in which it was going to be operating. And it has done a much better job of confronting al Qaeda

than it has done in confronting the Congress of the United States in kind of creating that framework.

And so you have -- until, really until the end of last year with the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act, an almost continuing series of, you know, antler locking clashes between Congress and the presidency over the course of the Obama administration; that he has not managed to get real control over. And I think the challenge for him, should he be re-elected going forward, the challenges for Romney would be rather different. But he challenges for Obama would be really how do you settle these relations with Congress in a fashion that would be even remotely as successful as you've been in confronting the enemy?

MR. GERSTEIN: Ben, I just wanted to start by asking you, since we're on the issue of sort of the political ramifications here. Many of us have been trying mightily to figure out what Mitt Romney's policies are on some of these terrorism-related issues. He struggled, obviously, at the convention as a result of not having mentioned Afghanistan but when you get into some of the specifics of either the Afghanistan-Pakistan policy or terrorism policy more -- generally, it seems somewhat hard to pin him down. You mentioned one in your paper that he favors recodifying or coming up with an extended version of AUMF.

We're about to have these presidential debates where I'm

told that perhaps as much as half of the time is supposed to be devoted to foreign policy issues which presumably includes terrorism issues. Where do you see -- presumably, Romney is going to have to try to differentiate himself from the president in some way -- where do you see the republicans having a direction to go here that could sell to voters?

MR. WITTES: Well, it's a really difficult problem for them. The areas that they've tried in the past are to oppose trials in federal court for terrorist suspects, which is actually really not a good idea, you know, to oppose the tool that you are likely to have to use repeatedly and that both the current administration and the former administration has used repeatedly as a sort of mainstay of particularly on the domestic side how you handle terror suspects.

The support of military commissions is part of the answer to that I suppose, except that, of course, Obama is now conducting military commissions and so that doesn't really differentiate you from the opponent. You can, as Romney has sort of flirted with in the past, focus on the interrogation side and try to differentiate yourself. Well, he ended enhanced interrogation. I'm really an enthusiast of sort of, you know, sleep deprivation and waterboarding but it's not really clear that that's sort of a winning -- I mean, it is clear by the way that when you poll people, people tend to like that stuff much more than elites do, but as a

presidential -- and it was a big, you know, you'll recall during the republican primaries there were -- there was sort of a, you know, I love waterboarding more than you; no, I love waterboarding more than you thing going on for awhile. I think, you know, in the sort of run-up to an actual general election that stuff would probably play pretty badly.

And in addition, there haven't actually been -- at a more serious level there have not been any recent cases that I know of that you could even plausibly say we have had operational setbacks as a result of sort of insufficient aggressiveness and interrogation, and so there isn't really a there there even if you put aside all the moral concerns and the legal concerns. And the result is that, I mean, I think you do have this problem of what you should talk about as the republican candidate, and the result in Romney's case has been really to talk about it as little as possible, which as I say is very awkward for him.

And I think underlying that is the fact that, you know, both sides really want there to be a great difference between them on this issue, and it just isn't there. And so you end up with certain things that, for example, neither candidate is going to close Guantanamo. You know, one candidate say he's committed to closing Guantanamo and one candidate says he's not -- he's committed to keeping Guantanamo, but we know that Obama is not actually going to do it, and we know that Romney isn't going

to do it. And so the voter kind of has this sense that there's much less difference than there may be rhetorically, especially since Obama isn't really talking much about closing Guantanamo these days.

And there are a lot of issues like that. Both candidates are very enthusiastic about, you know, attacking the enemy with drones. Both candidates as a practical matter will use both military commissions and federal court trials to try the enemy. Both candidates will reserve the right to hold detainees in military custody without charges at all under certain circumstances. And both will probably try to reduce to a minimum the number of circumstances in which they have to do that. And, you know, neither candidate is really moving aggressively, talking about how we shouldn't -- the NSA shouldn't be conducting, you know, the sort of surveillance that used to be very controversial before the FISA Amendments Act.

And so I do think you have underlying Romney silence, a real convergence between the candidates that makes it very hard for him to identify what the areas that he would really differentiate himself in the space looks like.

MR. GERSTEIN: Do you think a President Mitt Romney would be more likely to detain someone on U.S. soil outside the judicial -- traditional judicial legal system?

MR. WITTES: I think, you know, so this is a great hypothetical situation in the case of both candidates. Obama has basically said he won't do it, although he does not foreswear the legal authority to do it; he just says he won't. Romney hasn't, to my knowledge, said anything like that. As a practical matter, no president after the al-Hamdi and Padilla and Almari cases is going to be looking for a test case with which to do that. And so you're going to be looking to figure out a way to deal with such a person in the criminal justice system. And so far we have always found one.

So hypnotically, I think Romney might be more willing to contemplate it, but in practice their behavior is going to be exactly the same. They're going to look at the detainee in front of them and they're going to say can we make a criminal case? They're going to find a way to make the criminal case and the issue is not going to arise. Now, it is, I agree, Romney may have more conceptual willingness to do that than Obama, but I doubt you're ever going to see it tested, at least not as long as the numbers stay very small in terms of the number of people you're arresting domestically.

MR. GERSTEIN: And the bureaucratic institutional pressures from within the government would be to stay the course with the way these things are usually handled.

MR. WITTES: You know, we have -- it's not 2002 anymore. In 2002, we did not have very developed systems for when you pull somebody off a plane that you have intel from the intelligence community about and you've go to do something with him. That provokes a real panic. And, you know, we've stood up the National Security Division at the Justice Department. We have all kinds of routine cooperation between intelligence agencies and law enforcement all designed to ameliorate that problem and to make sure that when you have to confront that person, you can do it in a fashion that secures your intelligence, interests without compromising your law enforcement interests.

Those systems are not perfect. There are tradeoffs, but so far they have not resulted in a situation like Padilla or Almari where we simply could not proceed with the law enforcement case and it was unthinkable to let the person go.

MR. GERSTEIN: I want to ask you one thing about your paper before we move on to the reactions to your paper. Your paper talks a lot about what the next president should do in terms of trying to reach a meeting of the minds with Congress on how to proceed on some of these issues, like detention, probably also dealing with the AUMF, which is the authorization for use of military force, which is basically pretty much the only operative congressional enactment that we have dealing with a lot of

these issues related to terrorism.

Why do you think reaching an accommodation between the executive branch and the legislative branch here is so important? Why do you think maybe it wouldn't be a panacea for these problems but why do you think it would be such a salve? Because I could see people saying, "Look, Congress, as of the August 2012 Gallup Poll has a 10 percent approval rating. Most of its forays into this area when it has proposed riders or legislation, a lot of experts view a lot of those efforts as either exceedingly unwise and sometimes even comical in their ham-handedness. Why is it so important for the president to try to get a congressional stamp of approval for some of these policies? Why not just have the executive branch continue to work out these policies and let the elections -- presidential elections or whatever, serve as some sort of referendum validating them. Why go through this complicated dance with Congress?

MR. WITTES: Well, first of all, you have to go through the complicated dance with Congress because Congress forces you to. Right? I mean, if Congress were willing to, as it did for a lot of the Bush administration in certain areas, simply sit back and say you take responsibility for the outcomes. We'll keep our mouth shut. We won't say don't do it, but we also reserve the right to say bad things about you if

things go badly. Then that becomes a viable option.

The problem is that starting in response to the Guantanamo closure plan, that was not a game that Congress was willing to play anymore. And Congress passed a series of restrictions on the president's ability to transfer people out of Guantanamo, including to the United States for criminal process. And so there was a very deliberate and active effort on Congress's part to get involved in a way that requires if you're serious about doing any of these things that you engage with Congress merely at least as a defensive proposition in order to not have these options cut off.

Secondly, and I think sort of less situationally or kind of more fundamentally, it is not a healthy thing for to go years and years and years with the essential contours of very robust executive actions done on the basis of nebulous statutory or sometimes no statutory authority. Anytime you can have the Congress of the United States behind, even with a 10 percent approval rating, you would much rather as president have a federal statute saying you're within your rights to do this very controversial thing than not. The Bush administration suffered just terribly for not getting Congress onboard some things that they really would have been prepared to do had they been asked. And the Obama administration, sometimes against it will actually, has been through this back and forth

with Congress, has actually built some -- a little bit, some more durable architecture that I think is sort of a very salutary thing, including in litigation that they have going on, you know, every day.

MR. GERSTEIN: I should mention I said that AMF was probably the only big piece of legislation. The FISA (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act) amendments in 2008 that the president as a senator and candidate voted for was also a pretty significant piece of legislation essentially validating the NSA program or putting it into a legislative framework.

MR. WITTES: And you have the Military Commissions Act of 2009 as well, which I think is a very important piece of legislation in bringing the Democratic Party onboard the fundamental architecture by which we are likely to end up trying Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and the 9/11 -- I suppose I should say alleged 9/11 conspirators.

MR. GERSTEIN: Stephen, let's move to you and we're going to sort of change the discussion a little bit here and I think talk more about what one might call a more strategic or long-term proactive kinds of responses that the administration -- do you want to say something directly?

MR. GRAND: Actually, before we do that --

MR. GERSTEIN: Okay, sure.

MR. GRAND: -- can I just ask a question of Ben?

MR. GERSTEIN: Yeah.

MR. GRAND: Because I'm intrigued by some of what you said. Does this mean though that we've sort of reached a bipartisan consensus on what -- where American foreign policy, at least in this particular area, should be sort of post-9/11?

MR. WITTES: Well, everybody wants to deny. Both parties ferociously want to deny that such a consensus exists because the consensus actually violates both parties' essential self-image. You know, the Democratic Party, I'm going to caricature this just for fun, but I think you'll recognize some truth in both caricatures. Right? The Democratic Party sees itself as we're the part of the rule of law. You know, we're the people who live our values, who believe that security and liberty are not at odds and that we can do well by doing good, right, and that the other party is the party of, you know, macho aggressiveness and doesn't think about the place that we're going to occupy in the world and our image in the world and human rights and all that stuff. And the Republican Party looks at it and says, well, we're the party of toughness and we're the party that understands that whether something is good and in your interests may not be the same, and we're the party that, you know, has the discipline to do what is necessary even if it's not popular and the Democratic Party is

weak. Right? These are very, very deeply self, you know, deep in the self-images of the respective political movements.

And so I think it's hard for both sides to understand the degree of consensus that actually does exist. And the degree of consensus that exists is the following: One is we are going to use both law enforcement and war powers on a systematic, sustained level for the foreseeable future in confronting terrorism. We're going to use war powers overseas. We're going to use law enforcement powers chiefly domestically but also overseas.

The second is those war powers include both the power to target with lethal force people we consider to be part of the enemy, and the power to detain subject to the laws of war, not subject to the laws of the criminal justice system those we capture.

Third, we're going to be very aggressive surveilling all kinds of people in the course of doing those two things.

Fourth, we're going to use certain hybrid tool for those that we do capture. We may use, you know, military trials for some of them. We may use civilian trials for some of them. And those decisions are largely going to be matters of executive convenience.

And then finally, I think the other sort of core element of the consensus -- and this is a political consensus, you know, policy consensus

not a legal consensus -- is that we're going to be on offense and we're going to be doing as much offense as possible on the basis of standoff robotic platforms because that saves our people from getting hurt. And I think if you -- I think neither Mitt Romney nor Barack Obama put in this room under sodium pentothal would disagree with a word of that. And I think the reason they have so much trouble figuring out what to disagree about is that they all -- they both basically, and a huge percentage of both of their parties, actually operationally don't dissent from a word of that.

MR. GERSTEIN: Do you think it's fair to describe that as a George W. Bush term, too, consensus on what we should be doing? What the defaults should be on a lot of these policies?

MR. GRAND: Well, you're definitely right to distinguish between Bush term one and term two. Bush was -- Bush moved a lot and he changed. And Obama has gone further down the road that Bush was already moving in the latter part of his second term, and I don't think you would see -- so I see it more as a continuation of the directional momentum of the late Bush administration. The Bush administration learned a lot of lessons over the course of its time in office and Obama learned lessons from the Bush administration's time in office. I think largely those have gelled around a certain degree of consensus and I think, yeah, I think the Bush administration was moving in that direction. I

think Obama made some important innovations to further it down the road.

MR. GERSTEIN: Hafez, do you have any thoughts? Before we go to the formal responses, do you have any thoughts about Ben's statements on where the consensus stands?

MR. GHANEM: Well, my thoughts which I will deliver more later is that the whole debate on counterterrorism is too narrow. It just misses a huge set of issues that need to be tackled. Yes, the security aspect. Yes, the war effort aspects and the legal aspects are important and they have to be dealt with. But there are all the other issues -- economic issues, social issues, political issues -- that need to be tackled. What I would have liked to see actually is a debate on how, with all the changes happening now in the Arab world, how can we change -- how can we seize the opportunity to use those changes to fight terrorism? Because I see what is going on now with the Arab Spring and the revolutions as creating a great opportunity and also a great risk. That's where I would like to see --

MR. GERSTEIN: Okay.

MR. GHANEM: -- the debate in the U.S. going.

MR. GERSTEIN: So Stephen, why don't we start in on that a little bit. You know, you discuss in your paper some of that issue, how the U.S. can take advantage of the Arab Spring. You know, you paint the

U.S., I think, a little bit as sort of a bystander that this Arab Spring kind of happened to. I think from the U.S. perspective it's probably actually a little bit worse than that. I think a lot of folks in the Arab world saw, as I covered the first couple years of the Obama administration, them actually reinforcing some of these rather despotic regimes. In fact, the effort to jumpstart the Arab-Israeli peace process was largely pursued by fortifying leaders in the Arab world in places like Mubarak's Egypt. You know, the president went to Cairo with a speech that wasn't really focused on fomenting dramatic change in Cairo but in Egypt, but with other goals. Even people that, you know, who may not be discussed in polite company anymore, like President Assad, were the recipients of efforts to sort of romance them diplomatically during the early months and year of this administration, all of which has been now sort of dumped as the Arab Spring has been -- as the U.S. and the administration has attempted to adopt the Arab Spring.

I guess what I would say to you is does the U.S. have the credibility in the Arab world to be a proponent of democracy in this Arab Spring movement? Or does it have to try to take advantage of it in a more subtle way? The sense I get from the administration is they feel that the latter is the case; that they can't full-on try to take advantage of it but have to do it much more carefully because the U.S. credibility as a result of

various things dating back to the Bush administration and earlier, is kind of damaged there.

MR. GRAND: Well, you know, I think the big question on the table has been within this institution deals with the bad guys. How do you deal with terrorism? The project that I run looks at how do you engage with the 99.9 percent of Muslims that have nothing to do with al Qaeda and in many cases believe that they usurped a religion? And what does that engagement look like? And the Arab Spring I think has created these new opportunities for America and perils for America to engage in a different way with the peoples of at least the Middle East and North Africa. And to your point, I think there is some reticence to get to out in front for fear that our prior reputation will undermine legitimate voices in the region that are pushing for change.

But on the other hand, you're also seeing a great deal of disillusionment within the region about our reluctance to move more boldly. Syria being the most obvious and recent example where it's felt that America, particularly an American president, talked about returning to American values is turning a blind eye or at least not doing enough to counter what is a tyrant turning on his own people and killing them.

MR. GERSTEIN: And have you detected any differences on those policies between the Obama and Romney campaigns or their

rhetoric?

MR. GRAND: Well, you know, interestingly, as someone who cares deeply about what's happening in Syria, I kind of wish that both campaigns were talking about this more; that this was more of an issue because I think if it were we would be seeing more pressure for there to be a more forward-looking U.S. policy. But Romney hasn't really moved that much to the administration's position.

MR. GERSTEIN: Do you think he's caught -- that GOP candidate Governor Romney is caught in a sense between two wings of his party; one a traditionally hawkish kind of wing perhaps represented by Senator McCain, for example, and another wing which is the Tea Party wing which is seen as -- I don't know how powerful they are but they're seen as resurgent and powerful and I think tend to have a more -- maybe isolationist is too strong a word but they tend to be more skeptical about U.S. military involvements and foreign policy involvements and that Romney is trying to reap the votes of both those constituencies. And the moment he gets more specific about that issue or even some of the issues Ben's talking about -- the moment he takes a position he starts to undermine his standing with one of those constituencies. Is that part of what's going on here?

MR. GRAND: It's perhaps part of it but I think the larger

issue that's only becoming clearer and clearer over time is the Russians have really put down a red line in this issue and so both for the administration and for Romney as a candidate this has become an issue that's now larger than Syria. This is an issue of what do you do when you have a human rights crisis on your hands and a major power within the Security Council does not want to go along? Potentially two major powers within the Security Council don't want to go along. Do you push forward or not knowing that if you push forward there could be some huge fallout in terms of longer term relations with Russia, longer term relations with China that sort of balance a power within the world.

MR. GERSTEIN: Hafez, the paper you're speaking for here today talks about development and the youth movements, the population challenges, demographic challenges I think in many parts of the world and how they contribute to the problem of terrorism, just to come at it from a skeptical point of view, which is the way we reporters often do these things, you know, it seems that the problem with al Qaeda, I don't know if it's getting worse, but it seems to be metastasizing. It seems to be moving from one part of the world to another part of the world. You know, what seemed to be originating from one area now seems to be spreading from North Africa down into Africa. You have these areas in Yemen and Somalia that people are concerned about. It often seems like almost any

ungovernable or ungoverned space in the world becomes sort of a home that al Qaeda can inhabit. Isn't that a tremendously formidable problem to try to tackle through improving the development of the poor all over the world? It just seems like however laudable that goal may be and however wise it may be for the U.S. and others in the Western world to invest in that, is it really an effective strategy of combating terrorism?

MR. GHANEM: It's actually cheaper than building all those fancy drones. And if you look at the amount of money spent on defense compared to what goes for fighting poverty, what goes to fighting poverty is dwarfed. So I actually think in the long run -- I'm not saying the defense part is not important. I think given where we are now we have to invest in it. But in the long run we need to tackle the real issues.

And the real issues, let me give you a few facts. I mean, the project that I'm running is looking at the transition in the Arab countries and the economic transition. One of the questions we should ask ourselves is how do you explain the Arab revolts? And actually, when you ask this question it also explains -- it also helps you define the factors that make those countries such a right place for al Qaeda and others.

And let me just give you four stylized facts. The first one is that those countries are mostly young. You have 55 percent of the population of the Arab world that is less than 24 years old. Two-thirds of

the population is less than 30 years old. That although those countries spend a lot of money on education, actually, the quality of their education system is very poor. And when they do those global tests for math and science and the 14 Arab countries that participated in those tests, not one of them -- not one of them, not one is called the average. They're all way below average.

And if you look at the youth situation, they have the highest rate of youth unemployment in the world. Take the example of Egypt, the largest of those countries. Seventy percent -- there are 850,000 new entrants in the labor market of Egypt every year. Seventy percent of them have high school or above education. And those guys, it takes them about five years to find a job. And for those of them who find a job, three-quarters find jobs only in the informal sector. So they have vocational workers and they have no job security, no social benefits, and so on. So this is one fact. You have this huge youth population that sees very little opportunities for them.

The second fact, and it has to do with politics, those same young people do not have any way of expressing themselves or participating in the social and political lives in their countries. There was a survey done in Egypt in 2005 for a student group, for example, to publish a pamphlet in their university. It takes them six months because they

have to go through all different layers of clearances by the security people. The only -- the only avenue that was open for them was through the Islamist groups. And some of those Islamist groups did good work. I mean, they built libraries. They helped young people do some volunteer work with the poor and so on. But some of them also spread crazy ideas. And that same survey found that the majority of young people in Egypt had views that were not tolerant, especially not tolerant to people with different religions, different faiths and so on. So you had the whole political system that suppressed young people and bred intolerance.

The third fact, a huge sense of unfairness. I was looking -- before coming here I was looking at a paper by Gallup that was done a year ago on Tunisia. Tunisia has been growing fast. Egypt has been growing fast in terms of GDP and so on. And if you look at the superimposed two graphs, one graph is GDP per capita growth in Tunisia, which is an upward sloping line, and another graph is the question asking people are you thriving, which is a downward sloping line. How do you explain this? You explain this as the majority of those countries, like everywhere in the world, are middle class, and the middle class has been totally left out of the growth equation. Tunisia is fairly rich, but if you look at Yemen or you look at Egypt, 85 percent of what is considered middle class actually live on less than $4 a day. And this is your middle class.

And if you look at the data on income distribution over the last few years, it is the size of the number of people who are living -- who are rich or living on more than $14 a day has actually not changed. So it's not like -- so the middle class has been suppressed all of this time.

So there is this big sense of unfairness. Add to this a lot -- I don't want to talk too much, but a lot of cronyism and corruption which made the sense of unfairness even bigger.

And then there is also a sense -- there's a point that is important. You mentioned it briefly. There's a sense of international unfairness and that is especially linked to the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

So we have those four facts that are actually -- that have -- that creates (inaudible) -- all you need is one or two crazies to go and blow a place. And as Steve was saying, your .01 percent, if you have .01 percent of the population will subscribe to al Qaeda views, that is already dangerous.

So if you really want to deal with terrorism, I believe that you need to have a policy, yes, that includes defense issues, but it includes a partnership for development and not just any development but inclusive development and fairness that includes a partnership for democracy and that includes a democracy for peace trying to find a resolution for the

Palestinian Arab-Israeli issues. And you cannot just focus on one aspect and not all of the others.

Now, to end, the success of the current transition in the Arab countries will have a huge impact on whether we get more or less tourism in the future. If it fails, if those countries fail and they become failed states, as you rightly said, you create vacuums where al Qaeda thrives. We've seen it in Sinai. As the Egyptian transition was having trouble and the Egyptian government was weakening and weakening, we found all those groups who found great bases in Sinai. The same thing in Yemen. So it's a real danger that if this transition fails, we can end up with more terrorist bases around the region.

On the other hand, the success of this transition will help change this current situation, will help change the statute of the United States in the region and the nature of the relations and the way that Arabs think of the United States.

MR. GERSTEIN: How tight and direct do you think the relationship is, Hafez, between development and terrorism? Because you know and the paper itself acknowledges that many of the individuals who have carried out terrorist acts have been middle class. Some of them seem to have been maybe even above or upper middle class. And if you want to be totally Machiavellian about it there's probably some people who

would say that, you know, a little bit of education is a dangerous thing. Somebody who is totally uneducated is probably not going to be able to pull off a sophisticated, you know, underwear bombing aboard an aircraft because they'd have difficulty comporting themselves correctly to get on there. It does seem like a lot of the people that carry out these attacks have studied in London or their father was the head of the Oil Ministry or stories along those lines. You don't hear so many about, you know, people who were shepherds coming out and suddenly becoming a suicide bomber. What is your answer to folks who say, look, I don't think there's really any real connection?

MR. GHANEM: There is a connection. But you're right. The issue is not just -- that's why I said you have four -- you need to have a four-pronged approach and you need to deal with the social and political issues, not just the economic ones. First of all, the middle class business, when you say middle class you have to -- a middle class person in say Yemen would be an extremely poor person compared to us here. And then the issue also on education. For me, education is not just learning to use a computer or this or that but also an education system teaches you the basic -- your basic rights of being a citizen and it teaches you civic -- there's a part of civic education. All of this is missing in a system that is autocratic that is trying to make sure that everybody follows the leadership

roles and so on. You do not get this education. And what happens is exactly what the survey -- this 2005 survey shows. It builds a whole generation of people that are partially educated, that have very xenophobic views, and find difficulty in interacting and respecting others -- people with other views from other backgrounds.

MR. GERSTEIN: One more thing just from you Stephen or Hafez to respond to because it does relate to the campaign. One area where president -- the man who hopes to be president, Mitt Romney, has made his position fairly clear is that he's in the camp of people that believes the U.S. needs to be more explicit about talking about the threat of terrorism as emanating from Islamic radicalism and that there's an element of political correctness in the unwillingness of the Obama administration and many U.S. policymakers to publicly talk about Islam, an abhorrent form of Islam being the cause of terrorism. Do you think that he would follow through on that? Do you think he would move more to the Bush second term formulation which was where they sort of abandoned some of those ideas and went for sort of a softer approach? Do you think he's just blowing smoke on that? And what would be the impact if the U.S. started speaking more directly about Islamic terrorism being the threat?

MR. GRAND: I think, you know, to denigrate an entire

religion based on the acts of a few is a poor policy. You know, to go about trying to -- to go about inflaming the views of 1.4 billion people because there were, you know, a set of crazies operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan and other parts of the Maghreb and the Arabian Peninsula who have a very particular, very warped view of a particular religion is just a mistake. And you know, I think that probably comes from pressure within his party, the right wing of his party to make this a political issue but I think it, one, is misguided, and two, is bad policy.

MR. GERSTEIN: Hafez. Sorry, go ahead.

MR. WITTES: I also think, if I can just break in, that it's very unfair to Norwegian white supremacy. (Laughter) I mean, we've had a couple of like really dramatic terrorist attacks that should stand for the idea that this is a problem without a particular, you know, ethnic or religious or regional badge on it and you know, I think it's possible to keep in mind the idea, at least as pertains to the exercise of war powers that Congress has authorized the use of force against certain groups and not other groups, right. And so when you think about who is the United States fighting a war against, that will actually frame it in -- not in anti-Islamic terms but the United States has authorized -- the Congress of the United States has authorized the use of force against al Qaeda, the Taliban, and associated forces, all of which are Islamic groups of one sort or another.

That said, to confuse -- to confuse that with the problem being one that's essentially religious in nature, it's going to, as Steve says, smear a lot of people. It's also going to miss a lot of terrorists.

MR. GERSTEIN: But I think the critics of that position would say something like the Fort Hood shooting, you had indications of a potential terrorist attack that were overlooked out of an abundance of political correctness where people were so fearful of being labeled as anti-Islamic bigots that they didn't say things that they should have said about a colleague who was acting in a very abhorrent kind of way.

MR. WITTES: Oh, they may even be right about that. You know, if you have somebody who's talking in a very violent way, as Nidal Hasan appears to have been, animated by whatever concerns, and you suppress that concerns because you're afraid of an allegation of prejudice against the group that he is speaking in a very violent, extreme way as purporting to represent, I suppose you've probably earned the criticism. But that does not mean that that group alone is the problem, and it doesn't mean -- I mean, you can reverse engineer a lot of bad logic out of that. And so I mean, I think when you look around the United States the spate of shootings that have happened recently have, you know, also been a reminder that -- and again, what you want to define as terrorism and what you want to define as, you know, really bad incidents of violent crime, you

know, gets into a definitional question that's probably not availing or very interesting. But I do think they are real reminders that this is not a set of problems that we should principally think about in religious or ethnic terms.

MR. GERSTEIN: Hafez, did you want to jump in?

MR. GHANEM: Yeah. I would say, again, if we look at this as a medium to long run issue that needs to be resolved, it is in the interest of the United States to be seen as partnering with the people. I mean, the U.S. has been seen as partnering with autocratic leaders and supportive of the autocratic leaders for all those years. As a result today, it has very little credibility among the people. I mean, again, I was looking at the poll that shows that 70 percent of Egyptians do not -- would prefer not to receive any economic aid from the United States, and this is a country that's going bankrupt. You know, this just gives you a feel for the extent of the bad blood there. And you want to change that. It's important that you change that. And you will not succeed in doing that by starting to label them all as a group as being your enemy.

MR. GRAND: And it should be a partnership about governance. I mean, if you look at some of the real problems of Muslim majority countries, it's been governance. It's been really, really poor governance where we've aligned with the bad guys, with the poor leaders, and we have a chance with the Arab Spring to sort of rearrange the deck a

little bit and play a different role. And let's play a positive role in trying to change educational systems, but even more, trying to change political systems.

MR. GERSTEIN: Ben, let me just ask you one thing and then we'll go to audience questions in a minute. I want to switch back a little bit to the more concrete sort of areas that are under direct U.S. authority and U.S. control of the U.S. legal system and the executive branch.

On Guantanamo, in your paper towards the end you throw a little bit of a hand grenade and say not only should Guantanamo be kept open but it should be expanded. And I'm wondering if you might tell us briefly why it is you think that Guantanamo should be expanded, which I think is probably a fairly unusual position among the think tank set here in Washington. And also, does that mean that you disbelieve the very earnest pronouncements from all levels of the U.S. government that Guantanamo is the number one recruiting tool for al Qaeda?

MR. WITTES: So the second question is easy. Yes. I disbelieve that Guantanamo is the number one or even an especially significant recruiting tool for al Qaeda. Actually, my co-author Dan Byman is actually better positioned to talk about the role that Guantanamo plays in al Qaeda propaganda than I am, but my basic feeling is the relevant

question is are you holding people in extra criminal detention? If you are, whatever the facility you do that in will be a bad word in certain circles and you're just going to have to live with that. And if you move them to Thompson, Illinois, people will find out that Thompson means very much the same thing that Guantanamo. And once you've decide you're going to engage in certain types of detention there's going to be public relations consequences to that and you have to price that into your decision to do it. I think where you do it makes very, very little difference. That's just my opinion.

So let me clarify. When Obama said he was going to close Guantanamo I did not oppose that decision. In fact, the only things I wrote at the time were about the logistical challenges and the political challenges associated with getting it done. I accepted it as a worthwhile goal, though not the goal I would have set for an incoming president in this space, and I always thought it was a bit of a tail wagging the dog. That is to say the relevant question to me should be when and under what circumstances and according to what rules will you engage in military detention, not what the location of the facility in which you're going to do it is. And it always seemed to me that close Guantanamo was a way of talking about the location of a policy instead of the substance of the policy.

To this day, I don't care if you do it at Guantanamo Bay or if

you do it at somewhere else. The relevant question is what are you doing and how are you doing it? And what rules are you willing to live by in the course of doing it? I observe that Guantanamo is not going away. The logistical problems that I was writing about, the political problems actually turned out to be insurmountable given the president's willingness to put political energy into the subject, which was extremely limited. He was willing to issue an executive order on the second day in office. He was willing to give a speech at the National Archive a few months later. He was willing to make a few phone calls. Now he is not willing to talk about it at all unless asked in a press conference and caught off guard. And if that is the level of political energy that you are going to put into it, you're not going to get it done. And the sooner you acknowledge that the better.

Guantanamo isn't going away. It's not going away because Congress cares more about keeping it than the president cares about shutting it down, and that's all there is to the story. And anybody who tells you that there's more to the story than that is fooling themselves.

So the question is given that we're going to have Guantanamo, the question is under what circumstances are we going to have Guantanamo. And here's the irony of what the president has done and why I think he actually deserves a lot of blame for this. Starting under the Bush administration and continuing under the Obama administration

there has been a revolution at Guantanamo. Guantanamo, while we were all talking about closing it, has turned into the exact sort of model facility that we talked about closing it in order to say we were going to create. So detainees at Guantanamo have access to counsel. They get to have their court case -- they get to file habeas cases to have an independent judge review their detentions. Those cases get reviewed all the way up to the Supreme Court of the United States. Journalists from all over the world visit and tour this facility. They have -- there is a lot of public evidence that gets released in the course of these habeas litigations. And once they are found to be properly detained they are then -- have a continuing review process for as long as they are held there that actually promises to be quite rigorous.

And nobody really talks about this very much because we're all talking about how we should be closing it. And the question is what are you closing it in order to do? Closing it in order to rebuild it somewhere else with presumably the same set of procedures that we now have there. And so what I think is that the president acknowledging that he is, in fact, not closing Guantanamo should rather embrace it and should say, look, you know, I wanted to close this but there is a coordinate branch of government that doesn't let me do that. And so what we've done is we've turned it from the thing that we objected to to the thing that we aspired for

the circumstances of detention to be. And the irony is that if he made that argument there would be certain process consequences to it because there are a bunch of people being held elsewhere in the world who do not, though in U.S. custody, do not have the same sort of generous rights that are now being granted to Guantanamo detainees.

And so what I think, yes, is that we should bring anybody we're holding anywhere in the world in military detention, other than in certain very specific theater conflicts, but you know, if we're holding people still foreign theater in Bagram, which we just turned over to the Afghans the other day, I think those people should be at Guantanamo where they should get the benefit of the additional procedures that you get at Guantanamo that you don't get at the detention facility in Parwan. And I think a lot of good things would come, presumably in a second term, if we could have a little bit more of an honest conversation about Guantanamo which is (a) that it's not going away; and (b) we've really corrected the problems that made us want it to go away.

MR. GERSTEIN: I can tell you having just come from the Democratic Convention in Charlotte that the rhetoric and policy on this was pretty much exactly as Ben stated. The democratic platform continues to call for the closing of Guantanamo, although in a little bit less forceful way than it did four years ago. And the president said not a word

about the issue in his convention speech.

MR. WITTES: Well, there was a wonderful article in the Onion the other day that to the effect that the Guantanamo -- all 168 Guantanamo detainees -- one of them died over the weekend so there's 167 now -- but all 168 Guantanamo detainees were released into the Democratic Convention in Charlotte.

MR. GERSTEIN: So if there are questions in the audience, we're prepared to go to those now. You can just raise your hand. If you identify yourself and try to make it brief and make it actually a question as opposed to some sort of statement. This fellow way in the back seemed to be the first hand I saw.

MR. ABDI: Thank you. My name is Anshuman Abdi and I work for Voice of America, Afghanistan. My question is about Afghanistan. How do you see positions of both the campaigns on Afghanistan and also a 2014 transition as well?

MR. GERSTEIN: Anyone want to jump in on that?

MR. GRAND: The question was --

MR. GERSTEIN: On Afghanistan, what do you see as the positions of the two candidates and how would Afghanistan look different in the transition under the two different potential presidents?

MR. GRAND: Yeah, I think that there's, you know, been

some pressure on Romney to push for a longer transition. You know, I suspect that in the end that either President Obama in a second term or President Romney in a first term would continue the current policy, which is to draw down and draw down in a way that hopefully leaves behind an Afghan security force that can take care of the challenges presented by the Taliban.

MR. GERSTEIN: I mean, my view is that this is another area where Romney has straddled somewhat between the isolationist flank of his party and the more hawkish flank of the party and, you know, he didn't mention, as we said, Afghanistan at all in his convention speech which is kind of surprising given the 70,000 or so U.S. troops that are over there, and he's now been pointing to other speeches he's given where he says he's discussed the issue but as I've blogged about several times, you go to those speeches and you don't actually find a discussion of the substance of the issue; you find you saying that we have 70,000 troops in Afghanistan, which is not a policy going forward. (Laughter) So, but I think that that's going to have to change somewhat, either in a speech that he's about to give I think as soon as tomorrow on security issues again or certainly in these debates on foreign policy that we're going to hear during the month of October.

This gentleman down here. Wait for the mic if you would.

SPEAKER: My name is Joe (inaudible), just an independent retired person.

I'm just concerned about the U.S. policy and the use of drones in Yemen and Afghanistan and all. And I want to get your evaluation from the panel whether the extent of that is helping or hurting in terms of eliminating the number of terrorists facing the United States and the negative impact of the drones versus the actual reality of how many terrorists we're getting and anything you see, what kind of changes might be made if you agree that the problem is getting worse because of the drones.

MR. GERSTEIN: The president's first director of national intelligence, Dennis Blair, has made some headlines over the last year or so at various times by saying he thinks that essentially the blowback to aggressive use of the drones is causing more long-term damage for the U.S. than the short-term benefits. Ben, we can start with you or anybody who wants to jump in.

MR. WITTES: Well, I don't really know how to evaluate that because, you know, there's the relatively easy question to evaluate is are drones an effective way of killing the enemy? And the answer to that is pretty easy to answer. It's yes. And the reason -- the reason these have become a very attractive tool of choice is that they can extend power into

areas in which we do not have a significant troop footprint and it can deliver with astonishing accuracy lethal force by comparison to other means of attacking things that are quite remote to very remote corners of the world.

By most accounts that I've seen, including my co-authors, you know, the impact on the core enemy groups has been very substantial, both, you know, both in terms of the occasional high value kills but probably more importantly in terms of the just devastating in an ongoing way of sort of the middle management of these groups.

Now, I think to say that that has been very effective, and I think most people agree, most analysts agree that it has, raises this other question which is is the replenishing effect greater, lesser than, or about the same as the takeout effect? And I don't really know how to answer that in the short term. I mean, I think it is clear -- pretty clear to me that al Qaeda, the core of al Qaeda has not replenished itself in a terrible effective way. It's not clear to me though that other groups are not coming up in this sort of splintering metastasis that's going on that will in the long run be as dangerous or more dangerous. And I think that's sort of a "time will tell" kind of question. I will say that as a strategic and political matter it is very, very difficult for any president to say while this is an effective strategy at neutralizing a threat that we face today, I'm going to forbear

against the use of it because of the possibility that it may generate in the long run more people who dislike us and who will therefore constitute some greater threat in the long run. And this is I think part of the paradox of this conversation which, you know, I actually don't disagree with anything my two colleagues have said about the sort of need to focus on governance development and, you know, and poverty as big, big pieces of this puzzle. And similarly, they've both said, you know, they don't really disagree that there are these activities you have to engage in in order to neutralize or deal with or capture or sometimes kill immediate term threats. And so you end up with this gnawing sense that these two ambitions are not necessarily in any immediate sense easily reconcilable with one another and that some of the tools you're going to use are going to make it harder to use other tools. And yes, with respect to drone use there is this open question which is, you know, I do think to go back to Josh's question, whether Guantanamo is the principal recruiting device of al Qaeda, no. Right now drone use is. And that reflects the relative prevalence of it in our strategic arsenal right now.

MR. GHANEM: Yeah, I mean, a policy that is or a strategy that is based mainly on drone use and ignoring all of the other factors will ultimately be self-defeating in the long run. You will just have to be using more and more drones all the time.

MR. GERSTEIN: The skies would be dark.

MR. GHANEM: So, and that is my problem with the debate on the issue is that everybody is just focusing on one aspect of the problem, which is the security aspect and forgetting that in order to really defeat terrorism in the long run you need to deal with the real causes of it. And these are social, political, and economic.

MR. WITTES: In Obama's defense on this point though, and I do think, you know, he -- he actually had an insight, whether a positive one or a negative one quite a while ago during, you know, everybody listened during the campaign when he talked about, you know, closing Guantanamo and restoring the rule of law and all of those other things that sound like bromides in retrospect. He was actually talking about strategic targeted killing during the campaign, too. In fact, he talked about it during one of the debates with McCain. He said to McCain very directly, you know, you've said you'd follow Osama Bin Laden to the gates of hell but you won't even follow him to the cave that he lives in. We didn't know he lived in a city at the time. (Laughter) But somehow the compound that he lives in doesn't have the same ring to it.

And I think, you know, to be fair to Obama, he did come into office having articulated that he wanted to do a much more targeted, much more light footprint vision of operational counterterrorism. The problem

that he was thinking of is how do you take out the bad guys without invading whole countries? And I think a huge, big part of the answer reason why we -- why the drone strategy developed the way it did is it provides an answer to that question, albeit a very imperfect one.

MR. GERSTEIN: Stephen, did you want to say something?

MR. GRAND: So I think we are left with this question of how do you use the drones. It's clear we're going to use them. It's clear that they're highly lethal and effective, but it's clear they also have costs. They have costs -- you can only imagine if drones were flying above us right now, the sense of violation that we would feel, the sense that we would have that our sovereignty is being infringed upon, and the outrage we would have if one of our relatives were accidentally killed as part of that. So you need to strike a balance. And my understanding is that -- from colleagues -- I don't follow this issue as closely as they do, but my understanding from colleagues is that the number of strikes have gone down in Pakistan in part out of recognition that there has been blowback because of civilian deaths and just because of the high usage of drones. And we are using fewer drones right now in Pakistan and they are more targeted. Something that most people don't know about is most of the drone strikes now are in Yemen where we are much more active and engaged than we had been in the past.

MR. GERSTEIN: I think some of that drawdown or reduction in the number of strikes is also due to the tensions in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship in the wake of the incident where we killed several dozen of their troops by accident along the border as well.

Back there.

MR. OSBURN: Good afternoon. Dixon Osburn with Human Rights First.

Ben, you suggested that whoever wins the election, the president is going to continue to invoke war powers as part of the counterterrorism operations. Does that mean that we are caught in a perpetual war frame ad *infinitum*? And if not, what does success look like in the war against al Qaeda and affiliates?

MR. WITTES: It's an excellent sort of mother-of-all questions kind of question. So, look, there are pieces of the war authorized by the AUMF that it is relatively easy to imagine a conceptual end to. The most obvious is that we are currently in fits and starts in a negotiation with the Taliban. The Taliban is one of the enemy groups. You could imagine a situation in which that -- I find it a little implausible but at least in the short-term, but you can imagine a situation in which you reached some sort of political accommodation and for legal purposes I think that would be the end of the conflict, at least vis-à-vis the Taliban.

It is very hard to imagine a negotiated end to the portion of the conflict that is with al Qaeda. And so the question is you're really talking with al Qaeda about what the circumstances in which you would acknowledge a defeat of al Qaeda such that the war is for legal and strategic purposes over. The secretary of defense on a number of occasions has said we're within a few deaths of strategic defeat of al Qaeda. I have a feeling there were lawyers in the White House and the Pentagon who those statements made very, very nervous. I say that without any information, but if I were an attorney who had to argue that these war powers were available, having the secretary of defense walk around saying we've almost got them is actually not -- and that -- but that does -- sort of goes to your question. I mean, I think there is some point, and whether, you know, what the legal doctrine is when that point has been crossed, I don't think anybody really knows. You know, ultimately, the last thing the Supreme Court has said on the subject which was after -- in the early '50s after World War II is it's a political question that the courts have no role in deciding. I kind of find it hard to believe. The further and further you get away from any point at which there's such a thing as al Qaeda and the more the president wants to rely on those war powers, I think the less legs a decision like that is going to have. On the other hand, that's sort of the state of it for now. We don't really know the

answer to that question.

And then the final component of your question is what about these other affiliated groups since the administration interprets the authorization to authorize the use of force against al Qaeda, the Taliban, and associated forces. Right? So you can -- easy to imagine a conceptual end to the war with the Taliban; hard to imagine a negotiated end but you could imagine a strategic defeat of al Qaeda. And then there are all these associated forces and that raises a very tricky question. If you defeat al Qaeda, what does it mean to be associated with it? Right? And this is very unchartered legal territory, both as a domestic law matter and as an international law matter. And I think we just don't know the answer to it yet. I certainly don't purport to.

MR. GERSTEIN: If we came to a point where strategic defeat was for whatever reason announced by the U.S., what would be the implications of that? Because, for example, President Clinton fired missiles at Bin Laden before we had the AUMF. Would it mean that if suddenly an Aulaqi-type figure popped up we'd have to send a force in to try to arrest him rather than hit him with a drone or drop a bomb on him? Or would it just only matter to the various lawyers and international law scholars who like to debate these issues?

MR. WITTES: Well, so, I mean, the answer is you would

remove statutory authorization for any military activity once you say you are no longer -- once you say that war is over. The president, of course claims, as do all presidents, the inherent power under Article 2 of the Constitution and under the self-defense doctrine under international law under the U.N. Charter to protect the country against imminent threats. And so there's some residual latent power to respond to threats -- new threats that arise. I think the, you know, this is -- actually, the reason Dan and I conclude the paper by or part of the conclusion is that Mitt Romney, during the primaries, actually articulated an idea that is very worth the next president's -- whether it's Mitt Romney or Barack Obama -- taking very seriously, which is the idea of really rewriting the AUMF to describe the conflict that we are actually still fighting rather than the one that we started fighting 10 years ago and we, as Dixon says, attenuated rather far from. And I'm sure he wouldn't -- wouldn't speak for him but I suspect he wouldn't support that particular idea. I do think there's a lot to be said for the idea of having an authorizing document for the conflict that's sort of responsive to the conflict that you actually see yourself on a day-to-day level prosecuting.

MR. GRAND: I was just going to say --

MR. GERSTEIN: Yeah, go ahead.

MR. GRAND: -- this would not make the lawyers very

happy. It would be confusing but in my own vision of the end game is when al Qaeda ceases to be a relevant part of the conversation in the Muslim world. And I think largely through actions not of our own but because of the Arab Spring, I think we've moved closer to that where ordinary citizens in the Arab world have found that it's far more effective to go out in the streets peacefully than to blow yourself up as a suicide bomber. There's another way of charting a future path and of getting rid of these authoritarian leaders that have really mucked things up for so long.

MR. GERSTEIN: Let's try to get one other question in here from this gentleman here in the front.

SPEAKER: Jagdish Chandra, George Washington University.

We have been talking all the time about the Middle East. Of course, underlying we are talking about Islamic groups and so on. Seventy percent of the Muslims, the Islamic populations, they live in Indonesia, Turkey, South Asia, and so on. And Obama and this administration's image there is very high. Pakistan, there are certain problems in Pakistan, but in general, in the last three and a half years, the kind of image and relationship that Clinton and Obama have been nurturing is extremely good. So there are some intrinsic problems and risks which I think should not cloud the success that Obama has gotten in

this area.

MR. GERSTEIN: Hafez or Stephen, do you have any insight as to why -- is what the gentleman says correct? And if so, why is that?

MR. GHANEM: Yes. Yes. It's actually a very important point because I think Indonesia, in particular, is a very good example that we should be looking at when we study what is happening in the Middle East because Indonesia went through the same process with an autocratic leader, with a crisis, with very strong Islamic groups and very strong political Islam. The first elected president in Indonesia was also an Islamist. And as the country has been more and more successful, both on the economic transition following the fall of Suharto and following the East Asia crisis, and also on the democratic transition where they had I think three successful elections with a change in leadership, we see exactly that, a country that's becoming much more stable, more prosperous, and with excellent relations with the West. So I think there's a lot of lessons to be learned from the experiences of Asian countries, and particularly Indonesia because of the similarities in culture, religion, and even the structure of the economy.

MR. GERSTEIN: And these are places where al Qaeda and al Qaeda operates have, at least historically speaking, taken refuse and carried out even a major terrorist attack.

MR. GHANEM: Major terrorist attacks.

MR. WITTES: You had the Bali bombings in Indonesia.

MR. GHANEM: In Bali.

MR. WITTES: But you had a very robust government effort to shut down the extremists in Indonesia.

MR. GERSTEIN: Okay. I think maybe we can do one final question. This lady back there next to Dixon. Thanks.

MS. BATISTA: Hi, Amanda Batista, a student at American University.

My question is in terms of long term counterterrorism efforts made by the U.S., how important is the American image, particularly in Middle Eastern states? And if the American image or reputation is important, how can we make it better? Is it through drones or is it through our financial purse strings?

MR. GERSTEIN: How central is the U.S. to the discussion? I mean, can we have the Arab Spring and the terrorism debate take place without Uncle Sam automatically being the face of part of this debate?

MR. GHANEM: I think the U.S. has a role to play, a very important, critical role to play in the region and in those countries. However, as we said, I think Steve was saying earlier, because of the history and the baggage, at least in the short run, it needs to be quite

subtle. When asked most of the population in the Arab Spring countries -- in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen -- when asked, they do not want to see U.S. support to political institutions in the country, for example, which is normal. I mean, you wouldn't want to see Yemeni support of political institutions in the United States either.

So the U.S. has to play a role of supporting democracy in general. Has to try to build more, even in its economic work, it needs to build more ties with the people, with civil society, with -- trying to reach directly the poor and the beneficiaries of the projects, and as much as possible try to keep -- to stay a bit in the background and not be pushing too hard. The people in those countries are mature. They know what they want and they can do it on their own with some help from their friends. And I think that this is really -- the main point is that we should just leave -- those people have started the process which is important. They need some help in the process. Not all from the United States but from others also, from international organizations, from different countries, from amongst themselves, regional cooperation among the different countries in the region which is actually very weak. So they can learn from other countries, like Indonesia as we mentioned. And so the role -- the United States needs to reconsider a little bit how it operates in those countries and the types of relations it wants to build.

Finally, there is still -- I think that the Arab-Israeli conflict is always going to be a source of instability, and that is an area where the U.S. can play an important role in trying to bring out a peaceful solution there.

MR. GERSTEIN: So we're going to start to conclude here. My concluding question has to do with the fact that tomorrow is the eleventh anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, and I'm wondering if you gentlemen think that the debate of discussion over these terrorism-related issues here in the U.S. has matured, become more detached, become more thoughtful and strategic as time has gone on? And is there any prospect for us seeing any of that in a helpful way or way that advances the policies as opposed to sort of demagoguing them as we go into this hard-fought last seven or eight weeks of this campaign?

MR. WITTES: Well, I think the general answer unfortunately is no. The answer to any question, you know, can you expect a really mature discussion of the issue X in the last hard-fought weeks of the campaign is presumptively no. But particularly an issue like this which is, you know, we either -- we talk about sort of in two modes. One is the mode that's sort of distant from a major event like this one and the other is the mode where, you know, something awful has just happened. In the former situation, as we've seen in the campaign, we just don't engage it,

and I think we can expect very little discussion of this issue other than, by the way, did you remember that I killed Osama Bin Laden and a lot of, yeah, I would have done that, too. But beyond that I sort of doubt that we're going to have a lot of discussion of it unless something terrible happens in which case I think we can reasonably expect the quality of the discussion to be exceedingly immature and unserious.

And so I actually don't think there's a lot of reason for confidence in the American political debate in electoral terms in this. The good news is that beneath the surface there's actually, you know, a much more serious conversation and fortunately, that, you know, that can sometimes create groundwork for policy that you wouldn't know from the sort of gestalt surface conversation is really available.

MR. GERSTEIN: Stephen, any thoughts?

MR. GRAND: Gallup has asked since 9/11 of Americans, how much do you know about Muslims and Islam? And the response has been consistently, unfortunately, for the last 11 years. I haven't seen the most recent data but about half of Americans say not much or nothing at all. And I think that is a tragedy and one area where we really haven't made progress since 9/11. Since 9/11, American Muslims have really been the other in American culture, and I think that is unfortunate because of how it resounds on us as a country, how we're perceived internationally,

and just in terms of the plight of an important community in America.

MR. GERSTEIN: Hafez, any thoughts?

MR. GHANEM: Actually, maybe because I'm not following this as closely as my colleagues -- I'm just an economist -- I get the impression, well, the debate has matured. It is nowhere near what it ought to be because it tends to focus very much on the short-term with no strategy of how we're going to get out of this. But compared to 10 years ago, to nine years ago, I think that there is -- the debate has matured and people look at different aspects of the problem. Now, that does not mean that what my other two colleagues just said is wrong. No, but maybe I'm just seeing the glass as half full rather than half empty.

MR. GERSTEIN: I think maybe the debates might actually serve to produce at least some discussion which by itself might be somewhat useful of these issues if only because of the power of TV time and a national audience and the vacuum if they're really going to devote one or one and a half debates to these issues. They'll simply run out of time if they don't try to cover the Arab Spring and terrorism and some of these national security issues, so we may actually see perhaps an interesting, if not a robust debate, at least some of the issues discussed because as you mentioned, Ben, the president doesn't seem to want to talk about some aspects of this debate unless he's asked about it directly.

And Mitt Romney up till now has shown almost no interest in discussing these issues publicly. The two men may find they have little choice but to do that because of the focusing power of these debates.

I'd like to thank everybody for coming who is here in the room and everybody on C-SPAN or watching on the Internet who has joined us for this discussion. And on behalf of Brookings and the panelists, thank you for being here. Thanks a lot. Take care.

(Applause)

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