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WEBINAR

THE PROBLEM OF DEMOCRACY: ISLAM, LIBERALISM, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. MALONEY: Good afternoon from Washington, D.C. I'm Suzanne Maloney and I'm vice president and director of Foreign Policy here at the Brookings Institution. On behalf of Brookings' Foreign Policy and our Center for Middle East Policy, I'm delighted to welcome you to this very special event to discuss my friend and colleague, senior fellow, Shadi Hamid's new book, "The Problem of Democracy: America, the Middle East, and the Rise and Fall of an Idea."

The problem of democracy is a critical study of democracy and its merits in the world's most undemocratic regions. The book features dozens of interviews with senior U.S. officials and draws on hundreds of hours of conversation with Islamic activists and leaders in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, and Turkey.

The book shines a particular spotlight on the democratic dilemma, when democracy produces less than stellar results. Shadi argues that the United States has been ambivalent or opposed when Islam's parties are elected through free elections. He proposes democratic minimalism as a resolution to decouple democracy and liberalism when the two ideas are in intension.

"The Problem of Democracy: America, the Middle East, and the Rise and Fall of an Idea" offers a much-needed reminder of the consequential nature of developments in the region, even as our national security priorities have shifted away from the Middle East to focus on the challenges posed by strategic competition with great powers such as China.

A peaceful more prosperous, more stable Middle East will only emerge if and when good governance and institutionalized respect for human rights and the rule of law are the norm instead of the exception. That future is what so many in the region have put their lives on the line to advance including right now in a very traumatic way in Iran.

Shadi's book calls our attention to how U.S. policy could prioritize democracy as an end in and of itself rather than as a means to other goals. We have a phenomenal group of scholars here today to take up these issues and help us think about how the recent past can inform our approach to the future. Each of our panelists is an esteemed expert and a careful observer of the ways that democracies

interact with the rules based international order.

I'll introduce them in turn now. We're joined by Dr. Amaney Jamal from Princeton School where she is dean of the School of Public and International Affairs as well as the Edwards Sanford professor of politics and professor of politics and international affairs. Dr. Jamal also directs the workshop on Arabic Political Development and the Bobst American University of Beirut Collaborative Initiative. She is the author of numerous books and publications. Her book, "Barriers to Democracy," published in 2007, explores the role that civic associations play in promoting democratic effects in the Arab world. This won the 2008 American Political Science Association Best Book Award in the Commemorative Democratization section.

We're also joined by Dr. Francis Fukuyama. He's the Olivier Nomellini senior fellow at Stanford University's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies and a faculty member of FSI's Center on Democracy Development and the Rule of Law. Dr. Fukuyama's is a renowned scholar on issues of development in international politics. His 1992 book, "The End of History and the Last Man" has appeared in more than 20 foreign editions.

Let me introduce the author himself. Shadi Hamid is a senior fellow in the Center for Middle East Policy here at Brookings. Shadi is also the author of "Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle of Islam is Reshaping the World," which was short listed for the 2017 Lionel Gilbert Prize. His first book, "Temptations of Power Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East" was named a Foreign Affairs Best Book in 2014.

The discussion today will be moderated by Dr. Nader Hashemi who is the director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver's Joseph Cornell School of International Studies. He is also co-director of the Religion and International Affairs Certificate program and the co-director of the Political Theory Initiative. Before I turn the mike over to Nader, a final reminder that we are on the record today and we're streaming live. So please send your questions via email to events@brookings.edu or on Twitter using the hashtag #DemocracyProblem. Now, over to you Nader.

MR. HASHEMI: Well, thank you very much everyone for tuning in. It's a huge honor for

me to be moderating this book launch. We're here to discuss, analyze and debate Shadi Hamid's new book, "The Problem of Democracy: America, the Middle East, and the Rise and Fall of an Idea" just released by Oxford University Press. We encourage people who are tuning in today to tweet about this event. To tweet your questions to Shadi. We won't be able to get to all of your questions, but we'll try our best.

I want to begin by really, you know, thanking Shadi and congratulating him on his new book, but also for his ongoing contributions to our intellectual and public debate here in the United States on questions related to U.S. foreign policy, Islam, the Arab world, the Middle East and now more recently the question of democracy.

Shadi, this is a very provocative and timely book. It's perfect given the crisis of democracy that we're all dealing with and struggling with globally. But also, the timing is perfect given, you know, recent U.S. foreign policy debates related to Saudi Arabia, the question of oil, events more recently in Iran. So I'm looking forward to the discussion and the debate.

The format for everyone who is tuning in will be as follows. We agreed that Shadi would begin with a 15-minute overview of his book and its main theses. And then we will turn the floor over to Francis Fukuyama and Amaney Jamal who will be given roughly 10 minutes. If they go a bit over, I don't think anyone will complain to share their analysis of the book. And then we will take it from there. So with that as an introduction, Shadi, the floor is yours for the next 15 minutes.

MR. HAMID: Great. Thanks so much, Nader. Thanks, Suzanne for your introduction and the kind words. And thanks to Frank and Amaney for joining us for this conversation. I'm really excited to talk about these issues. Nader, as you said, they are pretty big ones.

So, you know, instead of -- I'll offer up some general remarks about the book and what I'm trying to do with it. And then maybe offer up some provocations that can maybe help frame the conversation. And also, I think provoke our audience to maybe think of questions or contentions that they might have. So and I would say that, you know, if you are interested in the book. I think that if folks register, they were able to get a 30 percent discount so, you know, with that as a little incentive. And

thanks to Brookings and Oxford University Press for making that possible. I do want people to read this because these issues are very dear to me.

And I've been thinking about them for many years now. And I would say in some ways this book is the culmination of 10 years, if not longer, of thinking and writing and debating these issues. And in terms of like framing what I tried to do in this book, I think that we at think tanks, we have -- there's two basic approaches you can take.

One is to take existing U.S. policy and accept it as a given and to work within those constraints. And then another approach is to think ahead and to maybe offer up ideas that may not seem very realistic or plausible right at this very moment, but they could become realistic and plausible five or 10 years down the road. And the hope is to kind of prepare the conversation for moving in a more bold direction, a more ambitious direction with U.S. foreign policy. And I'm very much in the latter school and I'll get to why that might be.

Part of the issue is I've become quite pessimistic about where U.S. policy has ended up. And one part of the problem is, first of all, we're not focusing as much on the Middle East. I think there's a general exhaustion with the region. But I think there's also a kind of disillusionment that comes out of the failures of their Arab spring, and that to me is concerning.

So what I do try to do in this book is two things. One, I try to offer up and answer to what I think is the fundamental question. Not just when it comes to politics in the Middle East but when it comes to politics in any number of countries in the world. And that question is this. What do we do when democracy produces bad outcomes? And I put bad there in scare quotes on purpose and we can get to why that might be because we don't agree on what constitutes a bad outcome whether it's in the Middle East or elsewhere in our own country here as Americans. And that I think problematizes the conversation. We no longer can achieve a consensus on what is good and what is bad.

So I take the Middle East as sort of a starting point for these broader debates around idea of democracy because of what I experienced during the Arab Spring when I was living in the region 2011 to 2013. And what I saw in the Middle East was something that at that time I thought was maybe,

let's say, foreign, maybe unique. And when I came back to the U.S., I was struck by the fact that it's 2014. I come back to Washington and still most of our debates are at least somewhat policy oriented.

Obviously, the healthcare debate was a big one. People used to talk about tax rates back then, deficit spending and so on. But then something odd shifted. 2016 campaign going into the election and we as Americans move away from those more technical policy conversations to what might be called the who we are debates. And this was striking to me because I had seen that in the Middle East. And that was at first surprising. And then it sort of become the new normal that -- so what are these kinds of questions?

The existential raw questions? So some of them include what is the nature of the state? What does it mean to be a citizen of a nation? What does it mean to be Egyptian? Jordanian? Tunisian? And I think we as Americans ask ourselves what does it mean to be American? What is the role of religion, culture and identity in public life? So these culture wars in our own country I think reflect this odd twist that in some ways the Middle East was ahead of its time. But it gave us a dark preview of what was to come in many of even the most well-established democracies including our own.

So I think there's a lot that Americans can learn from the Middle East, from the debates that folks were having during the Arab Spring and then we can speak more broadly about what the implications might be for the idea of democracy.

And as Suzanne mentioned, one of the things I try to do in this book is to offer up an alternative conception of democracy which maybe isn't very popular right now. And I call the democratic minimalism. And some of that has to do with prioritizing the democracy part in liberal democracy. And it's not so much to decouple small illiberalism from small-d democracy but it is to acknowledge that they aren't always the same thing. And sometimes, they are in tension or even conflict with each other. And when they are in tension then I think we should be able to -- we should think seriously about prioritizing one over the other.

And I think this comes into stark relief in various Middle Eastern cases because in those situations, we had Islamist parties coming to power through free and fair elections and they're not

necessarily committed liberals. And here, when I say liberalism, we're talking about the classic liberal tradition, prioritizing personal freedoms, individual autonomy, the sorts of things that are captured in the bill of rights. Restraints on the majority. And often times those are constitutional restraints.

And when we talk about small-d democracy, we're talking more about reflecting the will of majorities through regular elections. The importance of alternation of power. Responsiveness to the electorate even if the electorate has bad ideas. And this obviously, was quite relevant in the case of Egypt and Tunisia but also elsewhere during the Arab Spring where these groups come to power and a lot of people then panic and freak out, if you will. And they say, well, democracy is nice in theory but if it's leading to this then maybe we don't love democracy in practice.

So how do we contend with this tension between the idea of democracy and the practicality of democracy when democracy leads to outcomes that aren't just bad but are actually perceived as personally threatening to members of a given society? And in this case, and I'll mention this in a moment. I did have an interesting experience with many of my relatives in Egypt. I'm born and raised in Pennsylvania, but my parents came from Egypt.

And when I was spending time in Egypt during the Arab Spring, I think there was a kind of discomfort with the way I was approaching issues. And we would get into debates about these issues that I was coming in and saying that democracy was good or better. And then they said, well, Shadi, you don't have to live with the consequences of elections. We do. You can go back to the U.S., and you will go back to the U.S. So it's easy for you to say.

And I think this captures something that we see increasingly elsewhere. And, you know, any number of examples can suffice the rise of the far right in the most recent Italian elections. Where some of the same questions, obviously in a very different context, are being raised that, you know, this is what democracy is producing. Maybe we don't want it after all or maybe we should find ways to more aggressively constrain the will of voters because the voters don't know what's good for them.

I should note that when I distinguish between small-d democracy and small-l liberalism, there has to be some level of political liberalism for democracy to operate. So people have to have an

ability to oppose their government. They have to have the ability to access media so they can then share their criticisms with the broader electorate. For opposition to have a legitimate chance of winning, there has to be some room for open political expression, for protesting, for being out there in the public square bringing up those criticisms.

And this is where I distinguish between political liberalism and what I call social, cultural or religious liberalism or illiberalism. And the former is more about means and the latter is more about ends. In other words, if you think about people gathering in the square to protest that is a means. And that is necessary for the democracy process to reflect popular sentiment. But then the ends of democracy and I'll just give a couple of examples.

And they can include things like in the case of Muslim majority context in the Middle East, laws restricting the right to consume alcohol, have an abortion. But there I was thinking more than of the U.S. Laws about -- laws restricting the ability to blaspheme, so insulting prophets and divine text. Those are things that are about the overall conception of the good. They don't necessarily make it more difficult for people to contest elections and to compete. So that's I think an important distinction.

Now, I want to in the next five – five to seven minutes as I just wrap up. I want to talk about the practical implications of some of these arguments. And then I'm sure when it comes to liberalism and democracy, we'll have more than enough time to kind of tease out some of those distinctions. And also, what exactly happened in the case of Egypt and what my relatives may have been saying about their lack of belief in the democratic idea because they didn't like what it was producing.

I think that if we look at U.S. policy, we see this tension as I mentioned. But let's be more specific about what the tension is. I think that the Obama administration gives us a very interesting case because Obama seemed like he was more open to the prospect of respecting democratic outcomes even if they weren't to our liking. So he wasn't soft on the brotherhood. We can get to some of the conspiracy theories about Obama and the Muslim Brotherhood.

But in the early period of the Arab Spring, there was I think an intellectual openness to the idea that religiously inspired parties might do well and that we would have to in some sense come to

terms with that or engage with these groups.

My argument here is that that openness did not last. And if we go towards the second half of the Arab Spring, we see what I would say is a profound discomfort with the idea that Islamist parties being in power, staying in power and shaping the foreign policy of their respective countries.

So part of what I try to do in the second half of the book is reconstruct the Arab Spring period and try to understand what senior U.S. officials were thinking, saying and doing at particular moments in time. And I did close to 30 interviews with senior officials primarily from the Obama administration but also the Bush and Clinton administrations including people who were in the room with Obama at very key moments.

And some of you who read the book might find some tidbits and anecdotes that are, let's say, fresh or not previously reported about certain things that happened at particular key moments especially in the lead up to the coup in Egypt. And we can talk about some of the more colorful aspects of that. But just to give -- you know, I'll just give one example of -- so Anne Patterson who was the ambassador to Egypt at the time.

So what I would do in some of my interviews. I would offer up basically an alternative approach to U.S. policy and say, what if we had actually used our leverage with the Egyptian military in a more proactive way? And actually, made some of our commitments to them more explicitly conditional? And what I call this in the book, maximal leverage. And I try to tease out what a full-throated democracy promotion policy could look like because if I'm going to talk about the democratic idea and how it manifests itself, I want to give a sort of ideal type of what that looks like because then we can have more frank conversation about tradeoffs.

And I want to be honest about the tradeoffs because I think in the short run, democracy in Muslim majority context especially religiously conservative ones in the Middle East will create some level of instability. Will lead to outcomes that aren't exactly ideal to a traditional conception of U.S. interests.

So I remember I was talking to Anne Patterson, and I laid out what this full-throated maximal leverage policy might look like. And she said this, and I'll just quote her. The fact is we probably

did have leverage, but we were never going to use maximal leverage to prevent a coup. Okay. Then I asked her why? And she said, quote, unquote, at that point there were a lot of people who weren't sorry to see Morsi go.

And she's referring here to President Mohamed Morsi who was elected, long-time leader in the Muslim Brotherhood. And towards the end, a number of senior officials had soured considerably on Mohamed Morsi.

So and I was surprised. And a number of officials who I would have thought would have played out some of these more proactive scenarios. Sometimes they would respond, Shadi. They would say, Shadi, that's intriguing. We didn't actually -- this wasn't on the table. It's not something we considered. And perhaps one of the reasons they didn't consider it because they didn't actually consider this to be realistic. And we can talk about what it means to have realistic policy recommendations versus less realistic ones.

And I think what I'm trying to do in this book is to say that it shouldn't be about tinkering around the margins because there is something foundationally misguided and flawed and faulty with U.S. policy in the Middle East over the course of decades. And if we don't address those foundational issues, it's never going to change. And we're going to continue making and repeating the same mistakes over and over.

And I hope that we kind find a way to avoid that. But the only way I think we can avoid that is by coming to terms with the reality of our democratic dilemmas in the Middle East and actually come to terms with those far from ideal outcomes that result. And some of them are about ideology. And some of them are about how we perceive our national security interests. I think at some point, it will probably be worth talking about the role of Israel here and maybe I'll just end with this as a little teaser.

But when the Arab Spring started, I was a major skeptic of what is sometimes called linkage theory. The idea that resolving the Israel/Palestinian conflict is central to the region's future prospects of peace and stability. And we have to take that seriously because it affects a lot of other things and that's the linkage.

And I think that in the 1990s when the Clinton administration really prioritized the peace process there were some elements of this idea that this is sort of the holy grail of U.S. policy in the Middle East. And if only we can do this, it will lead to all these other peace dividends. And I would have said at the time, at the start of the Arab Spring that this has been disproven. And we saw how Israel didn't seem to figure prominently in those early days of protests.

But then I think as I wrote this book. I started to rethink my own assumptions. And what I saw time and time again if we look at key moments in the U.S. policy is that the U.S., for example, increases economic and military aids significantly to certain countries as they become more repressive.

So almost the opposite of what you would have expected after the conclusion of the Cold War. There's all this democratic optimism. We see something very different with Jordan in particular. What's happening to Jordan at this time? Jordan is pursuing a peace treaty with Israel. And the U.S. likes the idea of Jordan prioritizing this. And then Jordan actually clamps down on what was then a fledgling democratic process because how do you make peace with Israel, if your population is broadly anti-Israel and you need parliament to buy in, in order to push through a peace treaty?

So this is where the pursuit of peace with Israel actually ends up in very specific ways undermining any hopes we might have had for democratization. In fact, as these regimes become more autocratic, we support them more because they are pursuing peace with Israel.

And so, and I know Frank will have more to say about this. But there is a question about long term versus short term and I think that at the end of the day authoritarian regimes are inherently unstable. They're inherently brittle in the ways that we can't always anticipate. And Frank has an excellent article about this today in the Atlantic about how those weaknesses are showing in countries like Russia and China.

It's worth remembering that in terms of the long-term prospects is authoritarian regimes might seem stable. They might seem more efficient in the moment, but in the long run their weaknesses become more apparent. So I'll end there and look forward to the conversation.

MR. HASHEMI: Great. Thank you very much, Shadi, for that overview of your book. We

didn't agree on the order of the next speaker, so I'll just turn it over to Amaney Jamal if that's okay with Frank. And then we will listen to Frank after Amaney has concluded. So, Amaney, the floor is yours.

MS. JAMAL: Thank you so much, Nader. Shadi, again, I want to congratulate you on an outstanding book. I really enjoyed reading it. And just if I may plug it.

What I really particularly enjoyed is the inside look and the conversations, discussions you're having on the ground trying to get at this. So it really comes through the richness of the area. The case study that the region of the Middle East really comes through here shining. The analysis is sharp. We sort of bridge both your expertise on the Middle East and then also being, if I may say, like a D.C. insider also that comes through very strongly.

And very few people are able to do that so well. So again, I want to congratulate you on a terrific book which really is going to set up a series of policy questions I think for us as we think about the future of the Middle East and this question of democracy in the larger global context.

So I have about 10 minutes. I have about five key points I want to make. So I'm going to try to be very brief. And I hope we get -- that we can talk about this.

So the probably with democracy or the sort of negative extra ordinalities that democracy might breed in the context of the Arab world are often associated in your book and your analysis, Shadi, with this issue of liberalism or the lack thereof. And I just wanted to spend some time on this question because it's one that, you know, we've all been confronted with especially after the war on terror in terms of thinking about, well, what rule does this land play in preventing the democracy? Or at least that's basically how the debate was structured maybe 20, 25 years ago.

It existed -- it preexisted before that especially if we want to go back to the Iranian revolution. But for the last 20 years or so, it's been very much a part of the way the U.S. has engaged with the Arab world. And the idea being is that clearly somehow, somehow liberal thought does not comport with or is not compatible with Islamic thought or Islamic practice or lived Islamic experiences.

And in many ways, this is the structure of our foreign policy. So this deep-seated conviction that there's something about Islam and Muslims that is just sort of like undemocratic to even

more pointed. And so, part of me sort of comes back to this -- I'll come back to this sort of this categorization. And I'm going to basically push the argument about how much of that is really -- how much of seeing the problem through this lens is really our problem with not understanding or appreciating Islam or if I may even go further?

What we can now call sort of like this undercurrent of Islamophobia where everything about Islam and Muslim might be wrong because more or less, we always are looking at extreme Jihadists, terrorists or the Iranian experiment with democracy as like here's everything that is horrible with Islam.

So I'm just going to be very provocative and put it there because here's how I see the question. If the reason why we're not pushing for democracy is because their sphere of illiberalism. Then I think one of the logical ways to proceed if you buy into the moderation thesis is by sort of creating institutions and structures around democracy that allow for the inclusivity of varying viewpoints in the public sphere knowing full well that those viewpoints have an opportunity, the possibility of being represented in the public sphere.

Let's take the issue of women, for example. I like to put this issue on the table. If we look at the status of women in the Middle East, right? What we see over the last 50 years or so, 60 years or so is that women have made remarkable -- if we look at the objective indicators on women.

What we've seen is that there's been fundamental improvements. Phenomenal improvements in women's standing when we look at education. When we look at the percentage of women who are becoming educated. And when we look generationally, there's been significant -- I wouldn't say phenomenal but significant improvements in attitudes towards gender, so that things are moving and they're gradually improving. This is under conditions of authoritarianism, under conditions of war where economic markets have not really allowed for the entry of women into the workforce. So we'll come back to that.

But here's the point is that we often conflict that our own history, that our own democratic history was very liberal even to begin with, right? So in other words, when you look at women in a

Western societies, it's not until very recently, almost in the last 100 years, maybe even 50 years in most countries. I'm sitting in an institution at Princeton where women were not allowed to sit in this university until the 1970s, right?

So the idea that we consistently uphold this paradigm of liberalism ignoring the role that democracy itself played in shaping liberalism, I think is sometimes to our disadvantage in terms of the analysis. The other example that I want to bring here is, well, I guess the point I'm trying to make is that when we sort of say that, well, Muslim or Islam is illiberalism and therefore they're not ready for democracy. Are we sort of coming up and diagnosing the wrong problem? When in fact it's really our geostrategic priorities, kind of like where you ended, Shadi, that are shaping the debate. And why do I say this? Take the ICM in Kuwait, the Islamic Constitutional Movement. Once Islamic Constitutional Movement became pro-American after the Gulf War, it ran for parliament. You know, and everybody knows Kuwait is a very pluralistic society even though it's a monarchy. It ran for parliament. It ran basically on an illiberalism platform of segregating all institutions of higher education by gender, right?

And we know once you get into segregation, the downstream effects of segregation mean that women are going to get the raw end of the deal. So they ran on a platform of segregating women, but everybody applauded the democracy and pluralism in Kuwait. ICM since it participated in parliament has become far more moderate. Yes, there's still conservative but they're far more moderate than they were had they been shunned from the political process in my opinion. So again, this idea of to what extent is blocking these movements out of the parliamentary process really serving the liberal project?

So going back then to the geostrategic issues, the question if we do agree that geostrategic priorities play a role in shaping how we think, how the United States thinks about democracy. We must ask ourselves, well, A, how can we sort of secure geostrategic purposes while allowing for democracy? Or, B, if we're worried that our geostrategic interest will be threatened because anti-American forces will come to power, how can we reduce levels of anti-Americanism, right?

Those two questions have systematically been ignored in my opinion by the policy

establishment. So that's why it's very important to say, to come back and talk about the peace treaty with Israel. It's important to come back and talk about bolstering relations with authoritarian regimes which have really hurt civil society. It's really important to come back and talk about wars and destruction and how that has created the siege from war and renewed anti-Americanism in the region.

So and that gets us back to this original point that we started with. If you believe as a policymaker that no matter what the United States does, there will always be a deep-seated hatred of the United States because it's the Islam or Muslim world. Then no policy will ever shift levels of anti-Americanism.

But if you believe that no Arab citizens are at the heart of it, rational citizens and when they feel that they're being respected, and their human rights are being protected and their integrity and their dignity is being safeguarded by all foreign policies then maybe they can become pro-American or at least become neutral in a way that is not sabotage or hurt American geostrategic interests.

In my book and my work, I have often talked about the fact that citizens see in their economic wellbeing, their economic futures, the economic futures of their children the desire and need to have strong ties, meaningful ties with the United States. Most people want to immigrate to the United States. Of those who want to immigrate, they want to come to the United States. A lot of people appreciate American culture. They just don't appreciate the policies. And thinking about their own economic longevity. Their own economic opportunities, they link that to a sort of robust U.S. foreign policy. How am I on time, Nader?

MR. HASHEMI: You know what? Your time is almost up, but as I said in the introduction, if you take a few more minutes, I don't think anyone will complain. And of course, we're going to give the same extra time to Professor Fukuyama as well. So please continue.

MS. JAMAL: Okay. So I am going to talk about -- so just really quick. I really want to come up with a policy prerogative on your point, your conclusion, which 100 percent is right on target.

How does the U.S. reduce levels of anti-Americanism? You talk about the Obama years. Obama went to Egypt and gave a speech, and everybody paraded this as like this fundamental shift in

U.S. foreign policy. Right away improvements, U.S. evaluations went up across the region because of a speech. And some will even argue that it wasn't even backed by serious policy changes.

So this just shows you the level of desperation and the need for recognition from Arab societies of U.S. recognition of them as individuals. And then I want to come back to the larger point on the democracy issue.

We keep talking about how democracy has failed the Middle East and specifically the Arab world. Democracy has failed the Middle East or the Arab world. Democracy has failed the Arab world. Democracy has failed the Arab world. I mean the really only true sort of democratic disappointment has been Iran. The Egyptian experiment for everybody who was supportive of Morsi or against it as good or as bad as he was and as an authoritarian leader or not. The truth is that was only a one-year experiment.

So again, to talk about like this systemic failure of democracy is just one-year experiment in Egypt. The other democratic elections that happened in the region. You know, we had three systematic and three and fair elections in Tunisia which were amazing. It's only because economic failure and stagnation in Tunisia that you saw a populist leader come back to power through the democratic process.

The truth is that the per capita income in Tunisia at the eve of the Arab Spring in 2010 was better in real dollars than it is today. Led to sort of like the populace backsliding. So when we think about Tunisia's political culture, it was very democratic. And again, we keep this idea that you might -- everybody was worried about Ennahda coming to power. Worried about Morsi. Worried about the legacy and low and behold they wanted to be part of that economic technocratic elite to form and establish stronger ties with the West for economic development.

So again, when, you know, although the fear is there, Shadi, how credible is that fear? How rationale is that fear given the number of datapoints and actual experiments we've had with democracy in the Arab world? And I'll end there. Thank you so much.

MR. HASHEMI: Great. Thank you very much, Amaney Jamal. Professor Fukuyama, the

floor is yours.

MR. FUKUYAMA: Okay. Thank you. So I want to congratulate, Shadi, on this book also. It's a very interesting and provocative take on the Middle East and American foreign policy.

So there were a number of points that I thought you made that were quite good. And I'll go through those and then there's some other points that I found a little bit confusing or questionable. So I will get to those after the good points.

So first of all, you know, the democracy dilemma or the democratic dilemma that you describe is obviously at the core of America's problems in the Middle East. And I think explains a lot of the weakness of American foreign policy, which really is nothing to write home about over the last, you know, couple of generations.

I agree further that this reliance on Arab dictatorships means that you're relying on inherently fragile regimes that look extremely strong until they're not and then they collapse.

I agree that we've not been willing to use the leverage that we have. I've never understood why we couldn't put conditions on Egypt's military aid package. And none of the arguments in favor of not doing that made any sense to me.

A more fundamental issue about the difference between liberalism and democracy is clearly the case. They're not the same thing. I think linguistically, we try to rely on liberalism into the word democracy. But it's really properly spoken of as liberal democracy and there are separate sets of institutions.

I agree with what you say about the impact of the Arab/Israeli conflict that has been putting a damper on American willingness to, you know, to accept outcomes of democratic elections.

And then the most important what I think is a really interesting insight is the distinction you make between political and cultural liberalism. And the fact that it's really the cultural liberalism that's the sore point in the Middle East. I wouldn't define cultural liberalism as certainly not as essential to, you know, classical -- the classical understanding that liberalism.

In my book on liberalism, I actually said that there's been an extension of the

interpretation of the liberal's fundamental valuing or autonomy and a kind of creation of a certain kind of work liberalism that is really not supportable. And a lot of the opposition to what people think is liberalism is actually a reaction to that particular cultural interpretation.

A lot of that really is not about liberal principles. It's more about this ongoing discussion over the last, you know, 250 years over. You know, so all liberals believe that all human beings have a certain basic equal dignity that needs to be protected by rights. But the big issue has been who qualifies as a full-rights bearing human being?

And obviously, in the United States, it was only white men with property initially. And the 14th Amendment in theory includes African-Americans. The 19th Amendment includes women and now we've included all of these other categories of, you know, LBGTQ and so forth. And the cultural liberalism really isn't about the principle that people should be treated with equal dignity. It's really, you know, who falls into that category? The rights bearing human being.

And in the West, we've seen a really rapid increase. Like 20 years ago, you know, gay marriage wasn't legal anywhere. And all of a sudden it is. And, you know, that change has been very sudden. It's also produced a backlash in our country, but, you know, that's not liberalism. I mean that's something different. That's an interpretation of liberal principle that may or may not be appropriate.

All right. So those are things that I -- the things I have questions about really are definitional. Both in the way that you define liberalism and democracy because you speak about liberalism as if it's a vision of the final good. And that it's something that should be the outcome of democracy.

And I just think that that's historically not correct. I mean liberalism, you know, arises in the middle of the 17th century after the European wars of religion because early liberal thinkers believed that if you associate political power with a particular substantive religious belief, all you're going to get is unending violence, which Europe had experienced since the Protestant Reformation.

Therefore, you needed to deliberately lower the ends of politics to say, life itself and not a particular vision of the good life is what we want. And ever since then that's what liberal societies are.

We're not going to define the good life for anybody. You get to decide that yourself as long as you don't impede the rights of other people. But the state and the society more broadly is not going to define a higher good.

I mean that's really what liberalism is. And it's instantiated through rule of law that provides for limitations on powers of the state cannot impose, you know, a vision of the higher good on other people, but has to respect their fundamental rights. And, you know, you seem to be defining liberalism in this very narrow, specific sense of this work or cultural liberalism that is not essential to liberalism.

And I think that that is big mistake because actually you do want, you know, the political liberalism. I mean that's actually critical. So the other part of the definition that I don't think is quite right is the definition of democracy because as you said, actually in your presentation just now of the book.

You're actually sneaking liberalism in through the backdoor. It's the political liberalism, right, that you have elections, but they have to be free and fair. They have to permit freedom of speech. You have to be able to contest freely. Those are not inherent in democracy. I mean if you have democracy without liberalism, you know, people can vote for a one-time dictatorship for life. You know, that's a valid outcome of the purely democratic choice and one that actually sometimes democratic publics make.

It's the liberalism part that restricts the ability of democratic majorities to actually do things like that. And so, you're actually keeping the entire essence of what you define as political liberalism, but you're just calling it a democracy. You're calling it somehow minimal democracy. Whereas I think you could have just as easily labeled that as minimal liberalism and said that that's actually what we want.

We want peaceful transfer of power under clear rules in which there's open contestation because we believe that in the long run, you know, that's what's going to bring peace and stability. And that's kind of a fundamental liberal, you know, outlook. So I think you're actually a liberal and not a democratic when it comes down to it.

But I do think that, you know, in this distinction between cultural and social -- I'm sorry. Between social, cultural and political liberalism, you've actually touched on a nub of what's bothering people around the world right now. Because it's not just in the Middle East that people -- you know, I actually think that LGBTQ rights has been the single issue that has been pushed by Western, you know, liberal governments that has been the most neurologic and has generated the most opposition.

Like Putin in his speech where he was annexing these four Ukrainian problems. Had got all this stuff about parent one, parent two, parent three, you know. Like this is the thing that really bothered him. It's the thing that bothers his, you know, populace friends on the right in the United States. And I think that that is something that actually can be rethought in American foreign policy, right? Is our LGBTQ rights like the leading edge of a liberal society? And any diminution of them, you know, is completely unacceptable? Will lead to a cutoff of aid from the United States and so forth.

Or are you willing to be a little bit more tolerant of more conservative social attitudes on this relatively narrow range of issues having to do with gender, sexuality, family, you know, and so forth? Because it really offends a lot of people around the world when that becomes -- you know, they associate that with the United States and what the United States is pushing.

So I mean I guess that's the way I would take what you said and, you know, kind of reformulate it using slightly different terms. I guess the final question is could you possibly do this? You said this is a long-term project to get people onboard with this understanding.

And it's going to be a really long time because, you know, I can just imagine the first person that gets up in Congress and says, well, we should just drop off, you know, this whole set of rights and even, you know, with gender equality. Yeah, well, it's nice if you can have it but we're not going to insist on it. I just don't think that's going fly with anybody here.

And so, I do think you've got to, you know, you've got a big challenge in front of you. All right. Thank you.

MR. HASHEMI: Great. Thank you very much both Professor Fukuyama and Professor Jamal.

Shadi, you know, there's been some very good comments here. Some constructive criticism. It would only be appropriate for you to take some time to respond to what you've just heard from our two distinguished discussants. So please go ahead and then we'll take it from there.

MR. HAMID: Yeah, thank you. And I had told Frank and Amaney ahead of time over an email that I was hoping that there would be disagreement. So I'm glad that we delivered on that promise. I think, you know, panels where people agree and the panelists just say great things about the person who wrote the book, you know, it's nice in a way. But also, you want more than that.

So I really appreciate that, and I should also say that both Frank and Amaney have had a profound influence on my own work and that they're cited a number of times throughout the book. So it's great to talk to them about this.

So on Amaney's points about -- I just want to mention Tunisia here because I think Tunisia is a very -- it's a disturbing case because if there was one place where this could have and should have been more promising, it would have been there. But right now, Tunisia is transforming itself into an authoritarian regime. So I think there's a lot of questions that Tunisia forces us to ask about our assumptions about how things progress. Especially since I think as Amaney said, there were signs that Tunisian or at least some Tunisians were embracing a democratic culture.

But as it turns out that democratic culture was not as sticky and resilient as we thought. And part of the issue with the Ennahda party, the Islamism party that won the first parliamentary elections in 2011 and then it was part of coalition governments thereafter. Is that as moderate in scare quotes as Ennahda became so these were like the most gentle Islamism that you could imagine.

They really tried to moderate, right? But even then, secular opposition groups still had this fundamental distrust of them. Even to the extent that after Kais Saied did his power grab last year. Initially, much of secular civil society and liberal civil society and parties were actually not very critical. And they actually had more of a wait and see approach. Why? In part because they still had a profound dislike of the Ennahda party.

Because Rached Ghannouchi had become speaker of parliament and Ennahda ended

up being the largest block in parliament even though it hadn't won the previous elections. It had a plurality in parliament because the secular parties were very much fragmented. And this is always the issue that because some of these parties tend to stay united and having internal discipline. Even if they start to not do as well as in elections, they overperform in terms of their representation in parliament so on and so forth.

So I think it's really tragic that even where you had a, quote, unquote, model where Islamists were trying to dilute their Islamism and be somewhat good liberals. Even there, there was this fear. Why? Because when it comes to Islamist parties, it's the fear of what they might do in the future. It's very hard to address that because it's about something that hasn't happened yet. And how do you reassure people on that?

And this gets me to some of the points that Frank made. So it's not just about the more progressive conception of liberalism that we see emerging in the U.S. and the West in recent years or decades because gender equality is not a woke aspect of liberalism. One might say that it's core to liberal principles insofar as you have equality before the law.

So what's an example of this just to make it more practical? Let's say that a Democrat has been elected to parliament in Egypt. Passes legislation that undermines rights in divorce for women and sort of shifts the balance more towards men. Or you have a situation where, not that is likely, but to give an extreme example. That testimony of women in public courts is not taken at the same level. Or let's say, criminal codes that I think are offensive to the liberal spirit even if they're not technically making it hard for people to protest or to speak out in the kind of freedom of expression sense.

These are all things that I think any self-respecting liberal would have issues with. Or let's say there was a law passed that women could hold any position or even minorities. Religious minorities, I think there's a lot of concern about this too.

What happens if you have a more Islamically oriented government where Christians don't feel that they have full owner -- like it's not fully their government. Not because of any specific legislation, but because Islam is playing a more prominent role in public life. It's more difficult for Christians to

actually execute or to be involved in that kind of policymaking on a senior level so on and so forth.

I mean there's a number of manifestations of this that would seem to privilege Muslim over perhaps other groups. Or men over, you know, so on. So I think that is really -- that's where it becomes very difficult because I do think that -- and I should also say as someone who considers themselves a classical liberal who is critical of liberalism that's sometimes how I try to define it.

I mean I wouldn't want to live under any of this myself. So people, you know, I'm very happy to live under a democratically elected liberal regime in America. So I can understand why this would be frightening to others. And I think that, yeah, it's a tough one. And I think it's a question of where you draw the line.

My preference is to be a little bit more permissive when it comes to where we draw those lines. And have more deference towards electorates. For them to find out where they want to draw the red lines. So it's up to them through deliberation to figure out when is it -- when the majority will, if you will, going too far where you have to say, no. This actually constitutionally is a red line, and we want to make sure that it is seen as a red line?

MR. FUKUYAMA: But let me just ask a clarifying question, though. So if you had a Middle East regime that did what you just said. Basically, took away some category of women's rights. Is your version of, you know, minimal democracy at that point to say it's their choice?

You know, if they want to do that that's fine. And we're not going to say anything about it?

MR. HAMID: So well, first of all, I mean even so-called secular authoritarian governments still have restrictions on family law.

So, you know, there are where inheritance is women don't have equal -- full equality before the law when it comes to inherent rights. So this isn't just an Islamic thing. I would say that it's a broader result of having a conservative electorate especially when it comes to issues around the family. I think that we as Americans can criticize and express discomfort. But, for example, I wouldn't be comfortable with making, let's say, I don't know, making military aid or certain kinds of economic

assistance conditional on reversing a law on divorce proceedings.

We would say, oh, well. Until this is actually addressed, we're going to put you guys in the doghouse until you address this legislation. As long as that legislation was a reflection of the democratic process in that particular country.

So, yes, you know, I think that would be a hard sell for a lot of folks in Congress. I think that --

MR. FUKUYAMA: If the regime said that a certain ethnic group like Kurds couldn't vote or Baha'is, you know --

MR. HAMID: Well, then it wouldn't be minimally democratic in that sense because if you don't have the right to vote then it's no longer even a minimalist democracy. So that's where the right to oppose is absolutely essential. And that's where I try to draw that distinction between the things that you need that are maybe part of the liberal tradition if that completely overlapping with it. That are part of even a minimal -- like this more minimal --

MR. FUKUYAMA: So it is dependent on your distinction between political and cultural liberalism?

MR. HAMID: Yeah. Because -- so, let's say, for example, so sometimes people will say, well, Shadi, what about Myanmar? And do you have, you know, a genocide against, you know, the Rohingya and that sort of thing? But, you know, that extreme example, first of all, is not necessarily democratic. But that -- if there's a government that is elected and then proceeds to take away the right to vote from women from religious minorities, ethnic minorities, that is obviously where a red line has to be drawn.

Certainly, from an American perspective because -- well, on a very basic level if there's -- first of all, if you're killed or imprisoned then you lose the right to vote. So at a very basic level, these minorities have to be able to vote. They have to have the right to recourse and a right to express their opposition to whatever government is elected. And if they're disenfranchised then it can't even be considered an illiberal democracy. So that's where I -- yeah, so hopefully, that clarifies a little bit.

The last thing I'll just say just to kind of capture this. Is when my relatives in Egypt were saying they no longer -- they're not into this democratic idea if this is what it leads to. They weren't talking about the more expansive rights that we associate with modern liberalism in America today. And we can debate it, Frank, as you and I have before. Is classical liberalism ever content to stay classical? Or does it over time demand more for itself?

Putting that to the side, I don't think my relatives were concerned about that. But they were concerned about the very personal aspect of not recognizing a country that they had. So if these Islamic -- even if it's just Islamic rhetoric and not legislation that's being reflected through the educational curriculum or the national media. They felt that that was existential because it would affect, for example, how their daughters perceived the government.

That if there was a sense -- even if it wasn't through any direct legislation that their daughters would get the -- would feel that they were no longer of value. So it was more intangible than specific legislation. Honestly, it's understandable.

And that's why I don't see them as bad or evil people for supporting a military coup and then a massacre that happened after. For them, it was existential, and they would stop at nothing because it was a question of what it meant to be Egyptian. And it was so personal to them that they weren't willing to test it out at the ballot box.

MR. HASHEMI: Yeah, Amaney, go ahead. I think you wanted to jump in?

MS. JAMAL: Yeah, I just wanted to jump in on this issue of, you know, reconciling the democracy liberalism debate. And sort of like, well, what constitutes minimalist definition.

Here's like -- for me when I think about this question, if I may, Shadi? I'm wondering if you think about it in the same way? Is the fact that we have the status quo which is extremely authoritarian. So it's sort of the status quo is a liberal. And then we justify. Then I guess the fear and maybe, Frank, you can chime in. The fear is that that authoritarian status quo is more optimal than experimenting with democracy.

But the existing status quo is very illiberal and is actually even more widely

encompassing of -- it's almost like maximally undemocratic. So this is something that I sort of grapple with. But also, on the other hand, you know, Shadi, you sort of said, well, you would be uncomfortable to link foreign assistance or other forms of assistance to sort of at least some key human rights stipulations. And I was sort of curious about that because even on women's rights. And what I'm going to say might be a little bit provocative the other way right now.

Even on women's rights where we see -- where some of them -- the most significant advancements on women's rights -- and I'm talking about the things like the minimal marriage requirement. The right to divorce. Things of that sort have sort of emerged because local civil society activists were able to align themselves. And I'm not trying to reify the West here. Or you know, everybody knows that I can be very critical, but those alliances have been very important to get certain women's rights if this is only going to be reduced to women's rights.

To get some of those women's rights packages, it didn't come only, you know, from external influence and it didn't come only from domestic sort of organic emergence. This alliance was beneficial. It was beneficial for these -- for women's groups, civil rights activists across the Arab world to be able to sort of work with international organizations and other supporters in other countries.

Why is this important? Because to your point, I think while you are worried about the U.S. coming in with stipulations is that because levels of anti-Americanism are so high that this will discredit the work of women's rights movements. Having said that if we're in an alternate universe where anti-Americanism isn't as high as it is, where women's rights movements can align very -- you know, openly with Western movements, I think this would further the position of women in the region.

And so, you know, having a carrot and a stick sort of saying like, yes, you know, democracy is good, but, you know, we sort of hope and it is our extreme hope that, you know, the marriage age is not abolished. Is not necessarily a bad thing. But again, you know, it really just depends on like who's delivering that message, right?

If it's a messenger is ignoring everything else except focusing on these issues then I think this is where this relationship between the U.S. and democracy promotion or lack thereof in the Arab

world has really hurt the sort of organic liberal momentum in the region that is trying to advance human rights, women's rights and things of that sort. So I'll just leave it at that. I just wanted to chime in because it was not so black and white there.

MR. HAMID: And I'm going to say very quickly on this point just before I forget it. So I think that there's also a danger in seeing women's rights and, say, Christian minority rights in a country like Egypt in a very narrow sense because Christians and women benefit from the right to vote in meaningful elections.

Women also deserve the right to protest and to be in the public square. Women should have the right to criticize the ruling party. So when we carve out these exceptions and say, women's rights are only those that affect family law. Or the rights of Christian minorities are only the ones that affect Christians as Christians and not as human beings. And sometimes, I feel like this is a Middle Eastern version of identity politics.

We judge people not based on them as individuals because people are Christians are different. Not all of them are the same in Egypt. But when we put them in this overall package and we say, oh, let's help Christians as if they all want the same thing. I think it leads to a number of problems. And I think authoritarian regimes take advantage of that and they come to the defense of minorities and women and weaponize that because they know that we as Western audiences are responsive to that.

So we have to be careful to not get played by them. For them, it is very cynical. You know, a Tunisian would be dictator. Kais Saied, one of his first moves was appointing the first female prime minister in Tunisian history. But does that really improve women's rights when Tunisia is moving in the direction -- so if you just have women who are becoming part of the dictatorial new status quo, I mean we shouldn't see that as progress, you know, in my view.

So I think that's what we really have to be careful. And I think it would also be weird if we punish, you know, an elected government for having bad legislation on divorce. And then Saudi Arabia is an authoritarian regime that is more theocratic still the most of these other countries. And is more restrictive on women's rights, but we kind of let them continue that. But because this is an elected

government, we say, well, you're going in this direction. We have to stop you and make a conditional on X, Y or Z. Obviously, then we're creating, you know, a really I think concerning double standard there.

MR. HASHEMI: Okay. Shadi, I'm going to pose a question here and then we're going to go to the questions that are coming in from our viewers.

It's a question about political Islam. And you sort of seem to construct the book around the sort of inevitable reality that look pre-elections in the Islamic world or in the Middle East are going to produce an Islamic victory and that's something the U.S. foreign policy is going to have to grapple with.

But when I had a chance to sort of reflect on 40 years of political Islam in a recent article, I came to the conclusion that I think the Islamist phenomenon in my reading seems to have peaked because all of the, you know, examples whether, you know, it's fair to say this or not. There's a broad perception based on the experience of a very limited and very sort of qualified, you know, experience of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the experience in Iran, the experience in Sudan, the experience in Morocco and to a certain extent of Islamism power in Jordan doesn't produce a shining example that let's say five years from now you have a free and fair election in some country in the Middle East that Islamists are going to win and then pose these huge dilemmas in the way that you have sort of framed the book around.

So the question for you really is, you know, what's your reading right now of the future of political Islam? The mainstream manifestation, i.e., the Muslim Brotherhood movements? I'm of the view that their popularity has really peaked and that there is a lot of -- particularly among the young generation of Arabs and Muslims, that there's an openness to looking at other alternatives or perhaps at best sympathizing with perhaps an updated reimagined, you know, Islamism movement that's much more tolerant and inclusive of other perspectives. Could you comment on that?

MR. HAMID: Yeah, sure. It's a great question. So I definitely think that Islamist parties won't do as well going forward for some of the reasons that you alluded to. But keep in mind in Egypt's first free parliamentary elections in 2011, Islamist parties of various sorts won over -- it was around 70 depending on how you qualified Islamist party. Around 70, 71 percent of the popular vote.

So it wasn't just the Brotherhood which won about 41 percent. The ultraconservatives Salafis won 27 percent and there was another independent Islamist. So even if Egypt went down from 70 percent Islamist support to let's say 40, which would be an incredible drop if you take all the parties together. That would still mean that this Islamist would have considerable influence. Maybe not as the lead party, but perhaps as part of a governing coalition.

And not to compare this to Sweden, but, you know, right now a far-right party in Sweden is the largest party in the new governing coalition, the Sweden democrats. So even in extremely liberal advanced democracies, you can have a situation where a far-right party locationally on the spectrum can find a way to have outside influence even if they don't technically win.

I would also bring up the example of Indonesia and Malaysia where on the local level, you have Sharia ordinances that have been implemented. I talk about some of them in the book. Some of them are symbolic, some of them are actually like a little bit more intense. But often times those are implemented by non-Islamism parties.

So, for example, in Indonesia, Golkar which is an ostensibly secular party has implemented some of those Sharia ordinances. Why? If they want to win in conservative regions, they have to meet the median voter. And the median voter is pretty conservative. So they kind of give people some red meat in that regard. And they get onboard with Sharia. And they try to show that they're outbidding the Islamist on the local level.

So I think that there's different ways that this religious conservatism sort of emerges in election results even if groups like, let's say, the Muslim Brotherhood don't do as well going forward compared to what they did in 2011.

MR. HASHEMI: We've got a good question that just came in and it has to do with what I think the most interesting aspects of your book. And that is the relationship between the thesis of your book and the Israel/Palestine conflict, particular the Abraham Accords.

So the question from Josh Boynton asks, what role did or do the Abraham Accords have on the ever-evolving policies and relationships with Middle Eastern countries and the U.S. in regards to

the question of democracy, democratization and liberalism?

MR. HAMID: Yeah. So some thoughts on this. I'd be curious, you know, what Frank and Amaney think about how to approach this? Or where Israel fits in?

But I think that this is one of the more controversial arguments in the book. And so, basically, I was and still am against the Abraham Accords. And you might say, well, who can be against peace accords? But I think that I'm against what led to the Abraham Accords. So I understand that if we're looking at things very narrowly in the moment, you say, yeah, sure. What's wrong with a peace accord? Let's do it if people are willing to do it on their end.

But I think that it stabilizes this authoritarian status quo because it encourages this idea of peace, in quotation marks, over democracy. Because which -- who are the regimes that are leading the way on this? Some of them are extremely repressive. And I have in mind here the UAE and Bahrain which are some of the worst cases in this regard.

But also, Saudi Arabia which hasn't signed the Abraham Accords but is moving -- it's having, let's say, a closer relationship with Israel. And maybe down the road, we'll see that develop more. Saudi Arabia has become more repressive as many of you will know in recent years. So I worry about this idea of taking the Abraham Accords as a starting point for a new region because what that means to me, what that tells me is that we're doubling down on the mistakes of the past of looking the other way when it comes to human rights, political reform and democracy because of this prioritization of Israel.

And I'm all for prioritizing Israel's security if there was actually an existential threat. I think that there can and should be guarantees and there actually already are in any number of ways. What I don't like is to make this such a focal point for U.S. policy that it distorts other priorities because that hasn't led to a more stable Middle East.

When I look at the Middle East in the last few decades, I don't see as you sort of said in the beginning. I don't see sort of a wonderful record when it comes to U.S. policymaking. And I think that if we're just going to repeat the same strategies and the same policies of the past. I mean what did Einstein -- it was either Einstein or one of these so pop people who say a popular quote all the time. But

if you just repeat the same thing over and over and you expect better results that's sort of insanity.

And I think at some level there is something insane about the myopic nature of U.S. policy in the Middle East in that regard. So yes, let's take Israel's security seriously, but let's not let that be the fundamental thing that shapes everything else.

MR. HASHEMI: Yeah, Frank or Amaney, if you want to jump in on this aspect of U.S. foreign policy and the Abraham Accords, which, you know, pose a huge problem because they're structured on, you know, dealing with and supporting and sustaining authoritarian regimes who have made this peace agreement with Israel.

So that seems to be a big obstacle in terms of envisioning a more, you know, a different U.S. foreign policy based on democracy and democratization.

MS. JAMAL: Right. I mean if I can jump in? I mean this is something that, you know, I have thought about a great deal and worked on myself as well.

Is that, you know, ideally, we'd like to see peace with Israel throughout the Arab world, but we would like to see some of the fundamental core issues resolved in that peace, any sort of peace agreement. You know, first and foremost the Palestinian's conflict is ongoing. And we really are not seeing any end in sight in terms of that conflict.

When we look at public opinion, right? If we can public opinion matters because it's important for democracy and democracies will represent public opinion. You'll see that the public opinion in the Arab world as captured by the Arab barometer was unequivocally against the Abraham Accords by a huge majority, 90 percent plus in most countries.

So this is not necessarily in keeping with the attitude. So in addition to what you're sort of raising which is that these are authoritarian regimes. I'm even going to go a step further and say that there's no support for these accords in the region especially because the bigger issue is considered to be the Palestinians really conflict. And people want to see that issue resolved.

You know, after economic conditions in the region, the ongoing Palestinian/Israeli issue is a priority issue for a lot of citizens across the region. And the fact that it's complete -- you know, again,

it's sort of missed. And people have sort of like resigned themselves to, well, it's a irresolvable conflict and it's not worth anybody's political capital.

I think you are holding the future of democracy in a way hostage because now public -- it's not really Islamists that we're worried about. It's that, you know, people would like to see this conflict resolved. And as we're seeing again, this idea that Israel's security can be maintained. These bilateral relationships can ensue even on the Palestine/Israel front, right? Israel's security more or less is intact yet we're not seeing the movement towards a peace in ways that, A, will reduce anti-Americanism which will then help us with this question about are we worried about anti-American forces coming to power?

And, B, will allow citizens to believe that these accords, right, we didn't need authoritarianism. We didn't need authoritarian Egypt and repression to strike Camp David. We didn't need an authoritarian Jordan and repression to create the Jordan/Israeli peace. We didn't quite honestly need the PNA and its reversal of authoritarianism to sustain the peace treaty with Israel under conditions of less favorable conditions.

So again, and so now the Abraham Accords are like the third, fourth and fifth chapter to this relationship. And for many people, it's like, okay. Well, if we sort of, you know, the peace can bring at least -- can pave the way in many ways to a more democratic Middle East if that peace is more general and it really accomplishes the goal that it needs to accomplish.

MR. HASHEMI: Frank, do you have any comments on this? Or would you like us to move on?

MR. FUKUYAMA: I think we can just move on. I have some opinions about this, but --

MR. HASHEMI: Very good. So we have a question here that sort of is related directly related to your book, Shadi, from Richard Harold who asks, does the concept of minimalist democracy offer any solutions? Sorry. Does the concept of minimalist democracy offer any sustainable solutions for the polarization in advanced democracies like the United States?

MR. HAMID: Yeah. Great question. And so, it's funny. I was making the point that I'm about to make right now on Morning Joe as applied to how we should view Trump voters and that part of

it kind of went viral. And I had a lot of the right attacking me for what I said.

But the basic -- I thought it was actually something that folks on the right would have appreciated which was even if we think that Trump supporters are, quote, unquote, bad people that badness is not disqualifying in a democracy. So for me, that's more or less irrelevant. So what if they're bad people? Bad people have the right to vote. Bad people should be able to hold senior political positions if the people elect them.

And we don't -- as I said earlier, we don't agree on what constitutes good or bad people anymore in this country, in our country, America. That's always going to be a subjective thing. So I was saying, and, Frank, this is something that I say to, you know, democratic party, you know, audiences and liberals in America is we have to prepare ourselves for the prospect that 2024 will lead to a devastating outcome.

And if it's free and legitimate and the result is clear and not contested. And, you know, a certain friend or enemy wins then, you know, that's going to be a real test of each of our democratic commitments. But it also goes on the other side that if Biden or someone else as a Democrat wins in 2024 then Republicans will also have to commit themselves to respecting democratic outcomes even if they see the results as being existentially threatening to them.

So that to me is what each and every American has to commit themselves to. It will happen that the other side will win. There's no such thing as a permanent majority and no one who lives in a democracy should want there to be a permanent democratic or republican majority because that would undermine a core idea of democracy which is rotation of power. If one party keeps on winning, then you have to start asking yourself questions.

So I think that there's a lot of -- there's a lot to be learned from what happened in the Middle East. And some of them are a little bit simple and self-evident. Don't demonize your opponents even if you hate them or even if you hate their policies. Or think that they believe in terrible things. Don't go along that path because part of the challenge of democracy is taking antagonists or enemies and trying to convert them into mere opponents. You should never see your fellow American citizens or for

Swedes their fellow Swedes as enemies of the state or people who have to be destroyed and vanquished.

And that was language that was used routinely during the Arab Spring about Egyptians talking about fellow Egyptians or Tunisians talking about fellow Tunisians.

MR. FUKUYAMA: Actually, Shadi, just on that, your answer that that. Supposing in 2024, a majority of the American people in the states vote for a Democrat but because of the Republican ability to override democratic outcomes, they manipulate the vote and declare, you know, the Republican a winner.

At that point do we simply have to accept that outcome? Or do we say, you know, that's an intolerable -- that's something intolerable because it violated fundamental constitutional rules?

MR. HASHEMI: Shadi?

MR. HAMID: Yes. So maybe I misunderstood. So if it's done through the electoral college, which is what, you know, I wish it was otherwise but that's a system that we use --

MR. FUKUYAMA: No. It's done through the electoral college, but state legislature -- the public and state legislature is basically do what they tried to do in --

MR. HAMID: Yeah, I see what you mean.

MR. FUKUYAMA: -- cast that aside --

MR. HAMID: Yeah, so it depends if there is actual fraud and decertification.

MR. FUKUYAMA: No. No, fraud. There's no fraud. They just say we can't lose this election so we're going to override the popular vote. I mean that's really the scenario that we're facing in 2024. So if that happens then it seems to me, your position can't be that we just have to accept that, right?

MR. HAMID: Okay. So if it happens similar to 2016, which it didn't have the kind of overriding that I think you're talking about. But still, it was done through the electoral college. So it wasn't reflective of what many Americans see as a legitimate democratic outcome.

But I think as long as there isn't -- you don't have a situation where states are playing

games and doing things that some --

MR. FUKUYAMA: No. But that's what I'm asking.

MR. HAMID: Yeah. No, but look --

MR. FUKUYAMA: The presumption is that they are playing games.

MR. HAMID: Then it's actually not a legitimate democratic result if that's what they're doing, right? But if it's similar to 2016 with an electoral college it carried then we can't say that, oh, well, the electoral college isn't the relevant indicator here.

MR. FUKUYAMA: No. But nobody is arguing that.

MS. JAMAL: But can I just chime in? So, Frank, this is a really good point you raise. So my question to you is the following. If we do believe that might happen in 2024 and we have an election that is going to breed an undemocratic result can Biden just declare himself the leader of America and cancel elections?

MR. HASHEMI: That's a great question. I don't know what the constitutional precedent for that would be unless Frank knows?

MR. FUKUYAMA: No. There is no constitutional precedent. Biden certainly doesn't have the power to then just unilaterally override. But I think you're in the deepest constitutional crisis ever. But I just don't think that at that point you can say, well, you know, you have to accept the minimal democratic result because it wasn't a democratic result.

MR. HASHEMI: Right. I mean this is unfortunately the reality that we're facing. I wish we had more time to get into these debates. I want to conclude by, you know, thanking Shadi for his book. For thinking outside of the box. Good books provoke these types of conversations and debates. And I think, Shadi, you've accomplished that here today.

So thank you very much. That wraps it up. I want to thank everyone for their questions. Thank the Brookings Institution for hosting this. Thank our two distinguished discussants for their critical comments on Shadi's book. I'll just ask everyone who is on the panel to stay for one minute, mute their microphone so the YouTube feed can be completed. And that wraps it up unless, Shadi, you have

anything you want to say by virtue of a goodbye?

MR. HAMID: I would just say thank you, Nader, for moderating and guiding our discussion. Thanks to Frank and Amaney for being part of the conversation. I really enjoyed it. And thanks to all of you for joining. And I hope you found this interesting. And if it was interesting consider reading on so thank you.

MR. HASHEMI: Great. Thank you, everyone.

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