

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION  
2013 U.S.-ISLAMIC WORLD FORUM

Tuesday, June 11, 2013

**PLENARY IV: ARAB OPINION, IDENTITY, AND THE RESHAPING OF THE MIDDLE EAST**

**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Moderator:**

KHALED ELGINDY  
Fellow, Saban Center for Middle East Policy  
The Brookings Institution, United States

**Speakers:**

DALIA MOGAHED  
President/Chief Executive Officer, Mogahed  
Consulting  
Former Executive Director, Gallup Center for  
Muslim Studies, United States

SAMER SHEHATA  
Associate Professor of International and Area  
Studies  
Middle East Programs Coordinator  
University of Oklahoma, United States

SHIBLEY TELHAMI  
Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development,  
University of Maryland, College Park  
Nonresident Senior Fellow, Saban Center for  
Middle East Policy, The Brookings Institution,  
United States

\* \* \* \* \*

ANDERSON COURT REPORTING  
706 Duke Street, Suite 100  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. ELGINDY: Thank you for joining us this morning. I know it's quite early, and we very much appreciate having you with us for what I know will be a very exciting discussion. We have this morning a star-studded panel to talk about a very important subject, but let me begin by introducing myself. I am Khaled Elgindy, I am a Fellow at the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution, and I'll be moderating this morning's discussion on Arab opinion and identity.

So let me introduce our distinguished panel. To my immediate left is Dr. Shibley Telhami, who is a non resident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, as well as the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland, College Park. He has taught at numerous universities and is the author of many publications, including the best-selling book, *The Stakes: America And the Middle East*, and most recently, his two recent books, *The Peace Puzzle: America's Quest For Arab-Israeli Peace*, and the book that is the subject of this morning's discussion, *The World Through Arab Eyes: Arab Public Opinion And The Reshaping Of The Middle East*.

And then, to his left, we have Rashad Hussein, who is the United States Special Envoy to the organization of Islamic Cooperation, where he was appointed by President Obama in 2009, and as part of his position, he was involved in the writing of President Obama's now-famous *New Beginning* speech almost exactly four years ago, or right around four years ago.

And to his left, we have Dalia Mogahed, who is currently President and CEO of Mogahed Consulting in Washington D.C., and she is former Executive Director and Senior Analyst

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

for the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, where she led analysis of surveys of Muslims worldwide, and she has coauthored with John Esposito, the groundbreaking book, *Who Speaks For Islam: What A Billion Muslims Really Think*.

And, last but not least, Dr. Samir Shehata, who is Associate Professor of International Relations, International Area studies, and Middle East Program Coordinator at the University of Oklahoma. He was previously Assistant Professor of Arab Politics at Georgetown University, and is the author of numerous publications, including *Shop Floor Culture and Politics in Egypt*, and is the editor of *Islamist Politics in the Middle East*.

And, with that, let us begin our discussion. I'm going open with a question to Shibley; you've been around, obviously, you've done polling for quite a long time, what compelled you to write this book at this moment?

MR. TELHAMI: Well, thank you, first of all, for starting the conversation on this specific issue, because it allows me to put it in some context. I think now, with the Arab uprising, few people doubt that Arab public opinion plays a role, but, in fact, 20-some years ago, or even 10 years ago, there were many doubters, and they still are. And those doubters have to deal with the fact that it's still a world of power in states and governments, and it is for sure. But what people have assumed is that, therefore, public opinion didn't matter, particularly when the Middle East was made up largely of authoritarian rulers.

And yet, as I was studying the region, or writing about it, and also writing about it from the power perspective, it is inevitable that I would notice that rulers in the region were behaving as if public opinion didn't matter. And that, in some ways, you can document how, in fact, public

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

opinion was important, although we had no full idea about what public opinion is, we're speculating, since we didn't really have scientific public opinion polls. And it really started with my first book, which was on the negotiations between Israel and Egypt in the late 70s on the Camp David Accords.

When I was writing about those negotiations, in one of the first sessions in the negotiations between then Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat, and then Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin. Sadat was saying to Begin, he can't possibly do the kind of concessions Begin was asking him to do. And Menachem Begin said why can't you, you're essentially a dictator, you can tell the people whatever you want them, they'll believe you. And Sadat was so angry, by the way, that they had to be separated for the duration of the negotiations. They never negotiated together, they were brought together after the agreements were actually negotiated.

And, ultimately, Sadat paid with his life, even though he still didn't do what Begin was asking him to do, which was allow some Israeli settlements on the Sinai. Later on, it was obvious, when you look at how some Arab rulers behave, particularly if you look, for example, at the King of Jordan, then King Hussein of Jordan, how, even in 1990, 1991, here was this American ally, highly dependent, arguably one of the most dependent rulers on the United States, and also dependent on foreign aid, economic aid from rich Gulf states. And comes the '91 war, and the U.S. asks him to join the coalition against Iraq, a coalition that the U.S. was able to persuade Syria to join, and he refused to do so.

And he refused to do so in large part because he assessed that the price he would have to pay in terms of his legitimacy and public opinion was way too high for him, and he was prepared to undermine his relationship with the U.S. and the cutoff of aid from the Gulf to do so. Yet,

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

at the same time, we had the Saudis who seemingly went against public opinion by acquiescing in the stationing of American troops on Arab soil during that war, and got away with it. There was not the kind of backlash. But did they really get away with it? Because, in the end, one can make an argument that, yes, they got away with it, if you're only looking at survival. But did they pay a price? Did we all pay a price for the presence of American forces? Were Al-Qaeda, in part, driven by the presence of American forces?

So that got me thinking in the 1990s about writing about public opinion, under what circumstances it mattered. I wrote a lot of articles during that decade, but as the information or the revolution was expanding with these transnational TV stations, Al Jazeera and Alarabiya later, and so forth, I fully appreciated that this was bound to have an impact on public opinion and on how Arabs define themselves. One point I wanted to make, though, is that one of the things we didn't quite appreciate at the time, and I think we still, in a way, don't fully appreciate, is that this relationship between opinion and identity, how people identify themselves. And I think there was kind of a silly debate -- I call it silly up to a point. I mean, it's a serious debate, but really, at some level, superficial, which was did the Pan Arab movement die with Nasser with the '67 war, did people stop wanting to have Arabs being unified?

Well, you can make that argument, but the fact is, identity is much deeper than political movements. So when an Arab says I'm an Arab, they're not necessarily saying I'm ideologically, even that I want, I envision unity, but the fact that they identify themselves as Arab or as Muslim has consequences. Why? Because when you say I'm an Arab and I'm a Muslim, while you're saying at the same time an Egyptian or Jordanian or Saudi or another, you are linking yourself

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

to other Arabs and Muslims. That means that you care about what they think. That means that the narrative about what is good for Arabs, what is good for Muslims is central, not just for me as an individual, but also for government's legitimacy.

And, for that reason, I think, foreign policy is always part of domestic policy in the Arab world, you can't separate the two. And that's what we sought to do by having these public opinion polls over a decade trying to study this relationship between identity and opinion on the one hand, the media and how the media is influencing identity over time. And one of the interesting things is that we find over the decade preceding the uprising a decline in the individual's affinity with their states, although there are variations from country to country, an increase in the number of people who identify themselves more as Muslim or as Arab. And even correlated to that, not just that you have more people identifying themselves in transnational terms, those who identify themselves with the state are a minority, except in Lebanon.

But even when you ask an Arab, you say, do you want your government, which is supposed to represent the people, the citizens of that government, do you want the government to serve the interest of its people or do you want the government to serve the interests of Muslims or Arabs, and what you get is more than half say they want the government to serve the interests of Arabs and Muslims. Again, that puts foreign policy at center stage of the discourse in the Arab world.

MR. ELGINDY: Shibley, let me, I want to come back to this point about identity and public opinion a little bit later, but let me just ask you before we bring in some of the other panelists; I mean, obviously, the Arab world is quite diverse. What is it that we mean when we talk about Arab

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

public opinion? We know that Arabs have an enormous spectrum of views on religion, on democracy, on -- and it varies from country to country, and within countries, obviously among various demographics.

So is there such a thing is, what do we mean by Arab public opinion, is there a set of issues on which there is affirm consensus in the Arab world, is there something distinctly Arab about public opinion in the region?

MR. TELHAMI: First off all, I think we do mean by Arab public opinion more than one thing, we mean public opinion, first of all.

MR. ELGINDY: Right.

MR. TELHAMI: Because, you know, a lot of people, whether it's Arab or not, or Egyptian or Jordanian, a lot of people have, as I said, assumed that public opinion doesn't matter much in authoritarian rule, so disregard it, work with the rulers, and they can find a way to get the public online.

MR. ELGINDY: Right.

MR. TELHAMI: So that's one thing. But I think, when we talk about Arab public opinion, the question is, is there something common, a thread on major issues that you find across the Arab world? And I argue that there is. And you can see the commonalities, despite the differences on some issues, whether they're regional or sectarian. Broadly speaking, on major issues that define the relationship between the Arab world and the rest of the world, toward foreign powers, toward the United States, toward core issues such as war and peace, toward Iraq, toward the Arab-Israeli relationship, toward Palestine, you find incredible commonalities. There are

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

variations, but what's striking more is commonalities, not the differences.

MR. ELGINDY: Right. I want to ask Samer, Shibley has made the point that, not only does public opinion matter in terms of foreign policy, or the policies of Arab governments, but that it's always mattered. Do you agree with that, for one, and maybe talk a little bit about how foreign policy has affected and been affected by public opinion.

MR. SHEHATA: Sure. I certainly agree with it, and I think the question now becomes Arab public opinion mattered to leaders who were, in many cases, in most cases, not democratically elected, but how is it going to change now? In other words, certainly, foreign policy decisions and posturing Arab leaders took public opinion into consideration, and sometimes that meant, because many of these states were perceived to be or were compliant or dependent on outside support, sometimes that meant making a foreign policy decision, but also unleashing the security services at the same time to absorb the consequences of decisions that were not seen as being in the interests of those nation states, but also Arab interests, as well.

And so I think the question now is, and this kind of mirrors what Shibley said, certainly public opinion was important in the past, how is it going to be important differently in the present, in some states, where there is an expectation that the foreign policies of these states are going to more effectively and more sincerely represent the interests of the citizens, as well as the Arab public. Egypt is a perfect example of this. And so we, and I think there's an argument to be made that, if one were to do a kind of deep history of the Egyptian uprising of 2011, you would begin with the popular mobilization against Israeli policies and American support for Israeli policies as a result of the second intifada.



There's no question that that was the reemergence of massive street politics in Egypt, so the question now is, are these regimes going to be more aggressive, more sincere in their pursuing of national interests, as well as Arab and Islamic interests? And I think we see that with the changed posture of the Egyptian governments after the uprising, both under the military council, but particularly now under Mr. Morsi with regard to, for example, the question of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, their perspective on Gaza, their perspective on Hamas, and so on. And so I think Arab publics are going to play an even more significant role in effecting, not determining, but effecting foreign policy in the region.

MR. ELGINDY: And it's not even the case that American public opinion determines, even in the United States, public opinion doesn't determine foreign policy.

MR. SHEHATA: Exactly.

MR. ELGINDY: I mean, I can distinctly remember before the Iraq war, there was massive opposition to an American invasion, and quite vocal opposition, even on Capitol Hill. So public opinion is not clearly the factor, but it is among many factors. But is it the case that it is becoming more a factor or less a factor, as far as the way policies are made, whether domestic or foreign, in some of these new governments? Sam?

MR. SHEHATA: Well, I think the assumption would be that it's going to be taken much more seriously by leaders who are depending on the ballot box and not simply dependent on massive security forces and fraudulent elections to stay in power. Now, at the same time, that doesn't mean that they don't have national interests, and they try to balance these things, certainly, but I think it's likely to be the case that public opinion is going to be taken into greater consideration

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

when it comes to regional politics and foreign policy more generally.

MR. ELGINDY: I'm going to ask you a little bit later, maybe, to elaborate on the point that you made in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how they was a factor in Egyptian uprising, or that part, the culture, maybe, that led to that point. I'm going to ask you, at some point, to clarify that, but I'd like to ask Dalia; you've obviously followed public opinion for a long time. What do you see as, over the past ten years, both before and after, before and since these various uprisings, what have you seen change in trends in Arab public opinion?

MS. MOGAHED: Thank you. First, I want to say that I read the book and found it very useful and very interesting, so I think we all got a copy, and I would encourage you to take a look at it, I think it's an excellent piece of work. I think that there are two big changes that, as I look at public opinion over the past ten years, that that occurred. One is the relationship with the state, and two is how people are viewing their country or their relationship with the West more broadly, and the United States more specifically.

So, on the first one, the relationship with the state, I think that, more and more, people specifically in the Arab world lost their trust and lost their reliance or they're looking to the state to solve their problems. So one thing we looked at in the run up to the Arab uprising was how people were both, felt more and more controlled by the state and yet more and more, their needs not met by the state. So the state was neither an over protective father, paternal figure that was not letting you do anything, but at least taking care of you, taking care of your health care, your schooling.

It was the worst of both worlds, so if we, specifically, if we look at Egypt as an

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

example, what we saw change over the past several years was that, at the same time Egyptians felt that they were less and less free, they also felt less and less taken care of by the state, their satisfaction with just basic state functions deteriorated year after year after year, so that that famous social contract that we always hear about just disintegrated, and it set the ground for what we saw in 2011.

The second thing that I think changed was the relationship between the United States -- rather between Arabs and what they saw as the outside world. I think that the key shift that I saw in Arab public opinion between the Bush years and the Obama years wasn't necessarily a huge uptick in the approval of the United States, it wasn't a quantitative difference, but it was a qualitative difference. There was a shift from a perception that Islam itself was under siege, the idea of a war on Islam, this was something that was widely believed, it wasn't just, you know, the propaganda of extremists. Unfortunately, majority around the Middle East actually believed that the actions of United States were motivated by just the hatred of Islam itself.

MR. ELGINDY: And did you find that that cut across various demographic groups, or was it concentrated among --

MS. MOGAHED: It actually did cut across --

MR. ELGINDY: -- politicized --

MS. MOGAHED: -- basic demographic, various demographic groups, the educated, the young, the old, there wasn't --

MR. ELGINDY: Religious, secular --

MS. MOGAHED: Absolutely, religious or secular. What changed, what I think, I

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

think that the key shift, though, is Obama has his detractors and, in some cases, approval of the United States has even gone down. Now, in most cases, it hasn't, it's either stayed steady or gone up, but what has really changed, and I think a much more important shift, is the kind of criticism is an attack on American policy, whereas it was also an attack on American policy, but the intention that is attributed to that policy has changed.

So whereas before President Bush's religious background, the actual belief that he was waging a crusade, you know, people believed that and understood American policy through this lens. Now American policy is criticized just as policy. President Obama is seen as acting in the best interests in the United States, but it is now about policy, not about a war on Islam.

MR. ELGINDY: Right.

MS. MOGAHED: There is a very important shift where President Obama is seen as a political actor, not someone waging a religious war against an entire religion.

MR. ELGINDY: So would you say, then, the situation has returned sort of to the status quo ante, it's gone back to the old normal?

MS. MOGAHED: I think so. I think that that's actually, President Obama's biggest contribution, almost his legacy is that he shifted us from the realm of religious conflict to one of a conflict of policy. And the good thing about conflicts of policy, as difficult as they are and as complicated as they are, is our research shows a correlation between people believing that the conflict between, you know, broadly Muslim societies and the United States, when they see that conflict as being motivated or being driven by policy, they are more likely to see it as resolvable. When they see it as being motivated by religion, they are more likely to see it as inevitable.

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

MR. ELGINDY: Right. Let me ask Rashad on this very point. Obviously, you've traveled all over the Muslim world all over the world, and you've come into contact with public opinion directly. What is, and as I mentioned before, you were part of the team that helped President Obama prepare the New Beginning speech and that vision that was articulated, what have you seen in these four years to indicate, has there been a shift, or where are we today as compared with January 2009?

MR. HUSSEIN: Thank you so much, thank you to the organizers, again, for putting on a wonderful conference. And, really, thank you to my fellow panelists for all of your contributions, all the data, it's been very helpful to policymakers. And much of the data that's in Shibley's book and what Dalia has presented over the years tracks with much of our engagements throughout the Muslim world and dealing with governments and society and others.

I think one of the very clear points from the data, and it's coming out in this panel, is that the level of distrust that has been built up over decades is something, it's a very significant level, and that's something that we recognized coming in. So, oftentimes, people look at that data and they'll take a look at these issues, many of them are tough issues, and they'll say, you know, you're really in a tough spot doing this type of engagement, but I remain optimistic about it for a few reasons. First is that, my philosophy coming in to this position was that the policy issues are key to our engagement. So when I sit down with governments, in most, the majority of countries sit down with civil society leaders or to audiences recognizing that reality, we start off engaging based on a lot of these issues.

Now, the difficult part is that, because there's been so much mistrust that's built up

ANDERSON COURT REPORTING  
706 Duke Street, Suite 100  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

over the decades on these issues, people will take a look at any given, any particular foreign policy issue and they'll say that if there's not enough progress as they want to see on it, or the progress is slow, slower than they want to see, then oftentimes people will default to the old way of thinking and saying, well, this is the same thing that the United States has been doing for a long period of time. But I do see a shift, and the reason why I see a shift is because there's been a shift in policies. And let's go through some of those policy issues.

If you start with the war in Iraq. I mean, in the data that Shibley presents, it's clear that that was the, one of the strongest bases for tension between the United States and the Muslim world. In fact, Shibley writes that the unfavorable ratings of the United States in the six countries I studied peaked during the Iraq war, and it was after Obama began winding down the war in 2011, that others began to see the U.S. in a slightly more favorable light. So you have these decades of mistrust and people say it's because of policies. So then the question becomes, okay, let's look at the policies of this administration and let's take a poll; how many people in the Muslim world favor ending the Iraq war.

Well, I think it would be overwhelming, but the reason why, perhaps, the immediate shift hasn't been overwhelming is because of that distrust that's built up over time, not just with the United States, but of government in general, people will say, well, it's not quite done yet, or what's the intention behind that. So I think it's going to take a little bit of time before you see the bigger shift in numbers take place. Take a look at the next issue of Afghanistan, for example, if you did a poll in the Muslim world; how many people would like to see the United States involvement in the war in Afghanistan wind down? Again, you would have an overwhelming response. And that's what we're

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

doing. But, on the other hand, you have those that say, is it really winding down, is it winding down fast enough, is it going to actually come to an end?

And the reason for that is because of the decades and decades of mistrust again, so that's something that we come up against again. If you look at another major issue, the transitions that are taking place in the Muslim world, I was struck by a passage in Shibley's book here, too, where he says that the notable thing here is that, given the overwhelming negative views of the United States and the Arab world. The Arab verdict on the American handling of the uprisings is relatively positive, despite some Arab's criticisms of the American role, the Obama administration's relatively early embraced the public uprisings, and the lack of any heavy-handed intervention in Egypt resonated with other Arabs.

So, of course, there are grievances and there are people that say, you know, some of the shifts haven't occurred fast enough, but overwhelmingly, I think there's a recognition that we're moving in a positive direction there, as well. Now, for the people that are holding out or may not be quite convinced, again, maybe that's because of the views that they've had for so long, which are going to take time to shift. Now, of course, one of the biggest issues between the United States and Muslim communities around the world, we see this wherever we go, I think it tracks pretty well with Shibley's data on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and that's been true whether I've been in India, Indonesia, Nigeria, I'm talking about places outside the Arab world, as well, it's one of the first questions that we're asked about.

But when you talk to people and say what needs to be done about that, you know, people might have different variations of this solution, but overwhelmingly, people will say a two-state

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

solution in the Middle East, and, again, starting with the second day of the administration when the President appointed Senator Mitchell to be his Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, this is something we've been working on consistently, persistently, diligently and something that, as you know, Secretary Kerry has been working on in the short time that he's been in office, and this is another area where I think, when you look at a conflict that's gone on for so many decades, people will say, you know, is this another President who's coming in and saying that he's going to do something about it, or is there actually going to be movement on this.

So I think it remains to be seen what public opinion will look like, given the efforts that take place over the next couple of years on that issue. And, in many ways, it is very clear that if we are able to achieve some type of a breakthrough on that issue, then all the other things that we're doing in the policy realm and in the nonpolitical realm, I think will turn to gold in the sense that that's the one issue where people, people view the relationship through the lens often of the Arab-Israeli conflict. So you might have a discussion about what we've done in the nonpolitical realm, and people say that's all very important and those are the right things to do, but then when you ask them about the Cairo speech and people say things like we haven't seen enough follow through on what the President said in Cairo, what they really mean is that they haven't seen a breakthrough in Middle East peace. Because if you go through that speech, you'll see very clearly that we've pretty much done what the President said that we're going to do, and even in the area of Middle East peace, the effort has been very persistent.

So that's where I think we stand in the political realm. Now, outside of that, it's important to note that much of what we're doing in the Muslim world since the President came into



ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

office is not something that's driven by public opinion and it's not done with an eye on getting an uptick in a lot of these polls. When the President came in, he identified entrepreneurship as a key area because of the demographics, the youth demographic, the need to create jobs for the thousands and thousands of people that would be entering the work force, and he also saw it as important because entrepreneurship is often an area when you promote in which individuals push the envelope from, at a social level, as well. They're the people that have big ideas and produce changes in society, not just in the economic realm, but in the social and political realm, as well.

And that's why we identified entrepreneurship, and the President hosted a summit which he announced in Cairo in 2010, and Prime Minister Erdogan hosted a follow up summit, and we've been doing this ever since, and made it a staple of what we're doing. Now, there were those that said before the first summit that I don't think you guys get it, because you're not going to get an uptick in polling based on entrepreneurship because people will see it as an end-around on Middle East peace, and you're not focusing on the key issue. And our response was, that's not why we're doing it, we're doing it because it's the right thing to do. And there are certainly people that are spending all their time on Middle East peace, but you have to also plant the seeds in areas such as entrepreneurship, science, technology, health and other areas that are going to be necessary for prosperity, once we achieve a resolution in those political areas.

And the final things that I'll say, and I think it goes to Dalia's point really well is that, since the President has come in, we've really made a strong effort to address the increase in anti religious sentiments, that's whether it's Anti-Semitism, certainly Anti-Islamic sentiment, or religious intolerance generally. But I think sometimes people forget everything that's transpired over the last

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

few years. I mean, we, just since the President's come to office, there's been multiple occasions for the administration to speak out on these issues. Of course, there's the controversy over the establishment of the Islamic center near Ground Zero, and you can see where the administration came out on that. There was some controversy over what Terry Jones was trying to do, and you can see where the administration came out on that.

There was a film that came out last September, the Innocence of Muslims film, you have a President that goes to the General Assembly and says that the future cannot belong to those who slander the Prophet of Islam. You have Congressional hearings that took place on the radicalization of the American Muslim community, I think you saw a strong response on that issue. You have, you know, a Congresswoman who was sounding alarm over infiltration by the American Muslim community, and you saw the administration's response on that. We've had a number of events that have taken place that would, that some would try to use to create a clash between the United States and Muslim communities around the world, you had an attack at Ft. Hood, you had an attempted bombing of an airliner over Detroit, you had an attempted attack in Times Square, and you had these recent attacks in Boston.

And, every single time, you had the administration saying that none of this has anything to do with religion, it's not sanctioned by Islam, and that we shouldn't rush to judgment against any particular group of people. And I think that, when you contrast that view which we've taken in addressing some of the sentiment that's often used in our countries as a political tool, then that explains the basis for even some of the recent response we've seen to an attack in the United States such as what we saw in Boston versus the response that we've seen in other parts of the

world, including Europe after violent extremism has taken place there.

MR. ELGINDY: Right. So, basically, what I'm hearing, I think, from all of you is that it's the policy, stupid, right? It's the idea that public opinion is shaped largely by American policies, or at least Arab views of the United States are shaped largely by its policies. And that, in and of itself, I think, is a highly contentious view maybe beyond this particular discussion here, our circle here. But let me focus in on one particular issue that, Rashad, you mentioned, that Samar mentioned, and that certainly figures very prominently in your book, Shibley, and that's the issue of Israel and Palestine.

I was quite struck by, I think, all of you who were at the dinner the other night in which we heard the Secretary General of the OIC, the President of Afghanistan and others repeatedly make a reference to Palestinian rights, to the Palestinian issue, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general. And yet there is enormous skepticism among various circles in Washington that this issue really is important, and that it is central. Rashad, you mentioned that this is an issue that keeps coming up, whether it's Nigeria or India, well beyond the Arab world, certainly.

Shibley, I'm going to start with you, but I'd like everyone to maybe take a stab at this; why does this issue resonate, particularly at a moment when there's no shortage of crises around the world, but particularly in the Arab world and Syria, there's an enormous human tragedy that is unfolding before us, and yet the issue that people keep coming back to is Palestine. Shibley, what are your thoughts on why that's the case?

MR. TELHAMI: Well, you know, I've been calling this issue the prism of pain, the prism of pain through which Arabs see the world. And I think there's a lot of misunderstanding about this issue. When we call it the prism of pain, we're calling it the lens, as Rashad mentioned, through

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

which Arabs look at the world. What people confuse sometimes is to think that, therefore, this is the issue that a person wakes up in the morning thinking about. If you're an Egyptian mother or, you know, a Saudi father or a teenager in Lebanon, you don't wake up in the morning thinking Palestine, you're thinking about your ordinary life and all the priorities of putting food on the table.

MR. ELGINDY: Right.

MR. TELHAMI: Although, surprisingly, when you poll, even ask people to rank this issue in comparison to other priorities, it ranks pretty high. But what it is, it is a symbol of the Arab's relations with the rest of world. And I've been arguing throughout that, in some ways, you cannot separate Arab aspirations for freedom from authoritarian rulers, and their plight for dignity in the relationship with their governments, from their plight for dignity in the rest of the world, from a pursuit of respect around the world. The two are connected because of the way they identify themselves. And there is no issue that drives home what I call a collective humiliation in the relations of Arabs and the rest of the world than the issue of Palestine.

If Arabs are seeking dignity in the era of the uprisings, then the issue of Palestine is dignity's antithesis, it is exactly the opposite of what they're seeking. A lot of historical reasons for why that's the case, but if you look historically just at the decade before the uprisings, I think there's a lot of mischaracterizations of the driving forces behind the Arab's pursuit of freedom at home. If you look, obviously, they want jobs and they want better education, they want freedom from their governments, but that's been constant for decades. It's not, if you look at the whole decade preceding the Arab uprisings, what is striking is not that you had a new immense poverty in the Arab world, or new immense repression beyond what Arabs had experienced, but when you ask what has

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

happened that tells you why does it happen now, in 2010 or 2011, certainly, the information revolution is one.

But if there was anything that gave more impetus over the entire decade, review the decade and see what happened over that decade from 1990 to 2010, it was all foreign policy and humiliation of foreign policy. You had Arabs, certainly, the Iraq war was one, but it starts with the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the conflict, and so forth. So I think the Palestinian issue, first of all, represents that humiliation, that's number one. Number two, I think there's an identification between Israel and the U.S. In some ways, you can argue it's a successive American and Israeli foreign policy. There's a motto in Washington, also it is in Israel, that there should not be a light between Israel and the United States, the U.S.

So we rarely even, when you look at the references in the Arab world, Israel and the U.S. are mentioned together, in some ways, they're tied together, they're bound together. So if you're angry with, if you're an Arab and you're angry with Israel, you're inevitably angry with the U.S., it's impossible, in some ways, part of the success of the projection of there's no light between Israel and the U.S. And, number three, I think, when you look at the Arab-Israeli conflict and compare it to some other conflicts, it's been ongoing for the duration of everyone's life, almost everyone's life in the Middle East, and it's an open wound that flares up every once in a while over which Arabs seem to have no control.

But, finally, if you look at, you know, the pursuit of respect in the world the Arabs want, if you look at the Israeli calculation vis-a-vis the Palestinian issue, in the absence of Palestinian-Israeli peace, Israelis feel that war could happen any minute, with any combination of

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

Arab states. And so, therefore, they feel they have to have total superiority over any combination of Arab forces, or even Muslim forces in the Middle East, because that is part of their sense of insecurity as long as this conflict is unresolved. But, on that, the U.S. has total support, says we're going to give them the edge to have that superiority over the combined Arab forces, any particular contingency.

Looked at from the Arab side, at a time when Arabs want to have respect and they want to have independence, and they want, they seek their place in the world, and you're looking at yourself as part of a 350 million Arabs, or half a billion Muslims in the Middle East, and you can't accept the notion that a country of 8 million people is going to dominate you. And so, for that reason, in my own opinion, it is very difficult to take that out of Arab aspirations, and it's very difficult to take the U.S. out of it, because the U.S. is built into that conflict. And so, as long as that conflict continues, the U.S. has that problem.

And all the polls that we have done over the decade prior to the Arab uprising, and since the Arab uprising, showed that the American evaluation of American foreign policy, while it was partly connected to Iraq, it was even more so connected to the Palestine question. It is inescapable, and it is a sad tragedy in our discourse it is dismissed because, you heard the speeches, and I am sure that, if somebody was here from the Wall Street Journal or even from other more liberal organizations of news in the U.S., they would say, oh, it's just talk, hot air, or they're trying to distract attention, or, no, it's Al Jazeera telling them it's important. Well, I'm sorry, this issue was important long before Al Jazeera came into play.

MR. ELGINDY: We need to, at some point, go to our audience. I know people have

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

a lot of questions, but I want everyone to be able to comment on this, but if you could do so briefly so that we can take questions from the audience. Or, if you want to defer and fold your answer into questions, there may be questions along similar lines, we can do that, as well. But would anyone like to comment on this particular issue? Yes, go ahead.

MR. SHEHATA: Just very briefly. I mean, I think Shibley is completely correct, and, in fact, one way to think about this is, this is poses the limit on any improvement on U.S. relations with the Arab world and the Muslim world. As long as there isn't significant change on this issue, that is going to pose a barrier to improvement in perceptions of the United States. And I think what I'm also concerned about, and I don't want to every emphasize this in this audience, but I think it's relevant to some of the points that Shibley made with regard to the reference to the Wall Street Journal, is that it's not simply a question of optics, it's not a prism if the Arabs somehow could put on different glasses or see the world differently, this issue wouldn't be as important, and it's not simply humiliation in a psychological sense, we're talking about real material dispossession, right?

We're talking about occupation, we're talking about barriers to the freedom of movement and so on, so it's not simply a psychological malady that the Arabs have that they're humiliated, and so on. There are real issues of independence, of freedom, of autonomy that are at stake. And, just very lastly, and this gets to something that Dalia said, I think that, for many people in the Arab world, then, the conclusion over the last 10 years, or even 23 years, is that this is a structural, systemic problem in American society, American foreign policy. And then, unfortunately, they look and say what is the difference between President Bush's administration with regard to this issue and what it has done and achieved, and President Obama? There's no difference, in fact, and

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

I think that should be very, very concerning.

MR. TELHAMI: Well, I'll just say on that point that, obviously, there are real issues for Palestinians and Israelis, I mean, you add to that the fact that this is a very holy place for Christians, Muslims and Jewish people around the world. You know, when you ask the question of why is everyone so focused on the situation, I think that's part of the equation, as well. Now, what we have done very differently, I think, than the previous administrations, you have a President that comes in and recognizes that there's going to be ups and downs, this issue has been built up for so long, it's not going to be solved immediately, but you have a President that, right when he comes into office, gets started working on it.

And I think that's, if you look at how other administrations have approached it, that's something that you can track empirically. And, of course, the efforts on this being persistent whether it was through Senator Mitchell or what Secretary Kerry is doing now, I think the effort has been there, and it's a matter of continuing to work through to try to achieve a breakthrough.

MR. ELGINDY: Great. Thank you, guys. Let's go ahead and take questions from our audience. Let's start right up here in the front.

QUESTIONER: It's been very informative in the conversations within the community of diplomats and religious leaders, and this has been a continued point that we return to, with a very, very eclectic gathering of people. The question has to do with, really, a preface. The Secretary of State, Kerry, has been very clear publicly that Israel is facing greater isolation, given a variety of factors. And so, given the instability, at least within Egypt and its government, given the pressures that are placed on Jordan, given the cold peace that exists between Israel and Egypt, and what we



ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

would call a diplomatic peace between Jordan and Israel, and then given what we continue to hear, I continue to hear from religious, anyway, in the Middle East is the fact the United States did not support Palestine's desire to be recognized within the life of the United Nations. Israel continues to violate United Nations' resolutions in Kerala on the relationship of Palestine to Israel. I mean, we could continue to run this down, you know them all better than I do.

What does all of this do in terms of the role that America is going to have to play, given, again, a very short time line? And also, going back to something that Rashad said, which is that religious in all of these Abrahamic faiths consider Jerusalem to be a holy city for all three faiths, not to be possessed, in a sense, by one.

MR. ELGINDY: Let's take a couple at a time, since they might be connected. Imam Majid?

MR. MAJID: My question is about public opinion. How much of the public opinion in a particular country like the United States inform the decision of the leader against the public opinion in the Arab world, like what Americans think about a particular situation inform and influence the President of the United States? No matter what Arab opinion is, the Muslim opinion versus external opinion or public opinion of another country in terms of forming public foreign policy, the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy in terms of (inaudible)?

MR. ELGINDY: And Helen?

QUESTIONER: Thank you. Shibley, in the demonstrations that led to the Arab Spring and during the Arab Spring, there was never a slogan of long live Palestine, death to America, death to Israel. During the Iranian revolution, death to America was one of the main

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

slogans, then what do you attribute in to? And how come, suddenly, now, the shift? I mean, was it not important, or what happened? Thank you.

MR. ELGINDY: Okay. So let's start with those three, we have on the role of the United States, the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policymaking, and Israel-Palestine in the Arab uprisings.

MR. TELHAMI: Yeah. Let me start, actually, in reverse in response to Helen's -- by the way, it's not entirely true that there was no slogan or foreign policy, there were. They were not the most noticeable ones. I happened to be there in Cairo right after, and going through Tahrir Square, and there were a number of such slogans. But that's not the point. What my point is that, the uprisings were, of course, a revolt against authoritarian rule as seeking freedom. When you ask why were people so angry with their rulers in the first place, it wasn't only domestic politics, because they were, of course, angry for the absence of jobs and freedom, all of the things that we know have been there for decades, not just immediately preceding the uprisings.

But if you look at the extra anger with the rulers over the whole decade preceding the uprising, they were embarrassed by the -- why was the Egyptian slogan immediately after the revolution (inaudible), raise your head high. They felt they were not raising their heads high. And why they were not raising their heads high, because if you look at that decade starting off we events that they were depressed about, the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the violence between Israel and Palestine. Look back in 1990 -- I mean, 2001, 2001 before 9/11, then the -- post 9/11. I wouldn't say 9/11 was the reason; it was mostly the Iraq war. But the Iraq war overwhelming majority of Egyptians, like the overwhelming majority of Arabs didn't want it.

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

Their governments not only couldn't stop it, but they were seen to be collaborating in it; and then you had the 2006 war with Hezbollah where people thought, the Arab public opinion was on Hezbollah's side overwhelmingly, and the governments were on the other side; in 2008, the Gaza war, 2009. Those were the events that made them even angrier with the rulers. Yes, they were throwing the rulers out, they were empty rulers, but you can't separate their anger with the rulers from the foreign policy anger. It's really built into it, and you can see it.

Now, on the question pertaining to American foreign policy specifically, one of the things that we find, and this is one of the things that I'm, you know, having a little bit of doubts about how we're proceeding with diplomacy, to be fair to the Obama administration, that I advised during the first term on this very issue. When we look at polls on the Arab-Israeli issue, among -- I do polling, by the way, among Israelis, as well as among Arabs on this issue, and we compare. And, yes, overwhelmingly, Arabs still support, in principle, a two-state solution based on a '67 border, as do Israelis. But what has changed, you know, since the 1990s is a betting game, which is now you have a majority of Arabs and majority of Israelis no longer believe that the two-state solution will ever happen.

They don't trust, and they don't trust that the U.S. is really trying to do it, particularly after the President started with the first term, backtracked, didn't work out. So there is a lot of frustration and disbelief. If you don't believe, if I am a leader or even a citizen, and I'm watching the exercise of the government telling me you must compromise, or you can come back, why don't you come back to the negotiating table if I believe that the more likely outcome is that we're going to be in conflict next year, not in peace, I would be an idiot to make a compromise. So what we need is

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

not to get back to negotiating table, what we need is some transformation of perceptions, and that requires something far bigger than just returning to the negotiating table.

So far, neither Secretary Kerry nor the President are revealing their hand, maybe they have something in mind, we don't know, maybe they intend to put a plan on the table, maybe they have something that they think will transform the prospects. But unless you change people's assessment of peace and conflict, you're not going to get anywhere. And that's part of the problem right now, and that's, I think, what Kerry is facing.

MR. ELGINDY: Right.

MR. TELHAMI: In terms of the dynamics of opinion, there's no question, in fact, in the book, I have a chapter called, From 9/11 to Tahrir Square about American public opinion, and how it is changing vis-a-vis the Arab world. And it is, of course, a dynamic game, Arab public opinion influences American public opinion, vice versa. If Arabs think Americans are really anti Muslim, then you have a different reaction. I say, in fact, part of the spike in Islamic identity is based on, to use someone else's words, you are what you have to defend, if you think Islam is under assault, you rally behind Islam.

But the same thing is true about Americans, if they think that, "They hate us for our values," then I say it's a zero sum game, but what else is there? So, yes, it's dynamic, and I think that's one reason why we need to keep this exchange of informing the public discourse in both places.

MR. HUSSEIN: I want to quickly add that I think hollow's point is very important, though, because we don't want to be in a situation where 10, 15 years, we look back and we say the administration came in and they had this exclusive focus on Middle East peace when there was

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

people in the streets speaking out in support of their aspirations on a day-to-day basis, and that's why we have taken this comprehensive track of dealing, not just with the political issues, but as I said, starting back in 2009, before the uprisings began, and focusing on areas of entrepreneurship.

And the other point that I think we need to make here is that a lot of the discussion, and partly because of the focus on the Middle East peace issue has been on the Arab world, and we have to continually bring out the fact that this has been an important part of what we've been trying to do in our travels, that this is around 20 percent of the Muslim world. And, certainly, this is an issue, the Arab-Israeli conflict is an issue that you're asked about all over the world, but it's important not to centralize, you have a huge, you have the largest Muslim country in Indonesia, in India, you have the second largest population, you have the African continent, and it's important to make sure that we're addressing a whole range of issues, rather than, you know, viewing the entire relationship through that lens.

MR. ELGINDY: Can we just take another round real quick? I'm going ask you, please make your questions very brief. I'm going to start with Cynthia and then the gentleman two people down, and then the lady up in the front. And then I'll give everyone a chance to say some closing remarks, because we have very little time left.

QUESTIONER: Thank you very much, this is a fascinating panel. I have a question following, particularly to Rashad, but anyone can answer. There hasn't been that much mention of the administration's responses to the Arab Spring, and my sense, and some of Dalia's research has followed this up, and certainly, this is my sense from last December in the protests in Cairo. I kept hearing again and again why has the U.S. government abandoned the Egyptian people? And people

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

comparing the policy towards Muslim Brotherhood government exactly to the policy towards Mubarak, and I think the entrepreneurship efforts and everything are fantastic, but then you have things like Secretary Kerry waving the human rights exclusion on the arms shipments, and continuing to send them notwithstanding the continuing violations of human rights in Egypt. So how do you square that circle?

MR. ELGINDY: Yes, sir.

QUESTIONER: Hello, my name is (inaudible), I'm on the Board of International Universal Scholars, and a Professor of Islamic studies at the Qatar Foundation. I have a comment. I really appreciate the two points you made regarding the U.S. policy and its impacts on the public opinion in the Arab world, and the second point on Israel and Palestine. I think that the U.S. policy ought to go back to the values of the founding fathers of America in order for the public opinion in the Muslim majority countries to improve. What gave America popularity in this part of the board is its values of freedom and justice and opportunity, and so on.

And what the Muslim majority countries street is realizing is that the American foreign policy recently is not based on the American values, and therefore, it is policy without ethics, without the morality that is much appreciated. And it's actually very similar to the Islamic morality anyway.

MR. ELGINDY: Can I ask you to state a question, quickly, please, because we're out of time.

QUESTIONER: Sure. The question is, is it possible to have policy based on ethics?

MR. ELGINDY: Okay. And our last question from the lady up front.

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

QUESTIONER: (Inaudible) University in Morocco. Arabism and Islam have always been the main components of the Arab identity and the Muslim identity. However, the many frustrations these public relations have suffered made or pushed them to become isolated and concentrated on their daily problems. The revolutions or the demonstrations that took place in the Arab world were focused on a struggle against the dictatorship, and we have noticed the emergence of new elements that might lead to separation and partition inside these Arab countries.

In Morocco, for example, we have noticed the emergence of the Amazigh are now able to impose themselves with the acknowledgment of the language as an official language. Of course, identity is important, identity is in progress, however, when the Amazigh declared themselves as against the Arab and the Muslim identity, I think that this causes, constitutes a threat which should be dealt with by the governments. And this also applies on the Palestinian cause, the Palestinian cause that still interests millions of Arabs and I think that this question, this Palestinian cause is one of the obstacles that should be resolved and --

MR. ELGINDY: Can I ask you to begin the --

MS. MOGAHED: I think this response is to a couple of questions, but there was this very brief but, I think, important moment in time right after the fall of Mubarak where there was a tremendous amount of national pride in Egypt, people, I mean, were euphoric. I was there, I think, two weeks after Mubarak resigned, and not only were people very proud of what they had just accomplished, but for that brief moment, they, the praise that they perceived to be getting from the rest of the world, specifically from the United States, was something that added to that pride.

So, I mean, there's a new famous, I think, ad that I saw all over Egypt, it was a

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

(inaudible) ad, and it was a picture of this handsome boy about 9 years old, and a quote that was attributed to the President, to President Obama. It said, "We need to teach our children to be more like Egyptian children." And what was so interesting about that ad is that sense of national pride and euphoria after what they felt was a huge accomplishment, was validated and even amplified the recognition and the praise and affirmation of the President of the United States. And what that says, I think, is as that humiliation as Shibley was talking about dissipated, or for a moment, it was replaced by pride (inaudible), hold your head up.

That also coincided with a brief feeling of closeness or of better relations, and I think that that's an important piece, because not only does humiliation create more anger against the United States, because all of these conflicts that we've been talking about play into that sense of humiliation, but pride, sense of accomplishment, a sense that the future will be better than the past actually coincides with, ironically, a better outlook toward the U.S. And I think this is important as Arab democracies become more and more complicated.

We can have very loud voices and they exist in Washington, but we simply, as the United States, should not support democratization in the Middle East. And what I'm saying is, it's only through democratization, it's only through an independent, prosperous and democratic Middle East that we will get better relations. It's going to be messy, it's going to be bumpy, it's going to be harder than simply dictating things to authoritarian rulers, but it's only through this difficult road that robust and lasting improvements to the relationship will occur.

MR. ELGINDY: Anyone else want to take a stab at some of the questions?

MR. SHEHATA: Sure. Just a couple of quick points. One on Cynthia's question



ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

pertaining, you know, what position the administration should take in Egypt, and I think, here, I have to say, I have to defend the U.S. on this one, and not because I don't think -- I'm a liberal, I like to see liberal systems everywhere, but let's look at the kind of critique against the U.S. in prior years, saying, well, you know, you want, only when people like you get elected, you support them. And now we finally have somebody else gets elected, and the pressure comes from the liberals, how come you're sticking with this regime that is not exactly what you want.

I have a little problem with that, because I think you have to let -- I don't think it's up to the U.S. to determine, regardless what happens in Egypt, the American role is minimal. I happen to think that the Obama administration had this one right, don't make this about America in the first place, and the degree to which you can influence it is minimal. And I think that we have to understand, too, that, in every place, whether it's right or left, people, there is a struggle ongoing in every country, it's going to be in Egypt, certainly in a tragic way in Syria, it's going to go on everywhere, and people are going to want to super power to be on their side, even if they don't agree with it, or even if they might turn against it the next morning, they want help from the outside.

And I think we have to be very careful in walking through that. Just one other comment on sort of this Arab frustration with the seeming inconsistency of American values, you know, you say this and you do this. That, of course, is a problem with every country, particularly super powers, but I think when you look at Arab public opinion expectations of the U.S., when you ask people what do you believe drives American foreign policy? They have no illusion, and they never did. Whether it was under Obama or under Bush, and they say, number one, that the two top notch, two issues that dominate the answer are protecting oil and helping Israel.

And advancing democracy, you get less than 10 percent saying that's an American objective, advancing human rights, you get similar number. People really look at the U.S. through a kind of realist prism about what America is trying to do. And that, I think, is one reason why those remain the issues that matter most for evaluating American foreign policy.

MR. HUSSEIN: Just to add a point on the human rights questions. Of course, an area that we raise in all of our meetings and engagement with the Egyptian government, civil society, I think you saw the response to the recent NGO case and statement in the human rights council, as well, on that point. We also raise the issue of protecting religious minorities last year, I was with the Imam Majid, and a Coptic priest in Egypt stressing the importance of protection of the rights of the Coptic community there. We've been working on a project with some Society of North American scholars throughout the region on protection of the rights of religious minorities.

And they're looking at it particularly through an Islamic perspective, because they realize that's what's persuasive to the people in the region, to make sure that Christian communities and others are protected in all these countries that are undergoing transitions. It's actually, the discussions have really resonated with leaders that we've sat down with, including political leaders who have stated an interest in adopting a lot of the principles that are articulated by this group.

MR. ELGINDY: Thank you, Rashad, thank you Shibley, thank you Dalia, thank you Samar, and thank all of you for joining us this morning. Please join me in thanking our distinguished panel. (Applause)

\* \* \* \* \*

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

## CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

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

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2016

ANDERSON COURT REPORTING  
706 Duke Street, Suite 100  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190