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U.S. Politics and the Middle East

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PITA: Welcome to Intersections, the podcast where we talk about the angles on policy issues, part of the Brookings Podcast Network. I'm your host, Adrianna Pita, and with me today are two of our experts in Middle East policy: Shibley Telhami, a nonresident fellow with us and also the Anwar Sadat professor for peace and development at the University of Maryland; and Sarah Yerkes, a visiting fellow with our Center for Middle East Policy. Thank you both for being with us today.

TELHAMI: Pleasure.

YERKES: Thank you very much.

PITA: The occasion for our conversation today is some new polling research – Shibley, did I hear correctly that you've been doing this for about 25 years now?

TELHAMI: That's right.

PITA: – of public opinion issues. In this case, this was U.S. public opinion about U.S.-Israeli relations and about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this case, you ran the polls both shortly before and then directly after the U.S. presidential election, and noticed many changes in opinion. So I wanted to start by asking what you found to be the main, key takeaways from that, please?

TELHAMI: Well, you know, it's interesting. As you pointed out, I have been doing some polling on this for a long time, where I'm tracking some attitudes, and so we have historical measure of change over time. Some things have not changed much at all on the Israel – American political attitudes toward Israel and Palestine. One thing that hasn't changed is that, really throughout the 25 years, about 2/3 of the American public say they want the U.S. to lean toward neither side of the conflict. They want the U.S. to be

evenhanded. Among those who want the U.S. to take sides, we've had overwhelmingly – they want to take Israel's side, not the Palestinian side. That's what's been the case historically. That has varied over time a little bit, you know, in terms of ratios, but that was generally the picture.

What has changed is that historically, this was a bipartisan position more or less of the American public. There were always some variations, differences between Democrats and Republicans, but generally that was the trend across the board for Democrats and Republicans. What we've seen over the past few years, particularly the past 3-4 years, is a dramatic change in the nature of the partisan attitudes toward Israel and Palestine. So, what we've seen is that over time, the overwhelming majority of Democrats, almost in some cases even 90%, say they want the U.S. to be evenhanded – certainly over 80% in some of the recent polling, in this one a little bit less. And among Republicans, half, generally, want the U.S. to take Israel's side, more than they want the U.S. to be evenhanded. So it's been dramatically different over time, and what we've sensed over the past year particularly, an election year where there's heavy polarization, is the American public became even more polarized on the Israel-Palestine question. So for example, if you compare this year with November 2015, a year ago when we did this same event and released some data, on issues that are consequential for policy, such as do they want the U.S. to do nothing about Israeli settlement construction or do they want the U.S. to take mild action, like just statements and words, or do they want the U.S. to take sanctions or more severe action, about what we've seen is in the previous poll a year ago, about 49% of Democrats said they wanted the U.S. to apply sanctions or take more serious action. Only a minority of Republicans did. This year, the number of Democrats went up to 60% -- a majority of

Democrats, and the number of Republicans who want to apply sanctions decreased. So we've got a bigger – in some cases, the gulf between Democrats and Republicans is over 50%. It's like two Americas. So clearly there's been, partly a function of the election itself. And I would even submit that just even comparing October with November – we're talking about a month, because we did one two weeks before the election and one almost immediately after, less than a month apart – and we found that there was even more polarization after the election, in part because on this issue, particularly Democrats are worried that Trump is going to take positions that are going to undermine the two-state solutions they support. And so even more people are for sanctions, or more people are for taking action at the U.N., than was the case just a couple weeks before. So, that polarization is probably the most distinct, you know, finding, and this is really what has profoundly changed in American politics and attitudes toward –

But having said that, it's a mistake to only think it's only polarization, because we find that the American public is shifting on some policy issues over time. For example, I referred to the settlement issue and the sanctions. That changed across – there was only 39% or 37% or so, I believe, I don't know the exact number off the top of my head, but it was less than 40% who supported applying sanctions overall among the American public a year ago. Now, 46% support that. So, there's been like a outside-the-margin-of-error kind of difference, change on that issue, and in part because when you look at the American demographics – and we find that in the poll – that increasing segments of the American public are wanting the U.S. to be more evenhanded, and in some cases more sympathetic with the Palestinians. That includes younger people in America, the Millennials; it includes Hispanic Americans; it includes African Americans; and it includes women. Those are of

course the core constituents of the Democratic Party, but they are not only the Democratic Party. And in Asian Americans as well. We find, you know, the demographics that are expanding are ones that are also shifting position on the Arab-Israeli issue.

PITA: You mentioned the worries about what the Trump administration might be expected to do, and I did want to ask you – I had noticed immediately after the election, maybe in that week afterward when briefly there were rumors that Mike Huckabee might be the ambassador to Israel, I saw a lot of despair amongst a couple of people I follow that deal with Palestinian issues, basically saying “this is it, this is the death knell for the two-state solution, this ends all hope of a Palestinian state.” Was that sort of just that first flush of shock after the election, or is that still a prevailing attitude amongst – whether it’s Americans who feel more sympathetic toward the Palestinian issue, or amongst people in the Middle East. Is that still that large of a worry?

TELHAMI: Um, I don’t think so really so much. I think that a lot of people – here among Democrats for sure, but outside in the Middle East – I’m not really sure that people know what to expect from Trump. I mean, they obviously hear what, you know – some people like Trump in the Middle East, you know, for a variety of reasons. So it’s not like it’s a clear picture. But here, yes. I think Democrats really believe that this might be, you know, the end of the two-state solution as we know. Not that I’m certain about what Trump is going to be personally, but I think that most people are looking at what he’s been saying and, more importantly, the people that he’s appointing or the people that have been associated with them or the people that have been dealing with this issue that he’s empowered during the campaign – they certainly have been saying that they are comfortable with settlements, with moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, and so forth.

And so that, yes, I think that makes those Democrats who want to see a two-state solution or equitable settlement that's peaceful worried that time's running out. They're uncomfortable, they think, you know, this may be the end of it.

YERKES: I think there's two sides of that, and one is that there's the action that a Trump administration could undertake, which is, I think, what Shibley's talking about. There's also the inaction, and one of the fears is that should Trump actually step back from this issue and not pay that much attention to it, it gives room for the Israeli government, which is more and more far right, which has – I mean some of the Israeli ministers, Naftali Bennett for example, were giddy that Trump was elected, partially because it will give them the space to undertake action on the ground that could actually make a two-state solution impossible down the road. So I think, you know, we have to actually be paying attention to sort of the two different levels of this one, the action and also the inaction and what that means.

PITA: Sarah, you had written a good piece that sort of summed up what the prospects for – if the Obama administration wanted to do anything in its last few weeks – what their possibilities for action might be and what you thought they might be leaning toward. Do you want to sum that up briefly for us?

YERKES: Sure, I mean I think the administration has taken on the Israeli-Palestinian issue initially as one of its core foreign policy issues at the beginning, and had made two very serious attempts at resolving the conflict. Both of those failed, and so now in the lame-duck period, the question is will the Obama administration do something? The two sort of options there are: one, to lay out a parameters document, which would spell out basically – not into the weeds, but – of what the negotiations in 2013, 2014 accomplished, to sort of lay

that out – both for just posterity but also then should another administration take that up. And the second, which is I think the more likely option, is some sort of U.N. action, and whether that's either proactively – which I think is unlikely – taking action in the U.N. to approve a Palestinian state, recognize a Palestinian state, to name settlements as being illegal, different options; or else to fail to abstain or fail to vote against an action, which would represent a big shift in U.S. policy. And these are the things I think that the administration is really weighing right now – is which of those options, if any, are they likely to do. But as I wrote, and I still believe this, I think that the risks to the administration actually outweigh the benefit, partially because the Israelis and Palestinians are not prepared to make peace. Any sort of action is going to be symbolic at best. So then it's really looking at, you know, the legacy impact of this, and I think, you know, if you're President Obama, right now he's going out on a very positive legacy with regard to Israel. There's the Iran deal, which is a whole separate thing and he's not well-loved for that in Israel, but he inked this ten-year memorandum of understanding with the Israelis that provides the most security arrangements, most security assistance, of any administration in history, and that's kind of the final thing he did. So to then reopen the file on U.S.-Israel could have a lot of potential to backfire.

TELHAMI: Yeah, I'm not sure, you know. I mean, I agree with all the reservations that Sarah points out and I think it's a very, very tough call for the administration for the reasons she outlined. But I think there are also incentives for them to act, and what the poll indicates for one thing is that overall, more Americans want the U.S. to act at the U.N., either through a parameters resolution or to take action on settlements than not. So, the environment of public opinion is very permissive and supportive. More importantly, the vast

majority of Democrats wants him to do so, and they're essentially urging him to do so, and that's the constituency he's going to go back home to when he leaves the presidency. More importantly, I think, going back to the legacy issue which I think Sarah is correct in pointing out because obviously, what's left for him right now other than thinking about his legacy? I think his legacy on Israel-Palestine is not a good one that he's going to be remembered for. He's going to be remembered for. If he does nothing at all, as the President who killed the two-state solution because, as Sarah was correctly pointing out, the one issue with Trump, even if he doesn't act on it, that time is going to kill it. You know, eight years ago when I co-authored this piece for the Brookings and CFR report for the next president said "if it's not going to happen on this president's clock it's not going to happen at all." Time is running out, I'm not sure it's still possible anymore. And so he had an opportunity, he came in believing in it's important, he appointed a special envoy on his second day. He failed miserably. He's got nothing to show for it. Settlements have expanded on his clock. A lot more people don't think anymore that a two-state solution is possible, and that's his legacy. And so, if he has an opportunity to do something to reverse the tide or to save the two-state solution, this is his opportunity. Whether he thinks that can do it or not is another story. He might think that a parameters resolution will get attacked by everyone and in the end it'll reinforce his failure, but he might think a settlements resolution where settlements are declared illegal and has consequences for really applying the brakes by virtue of illegal cases that might ensue might actually impact the process and make it harder for President Trump to reverse. That's something I think that his constituents want to see, so I do think that he does have an incentive. None of us know what's in his head because ultimately this

is a presidential decision, not really an aide's decision. So I think the verdict is still out, I wouldn't rule it out – I think the verdict is still out.

YERKES: Yeah, I agree with that and I think the most likely of all the different options would be the voting positively or maybe abstaining from a resolution saying that settlements are illegal – something that doesn't necessarily have teeth, because then that, you know – There's the symbolism and then there's the practicality of it, and I think, you know, from him and – when I was serving in the State Department working on human rights issues in the Israeli-Palestinian Affairs Office, you could sense that there was a desire to do more and to sort of push back more, but political reasons or, you know, diplomacy reasons sort of tied the hands of the administration. I think, given the freedom of a lame duck period, that this is the opportunity that they have to make some sort of statement, even if it doesn't have teeth, even if the Trump administration doesn't abide by it – that sort of movement on settlements, which the administration has long said, in all but using that word, they've basically said that they're illegal without actually using that specific term.

PITA: I wanted to ask you both briefly about that memorandum of understanding – the \$38 billion in military aid – before turning to some broader issues. The memorandum, I mean – it's a ten year deal so that's well beyond the lifetime of the next president, even in a second term. Are those things binding on the next administration? You know, we've heard Trump talking a lot about wanting to withdraw from a lot of America's financial agreements with other nations and that sort of thing. Are they stuck with that, or can he decide that no, we want to rewrite this?

TELHAMI: First of all on aid, I have asked questions on aid over the past couple of polls, and most Americans think it's too much, that amount of aid, even though they think

Israel is a strategic asset. So it's not that they don't want to support Israel as an ally, but they think, given that Israel is a relatively rich country, that's too much American aid, and we see that. So the public has reservations about the amount of aid that's being given to Israel. But Congress doesn't have any reservations whatsoever and that's not going to change. That's been across the board, Democrats and Republicans. If anything, you know, as you can see from members of Congress who were saying to the Israelis "why didn't you make a deal with Obama, we could have given you some more." Now, Trump had sent various signals. At some point, in fact, he said he wants rich allies to pay back for aid. So his instinct is not to hand out aid. However, I think this is an agreement that I don't see how anybody could break. The only question is whether the commitment the Israelis have made, essentially not to seek more, whether that can somehow be finessed in some form or another, depending on what happens. But I don't think that, even if Trump wants it, I'm not sure he would want to put up that fight.

YERKES: Yeah, I mean I think there's a couple things to pay attention to in this arena. One is, as Shibley was discussing, I mean Trump is – at least appears at this point to be – basing a lot of his foreign policy decisions on transactional relationships. So I don't think, I mean, I agree, I don't think he can do anything to take away from this deal. But what is going to ask for in return? And I think that's where Netanyahu is a little bit nervous, that, you know, if he's saying we want allies to pay their fair share, what does that look like when you're talking about Israel? And I think Egypt's thinking through the same thing, Jordan, other countries that get these massive aid packages.

But another, an interesting point. I was on a panel two days after the election on U.S.-Israel relations in the Trump administration, and an Israeli who was on the panel with

me said that people keep painting this Bibi – this Netanyahu-Trump relationship as very positive, very tight, but if you looked at the MoU, you know, Bibi was dragging his feet trying to figure out who was going to be the next American president. Could he get a better deal depending on who was going to succeed Obama? And then once it looked like – that it start to seem that Trump could actually win – he quickly decided to sign it, thinking that if Trump were to win he would actually get a much worse deal than under Obama. So it just – I mean, who knows how much that's true, and what Bibi's actually thinking, but –

TELHAMI: Well no, it's an interesting point, Sarah, because actually, before the election, I did a public opinion and I asked the following question. Before the deal was signed, I asked – I said, you know, the administration is offering a deal on a scale of roughly \$40 billion for ten years, and do you think, if this waited until after the election, would Hillary offer more? Would Donald Trump offer more? Would Bernie Sanders offer more? In fact, the poll results showed that the public expected Trump to offer the least, less than what Obama's offering, but not Clinton. So there was at least an American public sense, and I assume that's also internalized externally, that given his posture at that time, that he may not have been prepared to make this kind of deal and maybe that was a part of the calculus.

PITA: So looking at U.S. relations in the Middle East a little more broadly, beyond Israel and beyond Palestine – Syria and ISIS, these are obviously the big crisis points, these get the bulk of public attention and media coverage. Iraq has been running sort of a second/third place because of the assault of Mosul and that sort of thing. What are some of the other areas that don't get talked about so much, that often get buried under these crisis

points, that you think are really important for the new administration to make sure that they focus on, or don't lose focus on at least?

TELHAMI: Well, first of all, you know, from the public opinion point of view, there's no question that public continues to rank ISIS as the number one priority. You know, objectively, I don't know if you could make that case that ISIS is more important than strategic relations with China or Russia, or trade, or immigration, or any of these – or climate – all these big issues. But the public internalized this issue for whatever reason as number one, so we get more than 50% of the public who says this is number one in comparison to the other issues that we put forth. And so I think to the extent that that is a starting point for Trump, to the extent that he said it was the number one issue in some ways in the Middle East, to the extent that it touches on the relationship with Russia particularly, because that's the way he framed that question about working with Russia in Syria – in fact, I did a poll just before the election on what the American public wants to see happen in Syria, and it's clear that that prioritizing of ISIS inclines them to agree with Trump that the differences with Russia should be put aside to focus on ISIS and not so much to focus on Assad. Not that they love Assad or even love Putin, but that they think that priority should define the policy of the United States of America.

So that's the starting point, but that's going to put him – you know, it's easy to say – but it's going to put him immediately at odds with people who may be open to him but see this is a priority issue to them, that is, particularly the Saudis – the GCC states generally, but especially the Saudis. I think he is more at home, of all the Middle Eastern governments, he is more at home with the government of Egypt, because the Egyptian government has essentially embraced some of the same issues he's embracing,

particularly on Syria – they see it his way, meaning set aside differences with Russia, work with Russia, Assad shouldn't be the priority, they want to keep the integrity of Syria, whatever that is at the moment, but not to see the Syrian army disintegrate and focus on Islamist groups. And like him, they don't think it's just ISIS. They think all the Islamists are bad. It's just – they're in the same camp that way, and they are at odds with their Saudi allies on this one. And so I think he's going to work with them. So I think that, in some ways I see him working with the Israelis but also working with the Egyptians, the UAE, which sees also sort of eye-to-eye with Egypt on some of these regional issues, and perhaps Jordan. That's going to be sort of his Arab cluster – Saudi Arabia on the side, in part because it's going to be uncomfortable with his Syria policy. That's going to lead to a lot of choices he'll have to make on other issues, like what to do about Yemen, what to do about Iran – the Iran issue is looming. As you know, Congress is still uncomfortable with the Iran deal. On the one hand, he says he doesn't like the Iran deal. Obviously, if he unravels it it's going to open up a huge can of worms I think he's not prepared to deal with or may not have sorted out. And on the other hand, he says, well we shouldn't be taking Iran on in Syria because they are essentially against ISIS. And so I think those contradictions are going to start coming to the forefront as soon as he takes real positions that are meaningful policy-wise.

YERKES: So Syria and ISIS are – I think he does want to deal with them, but even if he doesn't, he's going to have to. But related to that, I mean one thing that I think has not gotten a lot of attention that I hope the administration will pay attention to is North Africa, and partially because of the tie to ISIS. I mean, you have Libya which is still in a really terrible situation, and then you have Tunisia which is sort of this one success story that is

threatened dramatically by ISIS spillover, by – I mean, Tunisia has the highest number of foreign fighters of any country in the world who, many of them haven't returned yet and may return at some point, and so this is something that they have to be dealing with. And I hope that the next administration – I mean this administration, the Obama administration, has really taken that Tunisia security very seriously and devoted a lot of time and attention and resources to that. I hope that continues to be the case, partially just for the Tunisia security, ISIS reasons, but also symbolically. I mean, I think it would be very sad to see Tunisia sort of deteriorate under a lack of attention.

And then, the other issue is, I mean – the Syria sort of counterterrorism issue – but the refugee issue. I mean, I think that we don't exactly know what's going to happen under this administration. It hasn't been very positive. But I think he's going to be confronted with it. There's not – you're going to have to do something or find some way to do better than we've been doing so far, and I'm not sure what that's going to look like or if they'll actually take that seriously, but I think that's going to be impossible to ignore.

PITA: Right. I did want to ask you about Egypt. Egypt has been – they've been having a lot of economic issues. They just de-pegged the pound from the dollar. So in the long term that's going to be good, right now that's a little tough for folks. Given their economic struggles at home, they're having another round of crackdowns on civil society, NGOs. What is the status of the U.S. and Egyptian relationship? Are they still the strong partner in the same way they have been for a long number of years? Or are they sort of really turning inwardly? Are they maybe dealing with their neighbors less? Where is that at?

YERKES: So I think – I mean I agree with what Shibley was saying about the Trump-Egypt relationship. I think that there will be a renewed and sort of reset U.S.-Egypt

relationship. For better or worse, you know, Sisi has really proactively reached out to Trump and Trump has showered him with praise. I mean, I think these are two peas in a pod, I think that they will work very well together. I don't think that's necessarily to the benefit of Egyptians and you know, we're – we've seen just yesterday I believe, Egypt passed their new NGO law which is far worse than the Mubarak-era NGO law, which in itself was terrible. You're seeing this massive crackdown in civil society – on human rights: people being tortured, thrown in jail, disappeared. And I think, you know, any sort of U.S. pressure on those issues is going to sort of go away under the next administration, unfortunately. I hope I'm wrong, but that's what I would guess. You're going to see, really, this kind of – the U.S.-Egypt relationship is much more – not transactional, but really based on the security issues, based on the kind of cooperation that Shibley was talking about. And I think that, again, that's not beneficial to the Egyptian people in the long term, I don't think that's necessarily going to help the Egyptian economy in the long term, and you still have this really, you know, very unhappy populace in the same – the conditions that led to the Egyptian revolution are worse now than they were in 2011. So, I think Egypt's a really important thing for us to be watching, but I do think there will be a stronger, more simpatico Egypt-U.S. relationship in the next administration.

TELHAMI: You know, what happens in Egypt inside is not going to be a function of what America does or doesn't do. I mean, let's keep that in mind. I mean, they, you know – this is, you know, the regime fails or succeeds in keeping the country together; and maintaining support of the public or losing it, and having a situation that deteriorates economically and politically – is going to be really, a function of what they do, no matter who's in power in the White House, so keep that in mind. But I do think that what we're

going through right now is a phase of populism, you know, across, you know, almost global. As you can see, much of what we see in, even in Europe. And democracy isn't the number one priority for anyone except for advocates and activists. But at the level of majorities and heavy politics, I think democracy will pay a price. I think we're in a phase where strong leaders are the order of the day, where going back to strengthening states because there's a sense that anarchy has hurt more people than not. And it comes at an odd time in the Arab world, particularly in Egypt, but elsewhere in the Arab world, where the Arab uprising ushered in this empowerment of public, and people who want their voices heard, who want democracy, who want dignity, who want to have more say in politics. And that's not going to go away. Still, there are restless populations across the board. And at the same time, the backlash of what's happening in Syria and what's happening in Yemen and what's happening in Libya is driving them to fear the anarchy, and in some ways giving more voice to the strong leaders who want to keep the country together. So we have these contradictions that are going to still be with us, but in the short term the order of the day will be the strongman, man of war, for the Arab world, and Trump's victory will only reinforce that because he has already said that's really his model.

PITA: Given that what you have just described about – the strongmen aren't going anywhere, or that system of government, our colleague Tamara Wittes recently wrote a really good report about enabling and empowering more sustainable modes of governance in the Arab world. She talked about building social trust, particularly. What do you think is the – sort of the likelihood of, maybe, some of those reforms, those sorts of ideas, gaining any traction given what you just said? I think she had pointed out Morocco as being one country where they're trying to keep the people happy by making a couple of these small

reforms. So I wanted to ask about the likelihood of that, and also about – does the U.S. have any role in that, and again given Trump's proclivities to not want to spend money, not want to spend a lot of resources in nation-building in other countries?

TELHAMI: Let me be clear in what I said, particularly about the strongmen of the Middle East. They will fail if they don't open up. It's not going to work. I think the forces at the public level who have heard the voices throughout the Arab uprisings are still there, and the same that drove that is still there. People want dignity, they want freedom, they want opportunity, they want a stake in the system, and that's not going to go away. They might swallow hard and put up in the short-term for immediate returns that they need, particularly in moments of fear. So while it's the short-term, the strongmen, they're not going to survive if they don't do some of those things. Is that possible, is it likely? I don't know. I can't tell you. I think some states have been a little bit better at it than others, but I fear that usually it's like a catch-22. So the minute you're stronger you feel why do I have to give in more? And you go back and forth between that, and the incentive diminishes. And so where's the pressure going to come from? You might not realize, it might come from within. Is it going to come from the outside anytime soon? Of course not. I mean, Trump isn't going to be the one who's going to do it. Certainly Putin isn't going to be the one who's going to do it. Certainly the Chinese aren't going to be the ones who are going to do it. The Europeans are now – what are we talking about when we're talking about the EU at this moment? So yeah, that's why I say I think it's a phase where strongmen will feel they have a freer hand in the short term, but they will fail on their own if they don't take some action to loosen up their grip.

YERKES: I agree with that 100%. I think, you know, the main outcome of the Arab Spring was a fundamental shift in the relationship between the state and the people, and there was a recognition by the government that the people have the power to demand change and to carry out change, and that was very scary. And so, the result is this cycle that Shibley was describing, where governments then decided that, "oh, we better rein in the power." In some places like Tunisia you did have genuine democracy, Morocco you did have a new constitution, although I think it's very superficial. But the flip side of that, then, is what we're seeing now where the strongmen come in, they crack down. In Egypt, Sisi is this incredible strongman. He hasn't actually accomplished any of the things he set out to do, and hasn't improved the lives of Egyptians. So I don't think that the United States is going to have really any role in this, but the strongmen at some point are going to start to see that things are shifting the other way. That could be tomorrow, that could be in 20 years. I don't know.

PITA: Well, so that we don't end on a completely down note, are there any areas for hope that you see. Where are the places where constructive relationships might we look forward to in the next four years?

YERKES: I mean, I always just go back to Tunisia. I think it's – it is a very positive place. Again, it's not clear to me what our relationship will be like with Tunisians. I hope it's positive. I think they do actually listen, you know, they're a great partner, they're a great security partner. I hope that Trump sees them as a good partner. In civil society, I mean, in Tunisian civil society, as well as civil society in other – even in Egypt where it's been cracked down upon so much – I was just at this great dinner a couple nights ago with a bunch of civil society activists from around the region, and it was so uplifting. I mean, in all

the negativity coming from the region, you see these incredible activists who despite all the sort of pressure on them are still trying to carry out these positive things, and so it's very heartwarming.

PITA: It seems like it is being pretty well-reinforced. There was just – was it the UAE and some Western donors – just had a new – was it a conference in Tunisia?

YERKES: A donor conference, yes. This is a big – Tunisia 2020, their big investment conference. And the United States didn't make any new pledges but they weren't really expected to. But yeah, the UAE and Qatar and others gave, and Europeans pledged a lot of money. So hopefully, that'll go somewhere positively.

PITA: Shibley?

TELHAMI: Yeah, you know, there are two issues, of course. One is – I think should be expected positive, about U.S. foreign policy. Should we expect something good happening in the region? I think that we obviously, by default almost, we focus on the horrific stuff that goes on the Middle East. A lot of it is happening, and deserves a lot of our attention. But the reality of it is that, separate from governments, which have definitely failed before and after the Arab uprisings, there are some trends that are positive taking place. Globalization has been disruptive and has negative consequences, some of which have actually contributed to the Arab uprisings, but there's also a whole class of new people who are much more plugged-in through the information revolution, through the technology, through the world. And you find entrepreneurship and a whole set of activities that are going on in many countries that are not so much dependent on governments and that are changing society in a good way. And we're going to see more and more of that no

matter what happens at the center of these governments and in the places where we see horrific, unfortunate stuff taking place.

From the point of view of American foreign policy, I don't know what to expect. I mean, I know what I fear, and I fear a lot. But I don't know what to expect. You know, I read the mood of the American public, I'm doing polling domestically as well. We did a poll two weeks before the election and what we found, here in America, is 2/3 of the American public said "the system is rigged against people like me," here in America. What we found is 98% of the public said "I want significant change." 50% of Americans wanted "revolutionary change," not incremental change. And I wonder, in an article I wrote a week before the election, whether that cry for change means that not only those who embrace Donald Trump, who are a minority, but also those who want change so desperately, are prepared to roll the dice because they see him as an agent of change, and 65% of the public saw him as an agent of change even before the election. So there's a lot we don't know about Donald Trump. I know what I fear, as I said, and I see symptoms that make me worry, but it's a wild card. That's what the American public thinks, they rolled the dice, and rolling the dice may have pleasant surprises, but I don't know what these are.

PITA: All right. We'll have to wait and see. I wanted to let our listeners know that they will be able to find Shibley Telhami's research and [brookings.edu](https://www.brookings.edu/). You can also follow our discussants today at @shibleytelhami on Twitter and @saraheykerkes. And you can follow Intersections as well as the Brookings Cafeteria podcast @policypodcasts. So thank you both for joining me today.

YERKES: Thank you.

TELHAMI: Pleasure.