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U.S. PUBLIC OPINION TOWARD ARABS AND ISLAM: HOW "THE VIDEO INCIDENT" MAY AFFECT U.S.-MUSLIM RELATIONS

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PARTICIPANTS:

Moderator:

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

Panelists:

WILLIAM A. GALSTON
Senior Fellow and Ezra K. Zilkha Chair in Governance Studies
The Brookings Institution

HISHAM MELHEM
Washington Bureau Chief
Al Arabiya News Channel

SHIBLEY TELHAMI
Nonresident Senior Fellow, the Brookings Institution
Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development,
University of Maryland

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. WITTES: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Thank you so much for coming out on a somewhat dreary fall morning and on Columbus Day too, for an event that, in many ways, is more propitiously timed today than it was when we planned it because Presidential candidate, Governor Mitt Romney is giving a major foreign policy address later today just to the south of us addressing many of the Middle East policy questions that we will be discussing over the course of the day. And I hope that we'll be able to take a look at what the public opinion data may reveal about the potential popularity of the positions Governor Romney's putting forth.

But let me start by saying, the Arab Awakening, in many ways, ceased to put forward a coherent narrative to international observers and particularly to the American public, in some ways, very quickly.

The first few months of peaceful protestors facing off against the police forces of brutal dictatorships gave way to when those dictators did, in fact, embark on a violent response, a much more mixed picture of violent uprisings in Libya and elsewhere, and now what looks like an increasingly entrenched civil war, perhaps emerging as a sectarian war in Syria, and then finally, last month, with the eruption of demonstrations in Tunis, Cairo, and elsewhere, not only in the Middle East, but across the Muslim world, in protest of this now infamous YouTube video. The American public began to see a very confusing portrait of the changes that are taking place in the Arab world and what they mean.

Shibley Telhami, our nonresident Senior Fellow, and the Anwar Sadat Professor at the University of Maryland, together with his colleagues at the Program on International Policy Attitudes -- and I'd like to recognize Steve Kull, who's with us today, his research partner in this effort -- decided that they wanted, after the embassy attacks,

to dig in to where the American public is on these questions today, how they are struggling to interpret events in the Middle East in light of the attacks, but beyond the embassy attacks themselves.

And so Shibley will be providing us today with an overview of the results of their work, a new poll that was conducted just a week and a half ago --

MR. TELHAMI: Less.

MS. WITTES: Less. So, extremely fresh public opinion data.

We're going to take that data analysis and add to it some contextual analysis from two very seasoned observers, William Galston, the Ezra Zilkha Chair in Governance Studies here at the Brookings Institution, a seasoned observer of American politics and culture, and also a thoughtful scholar on issues of religion and culture in politics, and Hisham Melham, the Washington Bureau Chief for Al Arabiya, a seasoned observer of Arab politics, and with these two gentlemen as our assistants today, we'll be able to take a broader look at how the Arab world is looking at the United States and the U.S. public is looking at the Arab world as the Arab awakening continues to create a very uncertain and very fast changing environment.

So, I'm grateful to all of you for coming. I look forward to our discussion, and at this point I'd like to invite Shibley Telhami up to the podium to present the poll.

MR. TELHAMI: Thanks a lot, Tammy. It's always good to be here. I'm going to just present not the whole thing but some of the findings so we can get on with the conversation, so I'll present the highlights. I just want to give you a little bit of a picture about this particular poll.

It was conducted by Knowledge Networks, a sample of 737 that is designed to be nationally representative, it's an Internet panel. The methodology is described in the information that we'll put out and it's also available online.

I also want to say that it's really my pleasure and honor to partner through the Sadat program at the University of Maryland and Program for International Policy Attitudes, and particularly my colleague, Steve Kull, who by the way, has a recent book published by Brookings about feeling betrayed about Muslim attitudes broadly, which is an excellent book that I recommend. And also the fact that we did this September 27th to October 2nd, we didn't get the result until Wednesday. I'm really grateful for the staff, particularly of the PIPA staff, Clair Ramsey, Evan Lewis, and Abe Medoff who put a lot into it to get it out very quickly and put a lot of time into it.

So, the idea, obviously, was to measure it in a timely fashion to see how the American public is reacting to these demonstrations in the Arab world, but particularly to the attacks on embassies in Libya and Egypt and whether it has some consequences and look at these results and compare them with prior polls that we've done.

We've done a number of polls related to this including in the spring of 2012 and we've done one in August 2011, and there was also a Chicago Council poll that PIPA did in June, 2012. So, we have a little bit of a sense of comparison.

So, clearly, one of the things we were interested in finding out is how the public is internalizing what seemed to be sweeping demonstrations initially, it looked like they had huge support and they were very violent, certainly in Libya and Egypt, and obviously a lot of commentary was those people, those people.

So, we wanted to have an idea of what the American public internalized as "those people". Do they see the violent attacks, particularly against the embassies, to be supported by majorities of Arabs and Muslims or by minorities, and that was really the first question that we had about the attacks and Libya and Egypt.

And so, thinking about the attacks in Egypt and Libya, for each country, would you say the violent attacks were only supported by extremist minorities or they

were supported by majorities of the population, for both Egypt and Libya?

And you can see here, really large majority, 63 percent on Egypt, 61 on Libya, believe that these violent attacks were only supported by extremist minorities. So, that's kind of interesting because it was hard to know how the public here is internalizing these events. It looks like they're blaming it primarily on extremist minorities.

On the other hand, when you ask them about their impression about whether the governments of Egypt or Libya tried to protect the American diplomats and their staff, look at this, majorities say they did not. Certainly, larger majorities in Libya, 63 percent, 53 percent in Egypt, a little more divided in Egypt, but still, pretty much that's the perception.

Is it your impression that the government has criticized the attacks? Again, to get a sense of -- we know that the governments criticized the attacks as a matter of fact, of course, but the question is, what is the public here seeing when they're viewing the reports, and much more divided. More people say yes, identical for Egypt and Libya, 47 say yes, criticized the attacks, 42 percent say no.

By the way, the margin of error is +/- 4.6 percent.

Is it your impression that the government has tried to find and arrest the perpetrators? And, again, you see that the majority say they did not. So, one the one hand, they think these attacks were only supported by minorities, on the other hand, they think the governments, obviously, are not doing enough.

Now, one of the issues, of course, is aid to Egypt. This has been something that was put on hold throughout these attacks. We wanted to find out whether the American public shifted its views on aid to Egypt, and we actually presented them with four kind of statements to see which one they support more, two in favor of aid, two against aid, and you can see we started with a statement about the ongoing negotiations

on foreign aid to Egypt, and then we asked -- one statement is, the U.S. should continue to provide aid to Egypt because it helps Egypt's emerging democracy as it goes through a transition. And do you find that convincing or unconvincing? And you could see that overall, 61 percent find this argument unconvincing.

Now, yes, there is a significant partisan divide on this. You can see that 50 percent of Democrats find it convincing whereas only 22 percent of Republicans and 29 percent of independents find it convincing.

Second argument in favor of aid, the U.S. should continue to provide aid because it helps provide stability and is a continuing way for the U.S. to influence events. Again, when you look at it overall, 57 percent find this argument unconvincing. Again, there is more Democrats finding it convincing than Republican, but overall, it's still the same trend.

Now, when you go into the opposite arguments, the U.S. should stop giving aid to the Egyptian government because it has been slow to criticize and has failed to effectively confront those who have attacked the embassy in Cairo, then you can find, you know, 64 percent find this convincing and, you know, majorities every -- Democrats, Republicans, and independents -- find this convincing. That's pretty interesting.

The second anti-aid argument is essentially tied to the economic hard times. Given the difficult economic times the U.S. is going through, it is unwise for the U.S. to give large amounts of aid to Egypt. And so we tested that, and you can see that 74 percent find this argument convincing and, again, you know, while it is true that more Republicans support it, it's still pretty much supported across the board.

Now, so, in the end, after we go through these scenarios, then we ask, so, now, do you think the U.S. foreign aid to Egypt should be increased, kept at the same level, decreased, or stopped all together? And you can see, actually, it's a mixed picture

because what you find here is that essentially 42 percent say it should be decreased and -- but only 29 percent should be stopped altogether. And you can see that there is still a divide, you know, certainly across parties and lines, but that middle category is still very strong across the board except for independents where people are prepared to stop aid altogether, not surprisingly.

I just want to compare that with the -- a poll that was done with PIPA for the Chicago Council of Global Affairs in June, 2012, and you can see that there is a shift. You had -- in June you had 40 percent say aid should be kept at the same level, 29 percent say it should be decreased, now more of the people who said it should stay at the same level shifted to the decreased category. And so there has been a shift, no question. Whether it's tied to these events or not, of course, it's hard to know.

Now, what about views of Libya and Egypt as countries? What is your overall opinion of each of the following countries? Favorable? Unfavorable? This is a typical question. We've asked it on a number of countries over time. So, we also have a way to compare.

Now, we put Turkey in there also as kind of a way of comparing to see whether there's a shift also with Turkey even though there were no attacks, and you can see that the views of Libya are overwhelmingly negative. And by the way, we don't have a comparison point with Libya. We haven't asked questions about Libya in the past, so we really don't know whether this has always been the case or not. My suspicion, yes. But that's what it is.

In the case of Egypt it's certainly divided, but more people are unfavorable, and you can see over time there has been something of a shift. For example, right after the revolution in April 2011, we did what I call -- you know, in light of the Tahrir Square metaphor, where Americans were essentially taken positively by the

Tahrir Square issue, that you had 60 percent say they had favorable views of Egypt. That already declined in August -- by August 2011 to 40 percent.

There is not much of a shift since 2011, actually. For over a year it's roughly the same, particularly if you take, you know, the margin of error into account. So, it doesn't appear that this particular episode is necessarily responsible for views of Egypt.

America's role in the Middle East. In light of recent events in the Middle East, and thinking about broad U.S. interests in the region, do you think the U.S. should increase its diplomatic involvement in the region, maintain its current level of diplomatic involvement, or decrease its diplomatic involvement? And here, you know, you have a third of the American public wants to see diplomatic involvement decrease, but really a plurality, 46 percent, think it should be maintained at the same level and 14 percent say it should be increased.

Now, what about democratization? I mean, part of the -- over the past couple years we've been asking questions to see whether the American public watching these events in the Middle East, the transformations, actually supports democratization even if the outcome isn't exactly what they like, as, for example, the winning of Islamists, and so we were interested to see if, particularly events of the past few weeks, shifted that in any shape or form, meaning that they still support a country becoming more democratic even if the country, you know, is going to likely become more opposed to U.S. policies.

And surprisingly, to me this is a surprise, still, I think, that you have 50 percent of the American public say yes. This norm of supporting democracy appears to be strong even under circumstances where it could lead to outcomes that are, you know, opposed to the U.S. Forty-two percent disagree, obviously, it's a divided country in that regard, but certainly more people support that notion.

Do you think the popular uprising in the Arab world are more about ordinary people seeking freedom and democracy, more about Islamist groups seeking political power, or both equally? Now, we asked that early on because, as you know, the debate has always been, in this country, about sort of the nature of the Arab spring and we ask that from, you know, the first poll that we did on the Arab uprisings in April 2011, and you can see from here that, you know, in April 2011, 45 percent say it was more about ordinary people seeking democracy, only 15 percent saying it's mostly about Islamist groups seeking power, and 37 percent said both equally.

By August 2011, that had declined where you can see that still, you know, more people say it's ordinary -- it's about ordinary people than about Islamist groups. Now you can see it's a big shift. Now, I have to say a little bit of a cautionary note here. You know, we had to use the same exact language, referring to the Arab uprisings instead of the Arab spring, in order to get a trend line. We had to repeat the question exactly the way we asked it in prior years to have a sense.

But my own sense, and we discussed this early whether we should, even in this case, change the wording to Arab spring, part of the problem in this particular poll is that we're talking about other uprisings, demonstrations that we're talking about in the prior two weeks, and some people may confuse the term uprising with those demonstrations than with the Arab spring, broadly, so I wouldn't over interpret this one. I think there is a trend that has, you know, declined, no question, you can see it from April to August. This particular finding, this particular poll, for the reasons that I mentioned, I think has to be taken with a note of caution.

Views of Arabs and Muslims broadly. We started asking questions about whether -- how the American people sees "the Arab people" and "the Muslim people" particularly in light of the uprisings, and we -- let me just actually start with a question

about the clash of civilization, whether the tensions between Islam and the West, whether they think they arise more from differences of religion and culture or from conflict about political power and interest. And we had questions -- we've asked this before, as you can see from the trend line, and by and large, it looks like it's pretty consistent. More people think this is about -- a conflict about political power and interests than differences of religion and culture.

While there's a decline, a little bit, from August 2011 to October 2012, you can see, you know, in between there was the BBC poll in June 2006 where, you know, the numbers were the same. So, this doesn't appear to be much effected by recent events, actually. You know, maybe there is a trend here to be seen, but it doesn't appear to be affected much.

Now, if you look at the division of Republicans and Democrats on this, Democrats are certainly more likely to say this is mostly a conflict about political power and interests than Republicans. Republicans are more likely to say it's about differences of religion and culture.

A view of the Arab people generally. You can see, again, you know, there is a slight trend of declining favorable views of the Arabs from April 2011 when it was 56 percent to 49 percent, but, again, if you take the margin of error into account and particularly compare it to a year ago in August, 2011, there's not really a huge shift here in views of Arabs broadly, and they're still slightly more favorable than unfavorable.

And that seems to be the case also with reference to the Muslim people. We have 48 percent favorable, 48 percent unfavorable. Again, in comparison to August 2011, it's not a huge shift at all.

We asked two policy questions in addition, one pertaining to Iran, one pertaining to Syria, and I just want to report those very quickly before we move to the

conversation.

One question we asked in the last two polls that we've done is whether they believed an Israeli strike on Iran would delay Iran's nuclear program by one to two years, three to five years, more than five years, or accelerate Iran's nuclear program. And what we found, really, is that there's hardly any change at all from March 2012. It's almost identical results.

What's noteworthy here is obviously most people don't think it's going to delay Iran's nuclear program by more than five years, and even, when you look at it, more people think it will accelerate Iran's nuclear program than think it would delay it by more than five years, 22 percent to 15 percent. But, again, there's no change on this issue.

What is likely effect of Israeli strike on the prices of oil? Eighty-six percent say it would "drastically increase". The term drastically was actually built into the question. What would be the outcome on U.S. -- you know, for U.S. bases and U.S. involvement in the war? You can see that 70 percent think that Iran would attack U.S. bases and probably U.S. would get involved in the war. Huge numbers.

Now, what if Israel were to attack Iran? Do you think the U.S.'s military and strategic position in the Middle East would be better, worse, or about the same? Fifty-five percent say worse, 32 percent say about the same, and 8 percent say better.

So, bottom line, now do you think that the U.S. should discourage Israel from attacking Iran's nuclear program, take a neutral stance, or encourage Israel to attack Iran's nuclear program? I have to say that we had these three scenarios separately measured just to go through them before we gave them these choices. For speed, I'm not going through that, just to give you the bottom line on this, and the bottom line is that, you know, there's some change from March 2012, but not a lot, that you have

53 percent say the U.S. should take a neutral stand, 29 percent say discourage.

This really, you know, kind of you can see it across Republican, Democrat, that middle category of neutral stance actually holding for Democrats, Republicans, and independents equally.

Final question before we sit for the conversation is on the Syrian conflict. We asked, actually, I'm going to summarize it, we asked, really, these four questions separately, which is, whether they support each one of these things -- increasing economic and diplomatic sanctions on Syria, enforcing a no-fly zone over Syria, sending arms and supplies to anti government groups, bombing Syrian Air Defense, or sending troops into Syria. So, we asked them about each one of these, and let me give you the summary with just a very quick comment.

You can see that 60 percent support increasing diplomatic sanctions on Syria, but what's interesting is that 59 percent support a no-fly zone over Syria as well. Now, this is interesting because we can have a conversation about what that means, what the public thinks, because you can see from the three categories below that, it's only 22 percent support arming the Syrian rebels.

And I should say on that one, there was a poll that was done also in June asking the same questions. By and large, the results of this poll were pretty much the same on all these with the exception that in between there was also a CNN poll conducted in August which showed a more divided American public on the issue of arming the rebels.

And so, in some sense, that could be changed from August. You could see that only 22 percent support arming the rebels, 21 percent support bombing Syrian Air Defenses, and 13 percent support sending troops into Syria. There seems to be a contradiction of sorts between the opposition to bombing Syria Air Defenses and

enforcing a no-fly zone, it's worth discussing.

Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MS. WITTES: Well, while everyone is getting settled there, let me thank you, Shibley, for a swift overview of what are truly some fascinating results, and there's one slide, which I believe is in the packets that were handed out, but that Shibley wasn't able to go through, that's quite interesting on the Syrian conflict, that support for a no-fly zone, unlike a lot of the other options, varies quite strongly between Republicans and Democrats, on the one hand, who by and large favor a no-fly zone, and independents, on the other hand, who by and large, do not support the U.S. enforcement of a no-fly zone.

And it's an interesting divide between partisans and independents on this question, at a moment in our presidential campaign when both candidates are focused squarely on grabbing the independents, and yet both candidates are struggling to put forward a vision for the United States in the world that is active, that is engaged, and both of them are struggling with the question of how to respond to this worsening crisis in Syria.

So, with that as a bit of background, Bill, let me start with you, perhaps. That finding about independents is notable. It's also notable in this poll that the American public continues to be skeptical about foreign aid in general and about aid as a way of advancing American interests.

Given this sort of reticence, given the way the poll sort of reveals the war weariness of the American public, how can Romney or Obama persuade the U.S. public that they need to support a vision of leadership? What does this poll tell us about how Americans are struggling with the balance between leadership, multilateralism, intervention, nonintervention, as they continue to feel that priorities are here at home?

MR. GALSTON: Well, that's exactly the right question, Tammy, because I think struggling with ambivalence, tension, even contradiction, is the heart of the matter. And let me try to unpack that. I'm going to offer four broad generalizations about the state of American public opinion on these questions in general, and then I will end where Shibley ended, with some brief comments on the Syrian issue.

First, let me just make a technical polling note, and that is that this is a survey of adults. It's not a survey of registered voters let alone likely voters, and so there are some differences as you impose increasingly demanding screens on adults, and these results will probably pick up more young people, more people who are more weakly connected to the political system. And in this election year, I think that difference between adults and actual voters may turn out to be meaningful.

Okay, now on to the main event. First of all, how would I characterize overall public reaction to the Arab spring and its aftermath as revealed in this survey? I would say that people turned out to be reasonably well informed on the basics, some would say surprisingly well informed, their response, overall, moderate, nuanced, clearly influenced by domestic economic conditions.

There is, indeed, as Tammy's question suggested, a palpable weariness with the costs of engagement in the Middle East, but not to the extent of wanting to disengage altogether.

Nonetheless, from this survey and from this survey and from other surveys, I think one can reach the conclusion that the theme that its time for some nation building here at home has more than a little resonance with the American people.

Secondly, and this also, I think, responds to Tammy's question, Americans are deeply ambivalent about these events, and let me try to characterize that ambivalence as simply as possible. Americans simultaneously like democracy and they

like to be liked. And the Arab spring, at least in the short-term, is forcing them to come to grips with the fact that there may be some tension or even contradiction between those two primal American desires.

The Arab spring is forcing them to choose, at least in the short-term, because it is overwhelmingly likely, we've already seen this, that democratic governments will amplify voices that are skeptical about American foreign policy in the region and perhaps even skeptical about American culture and American political arrangements.

It will give voice to outlooks that clash with ours, example, free speech, authoritatively stated by Egypt's new president, Mr. Morsi, in his address at the United Nations.

You know, there is, I would say, in the face of this ambivalence, a narrow support for democratization, 50-42 is not overwhelming, and there is obviously a response to cognitive dissonance on this subject, as Shibley pointed out. The percentage of Americans thinking that the Arab spring is more about freedom and democracy than Islamist groups struggling for political power has declined by two-thirds in the past 16 months. That is significant.

Generalization number three, and Shibley hinted at this, but given my own study of American politics I wanted to underscore it: this survey shows signs -- and I would have been amazed if it didn't -- of acute partisan polarization on the basics of American policy, foreign policy. If American politics ever stopped at the border's edge, it no longer does.

And let me just give you a few examples from this survey. Because of Muslim intolerance, violent clashes with the West are inevitable, a proposition endorsed by 60 percent of Republicans but only 30 percent of Democrats. The clash of

civilizations, as the prism through which to see events in this region, Republicans endorse it by 56 percent, only 36 percent of Democrats agree.

Uprisings in the Arab world are more about Islamist groups seeking political power, Republicans 55, Democrats 30. And this even extends to the way people see the facts. The Egyptian government tried to protect Americans, 54 percent of Democrats think that the Egyptian government did try to do that, only 25 percent of Republicans.

The Egyptian government criticized the attacks, 65 percent of Democrats think the Egyptian government did that, but only 36 percent of Republicans. And I could go through the rest of the survey and illustrate these partisan fissures and, you know, so the proposition that everyone is entitled to his own opinion but not to his own facts, well, how 20th century that proposition seems.

Fourth generalization, which starts to broaden out, I read this survey as revealing a shaky foundation, at best, for a strong relationship between the United States, on the one hand, and the Arab and Muslim world, on the other. American public opinion is divided down the middle on both Arabs and Muslims, for Arabs 49-47, Muslims 48 percent favorable, 48 percent unfavorable, as Shibley pointed out, attitudes towards nations such as Egypt and Libya that have moved in a democratized direction in the past 16 months, negative, and have become more so during that period.

And 42 percent of Americans now endorse the clash of civilizations view, still a minority, but up from 26 percent just a year ago. So, these trends, it seems to me, are not positive from a standpoint of a strong relationship. I hope I'm wrong about that, but certainly these numbers are suggestive of some adverse trends.

Finally, as I promised, Syria. There is, as Shibley pointed out, a strong majority, 59 percent, supporting a no-fly zone and I suspect that the fact that the Libyan

no-fly zone turned out to be almost cost-free from the American standpoint is influencing that judgment. By contrast, and I have to say I found this an equally surprising finding, only 22 percent supporting arming the opposition.

One might speculate to the extent that that's a valid result, that it reflects American's historical experience of the blowback in Afghanistan where the weapons that we distributed to the anti-Soviet forces were then turned on us and people who supported our cause there and elsewhere.

Overall, and I will end here because it seems to me that this is where today's debate is going, there would seem to be a public predicate, a predicate in public opinion, for a somewhat stronger American stance vis-à-vis the Syrian conflict than the Obama Administration has thus far adopted.

Governor Romney's speech today is almost certain to raise this point. Whether it will raise it in a way that captures the public imagination and strikes them as sensible remains to be seen, but I would say that this survey and Governor Romney's speech, plus developments on the ground, may be the entering wedge for what I personally regard as an overdue public debate about what the United States ought to be doing vis-à-vis the Syrian conflict.

MS. WITTES: Bill, thank you so much. Let me now turn to Hisham, and Bill talked about the apparent polarization of U.S. public opinion on foreign policy issues, perhaps not surprising four weeks out from a campaign in which foreign policy has suddenly and surprisingly begun to play a significant role in both of the campaigns, but what we see in the Arab world is, with the emergence of more democratic politics, polarization as well around a number of issues that relate to the relationship, the interaction between these Arab states in transition and the United States, and the West more broadly.

The poll result that Americans seem to understand, this is about Islamists struggling for power, is suggestive, perhaps, of good media reporting, but perhaps of a creeping sense that the future of the Arab world looks like an argument amongst Islamists.

And indeed, I think that many commentators, yourself included, in the wake of the attacks on the embassies, have made the point that this was, to some extent, an argument amongst Islamists.

These Arab states in transition, unlike, say, the states of Eastern Europe, don't have a clear model that they're driving toward; it's not clear what they want to be. Can you talk a little bit about what those dividing lines are in the Arab world and how they relate to, where Bill ended up, the shaky foundation that exists here? What's the foundation look like in the transition states for building a relationship with the U.S.?

MR. MELHEM: Let me say first that, as Bill said, in the American view of the Arabs, there is more nuance. I wish I could say the same thing, but general view of the United States in the Arab world; it is still in the main, negative, for a variety of reasons.

I mean, I cover Washington to an audience or to people or to a readership that still sees the United States, fairly or unfairly, as the omniscient, omnipresent power in the Middle East, and since Arab states have been -- since the Second World War, since the end of what we used to call in the old days the Liberal Era, had been ruled by a collection of autocratic, repressive dictators, lack of freedom, with only few islands of freedom of expression, such as Lebanon, before, that explains, in part, the tendency to believe in ulterior motives, the tendency to believe in conspiracy theories, and what not. And the so-called Arab spring -- I hate that term -- the Arab uprisings have not changed that yet.

There is also a legacy of past conflicts between the United States and some Arab states, some Arab societies. In the last few decades the United States engaged Libya, Syria, Iraq in military confrontations, and the United States is playing a military role in Yemen and in Somalia. So, there is that legacy.

And there is the deeper legacy, which is the resentment that exists in the Arab world because of the traditional American support for these autocratic regimes. I mean, just think of the second inauguration speech of George Bush when he admitted for the first time, as an American president, that for the past 60 years, we, the Americans, through both Republican and Democratic administrations, looked the other way when our Arab friends were violating the basic rights of their own people and we did nothing in the name of free flow of oil, alliances against the Soviet Union, and in the name of stability. And Bush said at that time, enough of that. And we see what happened and what led to 9/11.

So, there is that legacy, and of course the American -- the legacy of what most Arabs see as the almost unconditional American support for Israel.

So, we should keep this in mind when we discuss how Arabs see the United States.

Unfortunately, I mean, those of us who studied the modern history of the Arab world would tell you that until the 1950s, and mainly 1967, mostly 1967, there existed in the Arab world, and I would even say beyond, in the Muslim world, although I'm not an expert on the Muslim world and I don't watch it as closely, maybe, as I should, that there existed in the Arab world a huge reservoir of good will towards the United States.

As a little kid growing up in Beirut in the 1960s, I used to read the glowing writings about the United States that was written by people like Khalil Gibran, Amir Ehani, you know, people who immigrated from the Arab world, mostly from Lebanon

to the United States in the 19th century and wrote beautifully and glowingly about the United States. Everybody would talk about the legacy of American education in the Middle East. The American University of Beirut established in 1865, later on the American University in Cairo. The American supported rights of the people for self-determination after the First World War, you know Wilson's declarations. All of that.

So, it's not in the genes of Arabs to be anti-American. There are political, historic reasons for this.

Now, we're talking about a number of Arab states who are going through a transition. Now, let me remind you, as someone with a leftist background, of course, you know, when you grow up you're mellow and you change a little bit, the best description of -- and Shibley heard me say that before, so maybe he should -- his indulgence -- I will quote a great Italian, Marxist philosopher, Antonio Gramsci, who said, "The crisis consists in the fact that the old is dying and the new is not born yet. In this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." A great variety of morbid symptoms appear.

And when I look at Benghazi, when I look at Cairo, when I look at what's happening in Syria, I see a great variety of morbid symptoms appearing and will continue to appear for a long time.

We don't know, as you said, where we're going. There is a transition from, you know, we are now in the post-Mubarak transition in Egypt, post-Ben Ali in Tunisia, post-Gaddafi in Libya, hopefully post-Assad in Syria very soon, but where we're going, we really don't know.

And this is going to take years.

Let me quote another Marxist. Vladimir Lenin said one time, "Sometimes decades pass and nothing happens, and sometimes in weeks, decades happen." So, in

18 days in Cairo, decades happened. After decades of stagnation, a great deal of change started, it began, that's why I don't call it revolution, that's why don't care about anybody calling it an Arab spring.

This is an uprising, and it was not led by, you know, a very well established political party, an agent of revolution, if you want, an agent of change. It was not led by one meta, you know, ideological narrative, although -- and it was led by -- it was begun by a non-Islamist, although later on, as I suspected, we are having a jaundiced view of Islamists. The Islamists hijacked it later on, if you want to call it, or they won the elections, I don't care, but now they are in charge.

Yet, there is a -- and, you know, although I am very critical of the Islamists, there is a family of Islamists, there are stripes of Islamists, there are spectrum of Islamists, and most experts on Egypt, and I'm not one of them, would tell you before the elections, oh, don't worry, the Muslim Brotherhood will end up with 25 percent at most -- 30 percent at most. They knew nothing about Egypt. We knew nothing about Egypt. We had no idea about the pulse, and this is no critique of the academics or the world of academe, but they deserve some poking once in a while just to be reminded.

Unfortunately for where I come from politically, the nature of governance in Egypt, the nature of governance in Tunisia, and in Libya and later on in Syria, the whole discussion is going to be within the all encompassing Islamist family, and the people I supported, democrats with small D, the reformers, the progressives, the secularists, are going to be watching with frustration.

They did a lousy job in the elections in Egypt and other places because, like I remember in my youth in 1968, everyone was happy with the student movements in Spain and in Paris and this and that, you know, we had long hair and we used to drink and think about the future and demonstrate in the streets, and that's changed.

The guys in Egypt, I love them, they are like my kids. They demonstrated, they did all of these things, but they didn't do retail politics, they didn't know what organization means; they didn't understand that politics is coalition, so now the Islamists are at the helm.

I'll say this one last point. What happened recently after that video and the reaction in Egypt and in Benghazi -- Benghazi is an active terror, we know, but let's talk about Egypt and the demonstrations that swept the rest of the Arab world and the Muslim world. This is not about religion. We are not engaged in theological disputations.

The history of the West and the Arabs, from the Crusades to the Colonial Era to post-Colonialism, it's about political power, it's about economics, it's about control. What happened is essentially a stupid video, produced by a bunch of idiotic people in California, nobody knew about it, it was on the Internet, until somebody, an Islamist in Egypt, translated it into Arabic, played it on local television, and there is a plethora of uncontrolled television stations in Egypt. And he brought somebody to explain it and to comment on it, who engaged in whipping up frenzy against the Christians of Egypt and all of that.

The Selafists grabbed this issue in their own competition with the so-called mainstream Islamists, which is the Muslim Brotherhood, in Egypt. The leader of the country, who happens to be a Muslim Brother, Mohamad Morsi, used it also in his competition with the Selafists. So, really have the two main Islamist groups competing using this issue as a pretext, as an excuse in their own ongoing political fight.

It's a political issue.

From the day Ayatollah Khomeini issued that stupid fatwa against Salman Rushdie, he was in dire trouble. When, after the movie, Lebanon organized Hezbollah into organizing a big campaign because (inaudible) is in a very defensive

position today, so he needed that pretext.

The same thing in Pakistan, the same thing in Afghanistan. You know, talk about the stupid cartoons against the Prophet Muhammad or two years ago with Terry Jones, this bigoted priest or whatever, in Florida who decided to burn Korans, the same thing, it's about political power. And every time, the Secretary of State or the President of the United States tells us that Islam is a great religion or that Judaism is a fantastic religion or that Christianity is a wonderful religion, he is playing -- he is entering into that crazy universe of these radical jihadists when it comes to the (inaudible), to the Islamists.

And by the way, I believe that every religion has its own Ayatollah, so don't worry about it.

And this is a huge mistake. It's a political issue, and every time we say Islam is this and Islam is that, when we deal with these radical -- rabid radicals in those societies, we are entering into their crazy universe and we lose. This is not religious. We are not engaged in religious disputations, theological disputations, we are dealing with societies that are weak, that have been marginalized, that have been brutalized, they have been pulverized by their own people, and the Arabs who still remember their glory days watch the rest of the world today, in a globalized world, as if the world is passing them by like a caravan and leaving them behind.

And this is -- this is it. Thank you.

(Applause)

MS. WITTES: Hisham, thank you.

I'm going to ask one brief question that I hope you can all tackle briefly before we open it up to the audience for your questions. And I think that you ended in a great place, Hisham, because fundamentally these arguments are not about culture or

religion, they're about politics and power.

And as Bill noted, Americans seem to recognize that, at some level. In fact, I would say that although Americans do like to be liked, they seem to admit, on this set of issues, a degree of pragmatism, and I wanted to ask you, Shibley, as one of the authors of the poll, whether you think that's an accurate lesson to draw from the data that we see? And, you know, how do you expect the next American President will be able to build on that if so?

I have to say, we had an election in Venezuela yesterday and so I woke up this morning thinking about Latin America where the United States is not very popular and has not been for a long time, for many of the same reasons that Hisham noted with respect to the Arab and Muslim world. And yet, the U.S. engages in a wide variety of fairly constructive economic, diplomatic relationships with Latin American states.

So, the tension between wanting to be liked and knowing that there are pragmatic reasons to engage in the world on the basis of interest, how is the next American President going to -- or what policies will the next American President be able to put forward and get public support for? Shibley?

MR. TELHAMI: Great. Thanks. That's a really good question. I just want to say one footnote to something Bill said about Knowledge Network's methodology, the people who fielded this survey. It is a nationally representative survey. What they do is they have a scientific random selection of telephone numbers as well as addresses and people who don't have Internet connection; they provide them with a computer and a connection, and people who don't speak Spanish they provide them with Spanish translation. And the methodologies online --

MR. GALSTON: I was not questioning that, Shibley.

MR. TELHAMI: But it's not --

MS. WITTES: It was just the relationship to the election.

MR. TELHAMI: It is demographically representative by age as well.

MR. GALSTON: No, that's not the point I was making. The point I was making was there's a difference between polling the universe of all adults on the one hand and polling people who are registered voters and likely voters --

MS. WITTES: In the presidential election.

MR. GALSTON: But as adults, I'm sure it's representative.

MR. TELHAMI: Anyway, that's a methodology question, those who are interested, it's out there. We could look at it.

But, you know, it's interesting, though, the result that you said I think is right. I think that, you know, given what we've seen and what, you know, Hisham said, I mean, a lot of Americans have to be frustrated watching the reaction take place. Except for even from just shooting at the embassy, just the kind of outcry and demonstrations, and yet they do appear to have a nuanced interpretation, and part of it -- and really almost along the lines that Hisham suggested, which is that this is being used by political -- a political tool of people who are competing with each other, whether it's extremists or Selafists or somebody else, actually the public does have that interpretation.

But I may also add that if you look at the Muslim public, Hisham is right, obviously, that the empty American views are pervasive across different segments of the public, different countries. We've measured that enough to know that it's pretty consistent and hasn't changed much.

But there are differences in attitudes across Muslim societies, even on issues like this, and one of the interesting things is that there is a -- you know, the world public opinion that PIPA actually did a poll in 2009 among Muslim countries, trying to see whether in principle they support the freedom of speech of people who criticize religion or

think that countries should pass laws against people who attack religion.

And there were major differences. I mean, majorities in Egypt and Pakistan wanted to see people punished for attacking religion. Religions in Turkey and Azerbaijan wanted to see people have the right to criticize religion. So, there are differences across Muslim societies. It's not the same thing. We have to keep that in mind.

Just one final note, which has to do also with interpreting particularly attitudes on Syria, but broadly, you know, if you're an American presidential candidate, what do you say here. I'm not sure I agree with Bill on this urge of Americans wanting to do more on Syria. I don't agree with that necessarily even though -- I want something done on Syria, separately, I'm not talking about myself in terms, you know, when you see all the -- I'm not sure what, but that's another story, you know.

MR. GALSTON: Join the crowd.

MR. TELHAMI: I mean, it's hard to see all this, you know, carnage and bloodshed and not wanting to do something, but if you look at the American public it's really consistent, overwhelmingly opposed to direct military intervention. And I think the aberration to that is this -- and if you look particularly at the opposition to even arming the troops, because they understand it's a slippery slope, kind of the resistance to being engaged in another war, you have to look at this no-fly zone as something of an aberration because it's an interpretation. Is it really costless? Libya was almost costless. Does it really entail bombings?

I'm not sure we should make a lot of that, but I know a lot of people have discomfort, no doubt. I mean, we all have discomfort. It's just very hard to watch death and destruction on the scale that we're watching and say I can't do anything about it. That's there.

But even bigger than that, I think the public is resisting seeing a path that would take American into war. I think that's pretty clear.

MR. WITTES: So, if Romney is, as reported, arguing for greater intervention today, he's facing an uphill climb.

MR. TELHAMI: Well, you can see only 22 percent support arming the rebels in this poll, but even worse for him, the opposition among independents is even greater, as you might expect, you know, the tendency is, but if you're looking -- so, it's very interesting, you know, to see how the public will react to it.

My own view is if he were to make that announcement and we were to have a poll tomorrow, the thought will increase, the support for it will increase by virtue of the fact that some of his core supporters want to endorse him, and therefore it wouldn't be a question of, you know, then we're -- leadership does count for something in this particular case. It sways opinion a little bit, but not enough to make a difference for him because it will be mostly his core supporters, it wouldn't be people who are swing voters.

MS. WITTES: Thanks. So, Hisham, is there room for a sort of pragmatic, interspaced American engagement with the Arab world? Would that receive a positive response?

MR. MELHEM: I'm a big believer in American engagement in the Arab and in the Muslim world. I'm also a big believer that there are certain things only the United States can do, from certain military interventions or providing certain aid or political support, technical support, I'm always reminded by the fact that the Europeans were so helpless to stop the mass killing of Bosnians and Kosovars in the 1990s, which occurred on European soil, which, for the first time since the Holocaust where people on European soil were being killed en masse because of their ethnic and religious background and the great European powers did nothing. Europe should live with that

shame for a long time. Only until the Americans intervened.

It's not pretty, but only the Americans could intervene and stop it. So, I'm a great believer in Madeleine Albright's --

MS. WITTES: Indispensible nation.

MR. MELHEM: Yeah, the United States is the indispensible power. Warts and all, that's it, that's the reality, I think. So, the United States should continue to engage in the Arab world. The United States should invest in a long-term alliance with those people in the Arab world and the Muslim world who share, with the United States, certain values, who believe that it serves their own interest to have a good relationship with the West, they believe that it's in our interest to be part of a globalized world, they believe that it's in their own interest to have good economic and political relationship with the United States, even when we disagree with the United States.

I mean, one of the good things that I liked about this poll is that the majority of Americans still believe that democracy in those countries that are going through transition or in the Arab world, or in the case of Turkey, and we know that more probably fully in Turkey than the rest of the Arab world because you have a more democratic system in Turkey, they support that even when the Turks or these new, supposedly democratic governments, would take positions, I'm not necessarily liking the United States. This is great; this is the nuanced thing that I offer that Bill was talking about.

Okay, we acknowledge that these countries -- since we're talking about countries in transition -- that they are going into transition. As a political fact, the Islamists are in charge, fine. Let's keep their feet to the fire. Let's engage them. And let's -- you know, and engaging means that you deal with them, you cooperate with them, you keep their feet to the fire, and you pressure them. I mean, let's be blunt about this.

Countries pressure each other. The United States imposes sanctions on companies that belong to Canada and to France. So, let's not kid ourselves.

In international relationships, love is not a requirement. Self-interest is what drives each nation. The United States should serve its interest in the Middle East, but there are people in the Middle East who are supposed to be our natural allies. Maybe among them some Islamists, I don't know. I wouldn't hold my breath.

You know, but you engage them. A country like Egypt, which is a key country, it's been there for 7,000 years, you know, these people created democracy, created central government, they have huge problems, they must still live in the glories of the old days, but they have to face the fact that they are poor, that they marginalize themselves. They marginalize themselves. Egypt used to be the trend setter in the Arab world, for 150 years. For 50 years under Mubarak, Egypt became a marginal power.

Morsi talks about, play a regional role; Morsi cannot even influence events in Gaza. Egypt is not equipped to deal with Turkey as a regional power. Egypt is still chafing because it lives in the shadow of Israel. Egypt cannot even compete with Iran, and they used to do that 50 years ago, 60 years ago.

So, Egypt is a poor country and the Egyptians should know, we have common interests, we need to help you, we want to help you, but you are going to have to follow certain rules too. The United Sates should not give one penny to any country unless there is reciprocity. I happen to believe that. In an ideal world, we shouldn't give Israel one penny and we shouldn't give Egypt one penny.

But it's not an ideal world and we have to deal with them. So, when Morsi waits for 50 hours for his first reaction, when the American embassy is torn, essentially, and the first reaction is silly, you know, on Facebook where he essentially starts by denouncing the movie or the video, he ends by saying, I ask my embassy in

Washington to pursue these people legally, and in the middle, he just says, in passing, as a state, of course, we're supposed to protect private and public property, including foreign legations. There was no word about the embassy. There was no word of sorrow. There was no word of condemnation. There was no word of accountability. Nothing. I mean, you know, you love these allies, right, and I think I was flabbergasted because the President of the United States, when he made his comment, didn't say a word.

And initially the reaction of the United States was appalling too in the sense that, we denounced the video more than we denounced the fact that, you know, people were demonstrating for something that of course the United States government has nothing to do and we didn't denounce the fact that the leadership in Egypt didn't say anything.

You see, the Arabs will always tell you, oh, it's a minority of people. Of course it's a minority of people. It's always a minority of people. Do you think a majority of the French people stormed the Bastille?

(Laughter)

Do you think a majority of the Russians fought in the Revolution? Do you think a majority of Americans fought the British for independence? No. Hell, no. There was one-third with the British, one-third against the British; another third was sitting on the fence.

So, it's not the minority that does these things, it is what the political class in that given country says about the minority, what the intellectuals and the academics and the journalists say when these things happen. It is not the mob. I can deal with the mob by a variety of ways, but who is in charge of that country? Who is the intellectual (inaudible), myself, what happened to Salman Rushdie, there are only -- only a few voices in the Arab and the Muslim world who had the guts to stand up and say that

crazy fatwa is crazy.

MR. TELHAMI: Just to follow up, Bill is going to talk and you have a question, but I just want to say a couple of things. One is on the foreign aid, first of all, which is -- I mean, part of the thing that we have to understand is that actually the Egyptian public doesn't want to see the aid either. So, it's not -- the American public and the Egyptian public -- so, who are the people who are actually pushing for aid? It is primarily government agencies and bureaucracies. I mean -- our military -- well, they have a lot of interest in that. And good ones, not --

MS. WITTES: So, maybe they're being hard headed and --

MR. MELHEM: On both sides, you're right.

MR. TELHAMI: And generally, even in Congress you say, how are we going to persuade people? Well, you send people from the Pentagon, the Pentagon says, we need this aid because we need that relationship, it sways and it sways there too.

So, both of -- the oddity of it is it's not the public on both sides that is actually pushing for the aid, it's these agencies, and we have to keep that in mind, it's self-interest.

But on the issue of Morsi and what we should be doing, I have to just differentiate between two things. One is, I absolutely agree the U.S. has to first and foremost protect its interest and make it clear. No question, you know, and as the President called Morsi and said, this is unacceptable, because obviously, regardless, doesn't matter what else is happening, this is a red line.

But on the other hand, we can't panic in an environment of that sort. You know, you said how transitions are unpredictable and there are all kinds of -- I don't remember the term that you used, but when you look at all of that, this is the time not to

pull back. There's still import in America's interest. You need to engage. The outcome is not decided. There is a battle going on in each one of these countries, and if you don't weigh in diplomatically and economically and militarily, if need be, the outcome isn't going to be to your liking. And the worst thing to do is to assume it's all the same, it's anarchic, you can't do anything about it, and pull back. That is a mistake, and I think panic is the wrong strategy.

MS. WITTES: Okay. I think those are two strong endorsements for an intra space approach. I think the challenge in a democratic society, ours as well as on the other side, is whether you can sustain support for such an approach. Hisham said love's got nothing to do with it.

MR. GALSTON: Look, I know the time for questions is getting short, so let me be brisk. I'll just make three points very quickly.

First of all, you know, building on the centrality of Egypt in this discussion, as a naïve American, one of the things that I've learned from your survey work in recent years is that Egyptian public opinion is much closer to Pakistani public opinion than most Americans have understood. And that, it seems to me, is an important predicate going forward.

I absolutely agree that continued engagement is essential, but we have to be clear-eyed about what we're engaging here and now and this is not a public that likes the United States. And the degree of antipathy in Egypt to the United States, the pervasiveness of it, is something we have to take on board as one of the factors shaping our policy. And, you know, if I've misread your surveys, please correct me, but I don't think I have. The results are too massive. That's number one.

Number two, just to be pugnacious, I do not accept the distinction between politics and interests on the one hand and culture and religion on the other. I

think that's a false start for the discussion. It won't work for the United States and it won't work for the Muslim world either. You cannot manipulate sentiments unless the sentiments are there to begin with.

And I do not buy the proposition that an Egyptian public that in a free and fair election gave more than 75 percent of the vote to this Islamist family, that you quite properly referred to, that wasn't a reflection of some minority manipulating public opinion, that IS public opinion.

MR. MELHEM: That's true.

MR. GALSTON: That is public opinion and there is an important religious component to that. And one of the things that's important to that religious component is a concept of blasphemy that was pervasive in the Western world five centuries ago, and which, as a matter of public policy, we have left behind. That is a religiously based conflict, and we have to face up to it.

This is not an argument for disengagement, but if we try to fool ourselves into believing, well, nobody really cares about that stuff and they're just being manipulated, I don't believe that. I just don't.

And I would like to be wrong, but I don't think I am.

MS. WITTES: Okay. With that, let me open it up. We've got about 15 minutes and I certainly appreciated the engagement. I will also appreciate it if you will keep your questions brief and to the point and identify yourself before you ask. And why don't we start right here in front.

SPEAKER: Hamid Shanal, Voice of America. How much influence did the partisan competition impact American public opinion toward the Arabs and Muslims compared to the angry reaction to the movie? And would the views impact U.S. policy regardless of who wins the presidential elections?

MS. WITTES: Are you directing that to anyone in particular?

MR. TELHAMI: I didn't quite understand the final question, the bottom line question is --

MS. WITTES: How will it affect voting? Was that --

SPEAKER: Would the views of American public toward Muslims and Arabs impact the U.S. policy regardless of who wins the presidential elections, whether it's Romney or Obama?

MR. TELHAMI: Let me just make two points. One point is about importance of issues. I happen to think that foreign policy isn't much of an issue in our elections anyway and even though it has -- the recent events have increased it and today Romney's giving his speech. By and large, it's not likely this late in the day, unless there's a war or something on that scale, to have much of an impact, and I think what we haven't talked about is how people rank these issues.

We do have a couple of questions in the poll about the ranking of the issue of relations in the Muslim world and also ranking the Arab-Israeli issue in the priorities. People do rank it in the top five, but in an open question, not in terms of comparison to other issues, if you put it in there, and Republicans, oddly enough, tend to rank it a little bit higher than Democrats. And maybe that's one thing that Romney is doing.

Now, what would happen if there is an election, obviously, let's say would make a difference between Romney and Obama on this, I'd make two points. Bill made a very good point early on how Democrats and Republicans are operating after two very different paradigms about their relationship with Arab and Muslim countries, and you can see it in public opinion poll. The constituencies -- they do see it more of a clash of civilization than it is a clash of conflict. It is pervasive; you find it in almost every issue,

including the Arab-Israeli issue, by the way.

So, there is a philosophical difference with the constituencies separate from, second, I don't know what Romney has in mind. We don't really know exactly what kind of foreign policy he would have, but the people who are around him are more or less the same -- many of the same people who were around Bush before, so I suspect that we would expect something more along that line.

MS. WITTES: Okay, what I'm going to do because time is short is take several questions and then come back to the panel. So, why don't we start right behind you in the striped shirt there, and then the lady here on the aisle and then we'll go across this way in the purple shirt, and the lady in the white jacket.

SPEAKER: Hi, my name is Bernerd Archiwald, I'm a University of California Santa Cruz student, and in regards to intervention in Syria or what the U.S. policy should be in Syria, how do we account for lower level tiers of fall out if we decide to intervene? For instance, the 13 percent Alawite population that affiliates itself with the Assad regime. What do you think will happen to them? Do you think that that can be foreseen if we decide to intervene and there's a change in government?

MS. WITTES: Thank you.

SPEAKER: Just I want to ask --

MS. WITTES: Please identify yourself.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible) from the American University of Beirut. I want to ask Mr. Galston that the 75 percent who voted for the Islamic parties, not because they were Islamic parties, because in Egypt for 70 years there were no political parties, so the Islamic parties became more political into the system, the political system. It's more political than Islamic. And for Hisham, Muhammad Morsi, what happened -- demonstration in Egypt, he was in a visit -- trip visit to the European Union in Brussels

and he really said that I am against the attack on the Prophet Muhammad, but also we don't accept in Cairo demonstration to attack the private property, the diplomatic buildings, and this is -- I'm against.

MS. WITTES: Okay, so --

SPEAKER: Just I want that the UN start to enact a law to stop the abuse of the free speech against all the religions, like --

MS. WITTES: Okay, so a question about the possibility of blasphemy law or norm established at the UN, which gets to the point you made, Bill, about the fact that this is a deeply seated value in a lot of cultures.

Let me go here and then to Julie.

SPEAKER: First of all, thank you very much for your insightful presentation.

MS. WITTES: Your name, please.

SPEAKER: My name is Dorgam with the PLO delegation. My question goes to Mr. Melhem. In a recent panel, actually that happened over here, I think it was, Mr. Raj Desai, who said that the Muslim Brotherhood is pro-business and socially conservative, if I recall correctly. Where does that exactly place the next administration here in the U.S. and American perceptions as to how they actually perceive of the Muslim Brotherhood or Morsi's Freedom and Justice Party specifically as far as it being a unique element identifying itself as such and a family of Islamists, as you put it, and as you emphasized, it is politics and economics, not necessarily religion and culture.

Thank you very much.

MS. WITTES: Okay, so maybe they're Republican voters. You can hand the microphone right there. Thank you, and then we'll come up to the panel.

SPEAKER: My question is for Dr. Telhami. I'm wondering how much

being informed affects responses. So, have you, in your long experience with polling, have you been able to look at responses, the difference between sophisticates and novices? And also, on certain questions, when you provide more information, for instance, instead of talking about Egypt's role with stability, on a question like that if you had said, you know, Egypt allowing U.S. warships to go through the Suez Canal or over flight rights -- when you ask questions that way, does it end up affecting responses?

MS. WITTES: Thank you. So, we've got four fascinating questions. I'm going to start with Bill and go down this way and give Shibley the last word.

Bill?

MR. GALSTON: Well, let me just respond to a couple of them. I confess, you know, when the young man in the purple shirt asked his question, I had a response very much like Tammy's, hmm, Muslim Brotherhood, pro-business, socially conservative. Do we have a party like that in the United States? And apparently we do, and so, perhaps, they'll make beautiful music together if Mr. Romney is --

MR. MELHEM: It will not be music, it will be noise.

MR. GALSTON: -- if Mr. Romney becomes President. But let me respond to the question that was directly addressed to me, because I think that question raised a very important point.

Yes, you are absolutely right. For decades, the Muslim Brotherhood was the only game in town and the Muslim Brotherhood, of course, was not exactly welcomed by the Egyptian government, whether it was Nasser's or Sadat's or Mubarak's, with open arms. You know, it was harassed, suppressed, jailed, et cetera, but it was there and so it has much deeper roots in Egyptian society than the groups of secularists, liberal intellectuals, et cetera.

And it is entirely possible that over time, as the newly empowered

Islamist parties come face-to-face with the realities of governing a country, that they will respond to that in various ways, and if they don't master the very real social and economic problems, the Egyptian public may shift its views over time.

So, I am not saying that the current political configuration is letters of jade, you know, carved into tablets of stone. Not at all. That can change. But at the same time, I think there's a lot of evidence to the effect that Egyptian public opinion is deeply conservative on a range of religions issues.

This is not an accident. I don't expect that to change. And to the extent that there are aspects of Western culture, including freedom of speech, that rub up against deep seated religious beliefs, religious beliefs, which I can respect even if I don't agree with them as a political matter, I think we will have an ongoing tension with that set of beliefs, we being the United States, not just the American government, but the American people, because we believe in freedom of speech just as deeply as people, you know, many people throughout the Muslim world, believe in the idea of honoring through speech the central figure of Islam.

And in the short-term, I think it's going to be very, very difficult to bridge that divide whenever it becomes central in a policy dispute. I wish I could come to a different conclusion, but I think that that is the fact of the matter and I don't think that is simply a consequence of the history of suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood.

MS. WITTES: Thank you, Bill. Hisham.

MR. MELHEM: Quickly on the Alawis, I mean, this will take forever, but we have, unfortunately a civil war, we're going to see more and more communal clashes in Syria, and unless the Syrian situation is contained somehow by foreign intervention, we will see a situation similar to Lebanon in '75, '76, and the Alawis, in the end, will suffer.

I would hasten to say that not necessarily all the Alawis are with the regime. You know, there are more nuanced politics in Syria than people are led to believe, and I think from this -- from the American side, we should always stress -- as the Americans have been doing, actually -- that we will not help you unless you represent all stripes, you know, of Syrian society, all that human mosaic, let's say, and I think this is the message that the United States should continue to repeat when they are dealing with the opposition.

Not only the Alawis are concerned, the Christians are concerned, and these are legitimate concerns given what happened to the Christian community in Iraq when we were there with 150,000 soldiers, men and women, and yet we've seen 50 percent of the Christians of Iraq leaving, which is a shame.

We can discuss it afterwards if you want.

On the issue of Morsi, I think Morsi, when he went to Italy, denounced the attacks after he spoke -- or after the President of the United States called him and hopefully read the riot act to him.

Morsi's reaction was appalling, period. He was exploiting it for his own political ends. And if you read that Facebook page of his, it's just appalling. This is not the views of a president of 75 million people, of a country that's been around fro 7,000 years. He was acting as if he was a small time politician in the opposition, not the leader of a supposedly great country. And there is no disputation o this issue.

On the question of blasphemy, I'm against any law against blasphemy. I don't like the fact that Europeans in Germany and other places, have laws that would criminalize denying the Holocaust. In Germany, I can understand it for a year or ten after the war, but it should not be the case.

IN this country here, we denounce people if they are anti-Semitic or anti-

Muslims and you criticize them, but you cannot have a law against that. This is free speech. Unless they are not egging people for violence, people have the right to be stupid and say outrageous things.

One of the reasons I became an American, it's because, again, let me use this as a secularist and use that language, because of what I would call my secular bible, which is the Bill of Rights and the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and everything added by Jefferson and Lincoln, all of these great guys. I could in Canada, I couldn't live in Europe. It's because the American Constitution, and I want the American President and every American official to remind the American people of this Constitution every day, and to remind the Egyptians and the Pakistanis and anybody who doesn't like it, this is our Constitution. Take it or leave it, live with it.

(Applause)

Let me tell you another thing. If you pile the books and the articles that were written against Islam in the last 1,400 years in Europe, written by Europeans, you will end up with a middle-sized pyramid. That did not prevent -- that fact did not prevent Islam from being, in the last few decades and generations, the fastest growing religion in the world. Until recently, Islam was the fastest growing religion in this great country. Now it is second to Mormonism. Okay?

If the Ummah, the Muslim Ummah, a billion, 700 million people are going to be afraid of Terry Jones, is this the religion that was behind creating the great culture of El Andalous, Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo. In medieval times we were more tolerant. We used to have debates about alakal: reason, iluman: faith and we didn't lynch people because of this. Why? Because we were powerful. Why? Because we had self-confidence.

There is a great passage written by Nietzsche -- I'm sorry I have to quote

philosophers, I spent seven years of my life studying European philosophy -- Nietzsche has a great saying, he said, we -- he's German -- he didn't like Judaism and Christianity, mind you, but he said about Islam, and he was talking about the Islam of El Andalous, he said, "We welcome -- I welcome this region. Why? Because that religion says yes to life. It created great culture. It says yes to life." It's not the asceticism -- it is not that we have to hide our women, it is not the debate about whether your beard should be that length or that rope should be that length -- this is a great religion when we wish to discuss cultural things and reason and philosophy and Aristotle and Plato. This is not the religion of the Ayatollah Khomeini. And if the Muslim wants to reduce their religion to this, that's their business, but they cannot tell you in the United States what you should say about Islam.

Because I can tell you many bad things that the Muslims said about other religions, but who cares, in the end?

One final thing, business -- business -- Islamists and business. Yes, they are conservative, that's why they are not revolutionaries. They are conservative. They are extremely conservative. And that's one reason they scare me. But there is also another thing, and I have to agree with Bill here, if you look at Said Kotob, if you look at his writings, especially when he was in this great country in the late 1940s, when he was horrified by what he saw in America as decadence, hedonism, materialism, weak spiritualism, and he said at that time, if there is a conflict between us and them, we will win because we are stronger.

And let me even say something that many Islamists don't like. When you listen and hear and read the rantings of Osama bin Laden, what do you see about the United States? Decadence, hedonism, materialism, no spiritual core. What do you see? You see echoes of Said Kotob. You see echoes of Said Kotob. Yes, they want to do business, and we know that, but they have also certain cultural views about the West in

general. We should be honest about this.

MS. WITTES: Thank you, Hisham. Shibley?

MR. TELHAMI: Just let me start with the easy one, which is the methodological one, that, yes, there are, in fact, studies. We've done that before. It does make a bit of difference. Actually, it used to be, in the public opinion poll, the so-called attentive public, people who pay attention, usually more educated. The Chicago Council used to be on foreign relations for global affairs used to do these among kind of the elites -- elite kind of surveys, and there are some differences.

I happen to believe, actually, that it's more important to work on what I call with colleagues the issue public. I've done work with (inaudible) early on to show that what we call people who rank an issue high on their priorities, regardless of whether they're well-informed or not, their opinion matters more for policy than the broader public opinion. But that's a separate issue.

I want to end with two points. One is related to what Bill said in this exchange about Islam and the majority and then the blasphemy issue.

I agree with Bill, by the way, about identity matters or culture and opinion. In fact, most of the public opinion polling we do, we say we're trying to look at the prism through which Arabs look at the world, because that's obviously the core, is how do they identify themselves.

To start with, with no disrespect to other Egyptians or Pakistanis, I don't agree that Pakistanis and Egyptians are close to each other in opinion. That's not true, actually, and one reason for it is this incredible difference in identity. They share the Islam, it's important, it's cornerstone -- it's central to them, but Egyptians are also very Arab and very Egyptian and very geographically situated and they have a particular history that defines them differently.

MR. GALSTON: I was making just a specific -- on anti-Americans.

MR. TELHAMI: No, but even on opinions -- anti-Americanism, everybody is almost alike.

(Laughter)

MR. MELHEM: Rest assured.

MR. TELHAMI: But on the majority of -- on the Egyptian Islamists, let's look at this, I mean, there's no question that they're strong, and it's demonstrated, they have a president and they have a parliament, and you're looking at it in terms of long haul, maybe they'll learn, or something like that. Maybe, I mean, Iranian, obviously stayed for longer than people thought, in power, but in Egypt, particularly, look at between the parliamentary election and the presidential election what happened.

In the presidential election, the first round, only 46 percent of the people voted, and the Islamists had an easier time of getting their people to vote because they're better organized, and Morsi won 26 percent of that 46 percent only. And in the runoff election against a secular, pro-regime with the regular establishment -- the old establishment behind him, he barely beat him.

So, Egypt is divided in ways far deeper than you are suggesting even with all the religion being important. But it's not the dominant thing in their lives, even if it's important to them, it's not always an every day, the dominant thing in their lives. There's a lot -- much more going on.

But on the blasphemy thing, I happen to be totally against any laws. I like what we have. And let me just explain why for a minute -- and not just because I like -- with Hisham, I prefer what we have over Europe on this issue, but if you get down through the slippery slope, there's no end to it.

I am of the opinion that speech sometimes is action. I was a student of a

prominent philosopher, John Searle, we both have philosophy in common in the background, who taught that speech -- there are speech acts, that language is action, and, yes, it matters and you have to pay attention to the consequences. But I worry more about who interprets that. And when you allow politicians or elected officials, on any given moment, to interpret that, it can be disastrous. You know, be careful what you wish for.

Just a month ago the California legislature passed a resolution that's non-binding, bipartisan, that seemed to be very innocent; it's anti -- against anti-Semitic language. Who would oppose that? Asking universities in particular to not condone or invite or certainly use public funding fro anti-Semitism. Who would oppose that, as a norm, particularly if it's not a law? But when you look at what they've written down to interpret what it means, all the different things that they put down, they listed down, as to how they interpret what is anti-Semitic, somebody like Jimmy Carter couldn't get invited on government funds in Berkeley.

Human Rights Watch, one of the most respected human rights' groups couldn't get invited or shouldn't get invited. That is a slippery slope and I think that is something that we all have to avoid because what we have is sacred, in my opinion, particularly as an academic. I certainly don't want to see new laws to limit what people say in the academy or outside.

MR. MELHEM: Amen, brother.

MS. WITTES: Please join me in giving a hand to all our panelists.

(Applause)

And as I send you out into -- many of you, I suspect, into the public transportation system, I have to note that Pamela Geller's ads are now appearing in the D.C. metro. And going to this debate about blasphemy and restricting speech, there's

been a very compelling response from faith communities in New York, putting up ads next to the Geller ads saying, “In the war between hate and love, choose love.”

So, with that thought, I leave you.

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