

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

TUNISIA'S DEMOCRATIC FIGURE:
AN ADDRESS BY RACHED GHANNOUCHI

Washington, D.C.

Friday, May 31, 2013

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Brookings. I'm Martin Indyk, the Director of the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings. I'm delighted to have an opportunity to introduce a very distinguished speaker this morning for an event that is sponsored and organized by our Saban Center for Middle East Policy.

Rached Ghannouchi is probably by now well known to all of you. I dare say that wasn't the case a few years ago when his intellectual contributions as a great Muslim thinker got little attention in the west. That was until the revolution that began in Tunisia and spread across the Arab world. And it's particularly important that what began in Tunisia continues in Tunisia in a very exemplary way. In a sense that the challenge of reconciling Islam and democracy in post-revolutionary Arab countries is a challenge that Tunisia is leading and that challenge is deeply influenced by the thinking and the leadership of Rached Ghannouchi.

He is the Co-founder and President of the Nahda Party in Tunisia, which is Tunisia's largest party. He co-founded the Nahda movement -- that is the renaissance movement -- and he is its intellectual leader. He is -- has been for a number of years now -- one of the world's leading Islamic thinkers, writing on Islam and modernity, democracy, relationship with secularism, relations with the west, human rights, civil society and I think it's fair to say that his writings have had profound influence on political and religious thought across the Arab and Muslim world. And for that reason, he was named as one of Time's 100 Most Influential People in the World last year and Foreign Policy's Top 100 Global Thinkers. He was awarded last year the Chatham House Prize and that was for the successful compromises that had been achieved during Tunisia's democratic transition. Rached Ghannouchi, therefore, is a very important thinker and a

very important leader and it's really a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to host him here at Brookings.

He will speak to us for about 20 minutes and then he will engage in a conversation with Tamara Wittes. Tamara is the Director of our Saban Center for Middle East Policy -- is, in her own right, an expert on democratic transitions in the Arab world and has worked in particular on these issues as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Near East Bureau in the first two years of the Arab revolutions.

So, ladies and gentlemen, please join me -- oh, I should say, before I welcome Mr. Ghannouchi, I want to say a special thank you to Mr. Moody and the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, who brought Mr. Ghannouchi to Washington for an important conference that they've just held and we thank you for making this event possible.

So, ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Rached Ghannouchi.

MR. GHANNOUCHI: Good morning. It's pleasure for me to address -- to be introduced by a famous politician, as Mr. Martin Indyk, and to be heard and discussed with such distinguished thinkers and people of culture. Also, I thank you -- the Brookings Institute -- to give me this opportunity.

I would like to briefly address the issue of democratic transition in Tunisia and the challenges that we face. The success of the democratic transition in Tunisia is not important for Tunisia only, but for the whole of the regime because it will establish the first country in the regime which is both democracy and Muslim. That is why, in Tunisia, we feel the burden of this responsibility and try our best to make it succeed. Our revolution is not for export. Tunisia is very small country. But we hope that a successful model can influence the rest of the regime.

Since before the election, we announced that we choose to govern through coalition with other secular parties. We could have formed our government by getting the support for independence, but we choose to form a coalition that had the widest degree of support across the political spectrum. We believe that in transitional period, simple majority government isn't enough, but we need a wide coalition to send a message that the country is for all and not just the majority. We believe that moderate Islamists and moderate secularists can and should work together and they both should find compromises to build consensus across the spectrum. We have tried hard to avoid ideological polarization because this is a recipe for chaos and failure. That is why we have made many concession -- whether in government or in constitution -- to avoid this danger.

We believe in the need of the coexistence between secularists and Islamists. In the framework of troika, we've congress for the republic party and democratic forum for work and liberties. On this basis of number of conviction, including - first, there is no contradiction between democracy and Islam. Democracy does not mean that governance should be particularly granted to secularists while considering the Islamists as enemies of the state who should be either in imprisoned or exiled. It does not also mean excluding secularists from power and marginalizing their role in authority and in drafting the constitution simply because they did not get a majority in the election.

Second, Islamists arrival to power does not mean that they will dominate the state, the society and the revolution because they are the most popular party as practiced by tyrannical systems. The state's role is not to impose a certain way of life on the people, but its role is to provide security and services to its people then let them make their own choice with regard to their way of life.

Third, the conflict between secularists and Islamists, which has continued for decades in our world, wasted enormous energies and helped dictator in their control of our countries. Therefore, the alliance between Islamists and secularists is important for the establishment of democracy and the society -- and the society able to handle its differences.

Ladies and gentlemen, on the question of the constitution -- the constitution is an important document as it limits the government's and the ruler's authority and forces it to abide by the law. We have a president in Islamist history in the form of what is known as Sahifar, which came at the time of the establishment in the first Islamist state led by the prophet himself. The constitution established a pluralistic state that brought together difference and established citizenship of the basis and the right and responsibilities.

We are happy that over the last few days in Tunisia, the committees of the Constituent Assembly have finally managed to finish working on the last draft of the constitution. This will, hopefully, be presented to the whole assembly over the next few days.

The guidance principle for it -- for this constitution -- is that it should not just be a constitution of the simple majority, but that it should be the constitution of the Tunisian as a whole, that all Tunisian can see themselves in this constitution and that they feel that it represent them all whether in majority or in minority.

In order to achieve this, we have organized wide consultation with different political players and with civil society organizations. In this process, we tried to develop a wide consensus around the constitution. However, when we faced serious differences around issue like (inaudible), the political system -- whether presidential or

parliamentary -- around the freedom of conscience, the universality of human rights, we had to organize a national dialog between the main parties to reach consensus and this lasted for near five weeks and ended up in reaching compromises around these different issues. Hence, we accepted to not include (inaudible) in constitution because constitution has to contain only what all people agree about.

I think we finally succeed to make national consensus about the main topic of this constitution. We believe that we have now a draft constitution that brings together the values of Islam and combines them with the values of modernity and democracy. This had been the dream of the great reformers since the 19th Century and we hope that through ratifying the constitution that we would have realized this dream. The new constitution incorporates all the values of equality of sex, the different freedoms of rights and the separation of powers. We hope that once the constitution is approved then the whole country will start preparing for its second elections, which we hope will be free and fair and we hope that many of our friends across the world will come to observe and monitor the elections. We hope that all the different parties will be participating. One flower does not make a spring. That is why this election is very important to prove that the democracy process cannot be reserved and also our people can see and can live in democracy.

Now, I would like to speak quickly about the challenges that we face in Tunisia. The first challenge is the economic-social ones. We all know that the factor was one of the main elections behind -- the first challenge is the economy social one. We all know that this factor was one of the main elements behind the revolution. We are faced with many problems. The first is that people's expectation are very high and their patience is very low. Also, the economic situation in our main trading partners in Europe

is affecting by export and affecting to reason. Despite these problems, the government has managed to reduce unemployment by two percent from 18 to 16. Also, growth went up from two percent when we took over to three point five for 2012. The number of tourists had also gone up and we received last year six million tourists. However, the young people who made the revolution in (inaudible) have not seen any improvement in their lives and this is a challenge that will need many years to tackle.

The second challenge is the security challenge. The revolution has weakened the state and its authority. This has given an opportunity to different group to try to push the boundaries and cross the law. Extremists on both sides -- whether on religion right or on the extreme left -- have tried to impose their views with no respect to the law. We tell these groups that do not think for one moment that democracy is weak. Slowly we are rebuilding the state's authority, but not on fear as it used to be under the dictator but it's based on the rule of law.

While regards to the Salafi issue, I would like to stress that this phenomena is first the fruit of the Ben Ali regime and not the fruit of the democracy or revolution. Secondly, the phenomena of Salafism is a complex one. Therefore, it needs a complex solution. We see, for example, that this phenomena exists in the poor area. Therefore, development needs to be part of the solution. Also, we need to know that this phenomena is diverse and that it's not all violent. Some Salafists are violent. Some are peaceful. Therefore, we need to push as many of the Salafists away from violence -- push them away of violence in order to isolate the violent ones and make the minority. As what happened in Egypt, for example, all Salafists in Egypt, they left the violence and accept to work within the law. This can be achieved through dialog and through convincing them that their understanding of Islam is wrong and that they need to work

within the law if they want their full rights as citizens.

Then third element in the solution is the security one. Choose who want or try to break the law or to impose their views on other with violence have to be dealt with severely. This is what the government has done over the last year by imprisoning hundreds of those who tried to break the law and in some instances also killing nearly 14 of them. Very sad to say that because they tried to smuggle weapons from Libya and they confront with security and the police. This security solution, however, needs to be governed by the respect for human rights and the law and not as Ben Ali did.

The fall of dictatorship regime in Tunisia was the spark that launched the Arab spring. There is no doubt that the success of the Tunisian experience will lead to the promotion of this peaceful and democracy path. Tunisia has shown that the Arab spring is not turning into a fundamentalist winter. Today, we can assure you that it will not turn into fundamentalist (inaudible) or secular winter, but into a democratic spring where all have a place. Tunisian people are very proud that the Arab spring starts from Tunisia and they are proud and they have a dream that they can establish the first democrat regime in Arab world which can affect all the Arab and Muslim world and establish good relation with the outer world.

MS. WITTES: Mr. Ghannouchi, thank you so much for those thoughtful and very thorough remarks that ranged from the principle basis for democratic transition to the practicalities of meeting people's needs.

I'd like to start our conversation, if I may, by taking you back a step to some of the discussions and dialogues that you had with other opposition movements before the revolution and some -- more information has come out in just the last year or so about all of the dialog and some of the understandings that were reached between

yourself and secular opposition leaders during those dark days of exile. You spoke about some of those principles today -- the idea that the state is not there to impose a particular way of life, but that people should be free to choose. I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about what the transition has been like from those dialogues that were separated from the day-to-day political sphere and the dialogues that you've had in the last few months to resolve these very tough issues in the constitution.

The first dialogue was not intruded on by interests and constituents and elections. But these current dialogues, of course, everyone has their eye on the next election. So can you tell us a little bit about how well those earlier understandings have survived the rough and tumble of politics?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: Thank you. Everyone who follow the itinerary of Nahda movement, of the -- my thought during the 25 years since 1981 when the Islamic movement in Tunisia declared itself a political party and asked for the government to be legalized. But the government of (inaudible) refused this demand. Since that time, we continue this itinerary that democracy and Islam as compatible, Islam and the human rights and universal values of human rights are compatible and the only source of legitimacy of state derives from the people. No other reference. No other legitimacy for the state. The only legitimacy comes from the people will through third and three elections.

Not on contradict within this spectrum -- within this paradigm -- given by Nahda, there is continuity -- a real continuity. We dialogue with -- we call for dialogue between Islamists and non-Islamists. In the first interview we gave after we declared ourselves as political party, a journalist asked me if the Tunisian people choose the communist party. He knows that communism and Islam is not compatible. What you can

do? So I respond without hesitation that I will accept the will of people and go to the people to convert them in the other election that he is wrong to choose communist party.

So he didn't -- we didn't (inaudible) -- no didn't go back in any time for this principle in our thought. And I think we influence -- we could influence many Islamic movement outside Tunisia. Tunisia is very small country, but it pretends that she can influence in cultural field outside also.

MS. WITTES: Well, perhaps I can turn us in that direction then. You said once, many years ago, that the most dangerous thing for Islamists is to be loved by the people before they get to power and then hated afterward. And I think we've seen a lot of debates around the Arab world since the revolutions about what different Islamist movements want when they get to power. How quickly they seek to win that majority to get into power, to get executive authority and we can refer to one particular country maybe a couple of states away from Tunisia.

MR. GHANNOUCHI: What we can add?

MS. WITTES: So I think the question is when you look at these different experiments around the region, do you worry that perhaps Islamist movements are succeeding too quickly and risking not being able to meet expectations from the public, risking the failure of the Islamic project?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: Islam is bigger than any Islamic movement. No one can pretend in Islam that he is the spokesman of Islam. This notion is not Islamic notion because no (inaudible) in Islam. So no one can pretend that he is the representer Islam. So Islam is plural and any Muslim can interpret the holy text and without any hegemony or any source -- any authority. No religion authority in Islam.

So Islamists are not one. There is very -- now there is -- Islamists

empower and Islamists (inaudible) in more than one country. So who are the Islamists? Well, this and that -- so the people who can choose who is the best, who is the worst.

So Islamists can empower, can succeed, can achieve, can be satisfied by people and can be rejected. So now we are -- in Tunisia, for example -- under test by the people. The next elections -- whether the people reelect us or negate or refuse us, it's the people will who choose. So, Islamists as other cannot be judged only through their deeds, their projects, their programs.

MS. WITTES: You spoke about how important it was for Nahda to rule -- to take governance in coalition with secular parties and to make the point clearly that the state is not just for the majority. The state is for all. Is that a lesson that you might suggest to other Islamic movements?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: I think it's -- we are in period of transition -- democratic transition. In such period, in the normal case, in democracy you can rule by 51 percent or 50 percent --

MS. WITTES: Plus one.

MR. GHANNOUCHI: Zero point five. But in such case, like what happened in Tunisia now, we are living under the period of transition. It's not enough to rule by 51 percent. You need to have -- to reach the vast majority. Especially, you have to avoid the polarization -- ideological polarization. It goes against any democratic change. In some countries -- we try in Tunisia to avoid this polarization because we see in other countries that the polarization consists or produce an obstacle for go ahead to the democracy -- to preparing, for example, constitution or preparing elections.

So by the coalition in Tunisia, between Islamists and secularists, we try to avoid this polarization. And we gave many concession for maintaining this coalition.

MS. WITTES: And does that hold true only to get through the constitution drafting process? How long is that transitional period in which coalition is important?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: I think in interest of democrat change, this coalition between Islamists and secularists will continue even after the next elections.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. You had some very clear words today about Salafi groups in Tunisia who have been willing to go outside the law, as you put it, to try and achieve their goals. And it seems to me that the case of those who are engaged in smuggling weapons were using violence is in some ways the easy case because there is no room in a democratic process for those who would use guns as a veto. But you talked about that larger group who may be tempted toward violence or using violence but who could be persuaded away. I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about that challenge. About how you and the Nahda movement are pursuing that dialog with Salafi groups and what are the obstacles that you see for the Salafi movements in fully integrating into the political process?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: You know that this phenomenon is not Tunisian -- it's not made in Tunisia. It's international movement -- international phenomena. And also this phenomenon is not the fruit of revolution or the democracy now in Tunisia. Not fruit of this regime in place in Tunisia, but the fruit of Ben Ali regime. Because, and also (inaudible) regime -- because Tunisia the laïcité -- the French laïcité not secularism because there is a real difference between Anglo-Saxon secularism and French laïcité. As I know, French licities struggling against the regime fight. So it's ideology anti-religion, but secularism -- it's only neutrality of the state vis-a-vis religions.

So sort of secularism, secularity can be accepted and coexist with Islam.

But the problem is with laïcité -- this ideology anti-religion. So our leader, who led the national independence (inaudible), have been influenced by French laïcité. So since the independence, enter in conflict with the Zaytuna Mosque -- the Zaytuna Mosque like other in Tunisia -- in Egypt. So the first decision of the independence of the government of the independence is closed down. The Zaytuna Mosque vacuum left -- a religious vacuum left in Tunisia have abled Tunisia to accept -- to be influenced by outside -- a religious trend coming from channel TV, a religious channel TV and so on. So part of our youth have been influenced by some extremists school broadcast from abroad. So how can -- also one the revolution come in Tunisia, more than 3,000 of Salafists were in prison. The revolution released all prisoners. Among them, the Salafists. And Ben Ali -- the Ben Ali regime, he dealt with Salafists with stone, with torture. But now it's not possible to use the same means against Salafists. Also Salafists are spread in Tunisia in special areas -- poor, the poor. So the poverty is also another source of Salafists.

I had heard the last speech of Mr. Obama that he insists that the poverty is source of extremism. So we cannot -- the phenomena also -- not all Salafism -- Salafists are violent. Some of them. Now in Egypt, the Salafists are now organized in two or three parties during 60 or 70 or '80s of last century, they explored hotels. They killed tourists. They killed ministers. But now, they have been reeducated. Through what? Through huge of violent police.

But there is mixed of (inaudible) of medicine. The fighting against poverty, dialogue and also security means. So because this phenomena is very complicated, it needs solution --

MS. WITTES: Complex solution.

MR. GHANNOUCHI: -- complex solution also.

MS. WITTES: Do you believe that through dialogue these Salafi groups can accept the neutrality of the state -- that core principle that you described? It seems to be antithetical opposed to their ideology.

MR. GHANNOUCHI: In politics, we cannot accept only what we love. We accept many things which we consider it necessity. So when they enter in politics, they (inaudible) -- charge of relativity can enter in their thought, so they can manage -- they can compare. When a person find themselves into prison for long time, they will rethink. They will discover the notion of balance of power and deal with the balance of power not only with the ideology -- his dreams -- but he deal with the balance of power in place.

MS. WITTES: The reality of politics --

MR. GHANNOUCHI: The reality -- the reality.

MS. WITTES: -- will lead them to compromise, you believe?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: Yes. And he discovers the art of compromise.

MS. WITTES: Okay. So you are relying on the notion that politics is the art of the possible and they will come to realize what's possible?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: One day I said I can see my youth in these people, because all trends -- nationalism and leftists -- they start by assault of violence. I know you remember in Europe, for example, in the '60s and '70s the leftists ideology extremes itself in many manners. One of them is violence. In Germany, for example, Bideman Huff. In France, Axion Direct. In Italy, the Red Brigade, which I believe that they can -- they can revolt against the imperialism by the force -- by weapons. But now -- where are they now? Now, most of them, they accept the balance of power and they constitute tiny parties. Some of them, they take their seats in Europe in Parliament now like Cohen

Bandit, for example. In my age, the French Revolution, 1968, he was the leader of the leftists. But now he accepts the balance of power.

MS. WITTES: I'll take one more question up here and then open it up to questions from our audience. You spoke about the work that Tunisia still needs to do in the socio-economic sphere and the help that it still looks for from its relationships with the rest of the world and those who wish to support Tunisian democracy. We're here in Washington. I know you will be having meetings with some U.S. government officials and while there have been many efforts to build our relations since the revolution, we suffered a major setback last September when some of these violent Salafis stormed the U.S. Embassy and destroyed the American School in Tunis. Just a few days ago, I understand, that 20 of those individuals were given suspended sentences. And so I wonder how that outcome matches up with your statement that violent Salafism needs to be dealt with very severely? And what do we need to do at this stage to get the U.S.-Tunisian relationship back to where it was before September?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: I think the relationship between Tunisia revolution and the United States is very well. And Tunisia revolution is supported by the EU, by the U.S., by Turkey, by Qatar. This is the main supporters of Tunisia -- current Tunisia government. So this problem of Salafists cannot constitute an obstacle, but it can manage it. It can deal. Tunisia government is dealing with this problem and arrests open the door for the people who are able -- ready to work within the law and leave the violence and do insist to use violence and to challenge the law, the government, the police, the Army, the civil society, the Tunisian community as a whole stand up against them.

So hundreds of them, as I said, they have been arrested. And even the

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group who attack the U.S. Embassy, they have been arrested and the court -- they are -- they still in prison. I can introduce you Mr. Livery because he is lawyer and he is member of our constituent parliament, to explain this matter because he's a lawyer also.

MS. WITTES: Would you like? Please.

MR LIVERY: Thank you very much.

MS. WITTES: They'll turn it up for you.

MR LIVERY: Thank you. We learned this judgment -- the recent judgment about the U.S. Embassy here. We learned last year and we now really -- we were really disappointed by that judgment, which does not reflect the policy of the government. As you know, today the judiciary is independent. We cannot interfere in the judgment, but the government took the right political decision by making an appeal against that judgment. So the people remain in prison for the moment and we hope that the Court of Appeal will take the right decision and will send the right signal reflecting the policy of the government. And I think the thought of people in Tunisia who are against such violent acts and such really unacceptable behavior from this Salafist violent groups, and we hope that this will also send the right signal for our partners, including the United States, about the will -- the right will and the strong will of the government to act against all of those who can destabilize the country and who can pose threats to our friends and our partners -- including, obviously, the embassies and the U.S. Embassy.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Thank you very much. All right, at this point I'd like to open it up for questions from the floor. We'll take them in turn and let me make two requests at the outset, which those of you who regularly attend here know already. Please identify yourself and please keep your question brief and make sure it's a question. Okay? And why don't we start here? Yes, sir.

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MR. GOOGENHEIM: Hi. My name is Joe Guggenheim -- just an interested citizen. I wonder if you could explain a bit how some of the principles and policies of the Islamist movement were incorporated into the constitution? What policies and procedures were different and what the secularists might have done so I can -- that we can better understand the differences in government and policy between the Islamists and the secularists.

MS. WITTES: Great. Thank you. So you said that Sharia is not explicitly in the constitution. That was a compromise that Nahda made with the secularists. But where are the Islamic principles in the constitution?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: What left? Some of our people -- our members ask what left in Nahda? What left of Islam in this movement once it accepts all universal values of human rights like democracy, like human rights equality, we argue that Islam is coming for the interests of people, for human kind. So any sort -- any way of achieving the interest of people. So it's Islamic order -- it mentioned in holy text are not mentioned because there is -- in Islam there is many pillars, many (inaudible) or principles. Whether this principle is achieved through this way or another way, the important is to achieve the main goal of Islam. The main goal is to implement justice in the Earth, to get rid of the injustice, to implement the peace in the world, to fight against the poverty. So it's -- so when they consider that Islam sort of punishment, this is the problem. Some people who haven't enough knowledge about Islam, they consider Islam a sort of punishment -- not ideology or a plan of giving services to the human kind, all humanity. So they insist that Sharia have been included in the constitution.

But part of our citizen, they're afraid. They fear Sharia because they haven't also enough knowledge about Sharia. Sharia is justice, freedom, peace, equality.

But some implementation of Sharia -- some experience practice of Islam in Pakistan, in Somalia -- gives very bad image of Islam. So many -- some of our elite they fear Sharia. So because the constitution has not based only through the agreements compromises, so you avoid this slogan. And the important thing is to guarantee the main freedom. If we guarantee -- if the constitution guarantee the main freedom, it's in it for us. It's Islam because Islam comes for that.

So discussion happen about the constitution whether the human rights, the declaration -- the international declaration of human rights are universal or we have to make some exceptions. We accept to consider the human rights declaration as universal, because we will be very happy if the human rights -- our problem is we have declared -- this declaration is that this declaration is not implemented. So let this declaration in practice -- implemented we will be very happy.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Next, Mohammed Alshenoui.

MR. ALSHENOU: I am from Voice of America. You have been a man of compromises. Would another party continue its coalition with two small secular parties or would seek more power for secular parties and could it include at the end Salafi groups who accepted to participate in the political process?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: If they give up using violence and accept the democracy. Because democracy now considers (inaudible) and believe -- so our sort of blaspheme. If they accept working within the law, so we will be very happy.

In Egypt, for example, all Egyptian Salafis gave up using violence, accept the rule of law, the democracy. Why not? Many leftists -- they were violent in (inaudible). Now they accept the democracy and working within the law. It's good.

QUESTIONER: But the coalition in general?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: And the coalition -- I believe that Tunisia still, for the next period after the election -- for the next five years -- needs a government of coalition also between -- not between Islamists, Nahda and Salafists. But between Islamists and the main constituent of the country, the Islamist and secularists.

MS. WITTES: A coalition of the (inaudible)?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: Yes. Because moderate Islamists and moderate secularists can work together. But the opposite -- the opposite secularist and the extremist Salafist and leftist, they can meet only to fight.

MS. WITTES: Okay. Let's go to the back. Is that Ariel?

MS. BONINNI: Hi. I'm Suzanna Boninni from the Italian Press Agency in Cronus. You just mentioned it would be very good if Tunisia will soon implement human right and my question is about human right. In waiting for human right to be implemented, do you think -- what do you think about the Amina case? Is it right that she is --

MR. GHANNOUCHI: The what?

MS. BONINNI: Amina. This is the case -- I mean everyone is talking about in the world and if you want to answer in French, it's completely fine with me. Or if you want me to repeat the question in French, I will be happy.

MS. WITTES: Thank you.

MR. GHANNOUCHI: I don't know Amina herself. I know that she is treated by some doctors -- psychological. I think she has some problems I know a doctor. He told me that she is treated in -- with some his friends. So I think it's a matter of traditions. Any society has own traditions. And anyone who break with tradition can find himself in not good position. So Tunisian woman -- Tunisian woman

protests against this behavior, which considered as not social behavior. So it's exceptional case in Tunisia.

MS. WITTES: So you don't think it's an example of anything larger?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: Not really.

MS. WITTES: You think this is an individual?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: Individual matter.

MS. WITTES: Okay. Next, Alexis.

MS. ARIA: Hi. Alexis Aria for the Congressional Research Service. You touched on the attack against the U.S. Embassy already. I just wanted to bring us back to that for a little bit. In the U.S. Embassy's statement on the verdicts, they did suggest that they disagreed with the verdicts. They also suggested that the attack had not been fully investigated or that the key perpetrators had not been prosecuted. I wonder if you can give us insight, given that this is under investigation in Tunisia, into what you think the causes of the attack were -- whether the attack was premeditated or spontaneous? And similarly for the assassination of Chokri Belaid. Whether you think that there is evidence to suggest why the assassination took place, where we are with the investigation and what steps have been taken to date to prosecute it? Thank you.

MS. WITTES: Okay. So the investigations of these two significant violent incidents.

MR. GHANNOUCHI: Both of them is continued -- are continued. The investigation about Chokri Belaid. Some of the perpetrators have been arrested. Some of them, the police look for them to be arrested and judged.

Also the --

MS. WITTES: The attack on --

MR. GHANNOUCHI: -- the attack also is under investigation by the police and by the court.

MS. WITTES: So you're saying it's not over yet. There may be more arrests.

MR. GHANNOUCHI: Yes.

MS. WITTES: Mr. Ladheri, do you want to add anything on any of those?

MR. LADHERI: Yes. Just maybe the question about Amina from the (inaudible) moment also.

MR. GHANNOUCHI: Yesterday, I visited New York and I am visiting now Washington. I didn't see anyone like Amina.

MR. LADHERI: It was asked (inaudible) actually the parents of Amina declared that she has experience some psychological troubles. But, anyway, the tribunal decided yesterday about this case because she broke the law because it is not acceptable under the Tunisian law. I think also it's the case here to be (inaudible) in such way. But, they also sentence -- the case and the -- she has just a fine to pay. So she's not arrested.

But regarding the U.S. Embassy case also -- we are not actually happy about the decision, as I said earlier, about the verdict. But we have to keep in mind the importance of the reforms and the very substantial and radical reforms to be implemented. Even security forces as well as in the judiciary in Tunisia. Because it is the system of the --Ben Ali system -- it is the heritage of Ben Ali system and this system now -- judiciary or the police -- is and we undertook an important work including with partnership with our friends, I think, from the European Union and also United States

offer to help in that. Regardless, it's important to keep in mind that, for example, the police are not -- don't have, for the moment, the necessary tools, for example, to have prosecution or investigation like we can have here in the United States. They used to use torture, for example, to obtain information. Now it's not possible. It's not acceptable to do that.

So for this reason it's quite complicated, but, anyway, there is an important -- there is an important result, for example, in the Chokri Belaid case. And yesterday the Interior Minister declared that there is news and they say regardless a real important work done by the security forces and by the judges instructing this affair which remain confidential for the moment. But we have to keep in mind that in only a few weeks or days after the assassination, the security forces identified the persons and arrested some of them. So there is progress in this regard, but we have to keep in mind that all of the system should be, you know, reformed to have more important and more efficient results. Thank you.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Okay. I think we have time for --

MR. GHANNOUCHI: I think we believe that this assassination is a political crime and political crime usually is made very with technicity, very scientific and the techniques very sophisticated. And, for example, the matter of Hariri in Lebanon so far, the matter of Kennedy, President Kennedy so far is still mysterious. So it takes time, but the Tunisian police now this crime is very clear, who perpetrate it is known. So the matter is a matter of time to catch this person.

MS. WITTES: I think perhaps what the Kennedy assassination teaches is that even when all the facts are in, some will not be convinced that they have the real story. Okay, one or two more questions. The gentleman in the blue shirt. Yes.

MALE SPEAKER: Thank you. My name is Mohammed Ashmeil. I work for the Embassy of Egypt in D.C. and I think you are entirely right that Tunisian's should be proud for pioneering change in the region and always look at your people for that. My question is regarding the economic and social challenges that you mentioned. I think that these frustrations were central in the uprisings in Egypt and in Tunisia, of course. But nowadays there has not been a focus by the political debate on these issues. So I wonder if at Nahda you have a vision regarding the economy or regarding the type of reforms that were in place before the uprising. And also whether you have maybe a country in mind as a model for economic policies? Or maybe -- is it a subject that don't come up in the leadership of Nahda and is left at the government and technocratic level? Thank you.

MR. GHANNOUCHI: The economy problem is very important because a revolution have been made for two reasons -- freedom and justice. Freedom is there in Tunisia. No party is forbidden. No newspaper forbidden. So Tunisian people are living with freedom never has been seen. Now the problem how we can balance between freedom and order. How can coexist between freedom and order. The society needs both. Now, in Tunisia, the freedom is needed to be helped and to go together with the order. This is the problem in this matter.

But the second goal of the revolution has not yet achieved the justice because Ben Ali legacy left huge of corruption in the country and left unbalance between the regime -- the cost regime and the inside regime. It takes -- needs long time to remedy this disease. We think once we -- the constitution will be accepted, the elections organized or held. I think the Tunisian is able to have real growth, real development because Tunisian people is homogeneous people. The level of education is good. Also,

Tunisia in the center of the world between Arab and Europe, so we have -- we are in good place to see and to promote and to achieve the first democracy in Arab world and Tunis is able to be like Malaysia, like Singapore. There is a real ability in Tunisia. Now we try to encourage the investor -- foreign investor, tourism and try to balance between the regimes in Tunisia.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Yes. The lady with the silver bracelet there. I can see -- yes.

MS. CAMPOS: Thank you. Lorraine Campos. I'm Desk (inaudible) of the International Monetary Fund for Tunisia. I wanted to ask of the constitutional process. You mentioned that there was agreement among the committees and the draft will be sent very soon to the assembly. Yesterday, on the contrary, Moody's downgraded the country and one of the issues that mentioned is that there was not agreement on the constitution and some delays can be expected and, therefore, the elections that now were postponed for the end of this year might be further delayed for the beginning of 2014. Could you tell us which is the situation because I don't -- I'm not seeing very clear what is happening with that -- which has, of course, could have an impact on the economic developments?

MS. WITTES: So you're saying Moody's has downgraded Tunisia's credit rating because it's citing delays in the constitutional and election process. Okay.

MR. GHANNOUCHI: I think some very small details left undiscussed between the main parties in the parliament and the civil society. But I think very soon the last -- the final draft will be sent to the president.

MS. WITTES: And so you expect elections this year?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: Yes, yes. I expect the election this year. I expect

that.

MS. WITTES: Okay. Let's see if we can sneak in perhaps one more question.

MR. BASLI: Thank you. Ambassador Basli and leader of political party in Tunisia. I take this advantage -- this opportunity to speak -- I'm not going to ask a question to (inaudible) Ghannouchi. I will ask a question to you, to Martin, Ambassador and to (inaudible) -- to the Americans.

MR. GHANNOUCHI: You can question me in Tunisia.

MR. BASLI: No, because I'm very honored to be part of this event to hear (inaudible) Ghannouchi that have the pleasure to meet him as a leader. He received me in his office a long time ago and he's spoke exactly the same as today. That's why I felt quite confident about the future of Tunisia. Of course, we are very proud and very happy that Tunisia is embracing this value -- this universal values of democracy and human rights we are seeing at the beginning.

And my question is just this. What American, what Europe -- especially America because we are here in this Brookings event. I was told yesterday that a democratic countries in the Arab world meet the interest of America. It should meet the interest of the Middle East -- of the Arabs, first.

MS. WITTES: Of course.

MR. BASLI: And American, secondly. Why not? But what do the interests of American division? This is the main question. And, if America and the western world were backing up Israel for 50 years, it is not because of the Jewish lobby in America we live in. It is because Israel was a democratic country. This is my belief. And for this reason, in democratic countries surrounding another democratic (inaudible),

they were in conflict for 50 years. What America? At the end of the day is to make peace between Israel and the Arabs. I think the best way to make peace between Arabs and Israel is through democracy. Nothing else. And this is why, I guess and I think, America should help the case of Tunisia to overcome this difficult period of time and to reach this compromise that Mr. Ghannouchi is talking about today and to finally make the rule of law and democratic institution that could fight equally with Israel and equally with the free world, which is American and Europe.

So for this reason, I want -- my question is what America can do in this political target, which is our target? We want to make peace, too. But we want to have a state for Palestine, want to have equal rights and we want, also, at the end of the day, to live freely and equal as America wish. And Martin tried a lot to (inaudible).

MS. WITTES: He certainly did.

MR. BASLI: I know he was ambassador (inaudible).

MS. WITTES: Thank you very much. Thank you. Behind you. All right, well, I appreciate the perspective and I'll try to answer the question as briefly as I can and speak not only as a scholar and someone who has been looking at precisely these issues of democratic development in the Arab world for about 10 years, but also as somebody who worked on these issues for the U.S. government.

It's been my view for a number of years that the United States has an interest in supporting democratic development in the Arab world because of our core interests as a global super power and as a country with friends and partners in the region. Our interest in ensuring the free flow of energy to global markets. Our interests in countering terrorism. Our interests in protecting our allies all require a region that is stable and a region where we can find cooperation and partnership. And at the broadest

level, in a globalized world, for a United States that is rooted in a liberal international order of free markets and free flow of people and goods, we need a stable Middle East. And it's been quite evident to me for many years and I think it is quite explicit now in American policy that the gap between leaders and citizens in these Arab states was not sustainable and it was fundamentally unstable and destabilizing. And anyone who had any doubts about that before 2011, the reality is clear today. The region will not return to stability until there is a revised relationship between government and citizens. And this is the struggle that Tunisia is engaged in today. And I have to say that the degree of dialogue -- not only amongst political actors, but between political actors and civil society and Tunisia -- has been essential to the stability of Tunisia's transition so far and its ability to make progress in this regard.

So I'm an optimist on democratic development in Tunisia and I think the United States has committed itself as a matter to policy to support these democratic transitions. It's trying to do so in a very complex environment -- both in the region and at home. And it's facing a lot of pressures. But I think if we hold to the core fact that this is where the region is going, this is what the people of the region want and it is in the interest of the United States, that we can find ways to work together to advance it.

So thank you and Mr. Ghannouchi, if you have any final words?

MR. GHANNOUCHI: I thank you.

MS. WITTES: Okay. Let me thank you for honoring us with your presence, your very thoughtful --

MR. GHANNOUCHI: I invite you and all our colleagues here to visit Tunisia. Tunisia is very nice country and it's nicer without Ben Ali.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. Thank you very much.

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