CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

12th Annual Conference

Tunisia's and Egypt's Revolutions and Transitions to Democracy

What is the impact on the Arab World?
What Lessons can we learn?

Friday, April 15, 2011

The Jack Morton Auditorium
Washington, DC 20052

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Democracy scholars and activists, business leaders, diplomats, and government officials from Egypt, the Philippines, Syria, Tunisia, and the United States met at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., on April 15, 2011, to examine recent political and social events in the Arab world, and to consider their implications for the development of democracy in the region. The event was organized by the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy and was the twelfth in a series of annual conferences sponsored by CSID. A video recording of the full-day conference is available. Photos of the conference are available. An edited summary of conference presentations follows.

WELCOMING REMARKS

Radwan Masmoudi, president of CSID, opened the conference by referring to the recent revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt as "something we have been dreaming of for a long time." The revolutions had exposed a serious misunderstanding of the true character of Arab regimes by many Western observers, Dr. Masmoudi asserted. What outsiders took to be stability was a rotten foundation built on corruption and repression. Long-time Arab rulers most familiar to Western officials grew increasingly out of touch with their own populations, even as their empty promises of reforms failed to address chronic social and economic problems.

For far too long, the West supported the old regimes in the mistaken belief that this would maintain regional stability, Dr. Masmoudi added. Even in recent months Western governments had been slow to respond to new possibilities for democratic breakthroughs in the Arab world. "But now the United States and the West in general realize that change is coming. And we should not be afraid of change."

Dr. Masmoudi then invited participants to focus on the key themes of the conference: explaining what happened in Tunisia and Egypt and assessing the prospects for democracy in those countries; reflecting on the prospects for similar revolutions in other Arab countries; and setting forth recommendations on how the United States and other international

actors can best support the spread of democracy in the Islamic world.

PANEL 1: THE JASMINE REVOLUTION AND TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY IN TUNISIA

Radwan Ziadeh, founder and director, Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies, Syria, moderated

the first panel, which began with brief welcoming remarks by **Mohamed Salah Tekaya,** ambassador of Tunisia to the United States.

Jaloul Ayed, minister of finance of Tunisia, opened the first presentation by asserting that, "We have a real opportunity to chart a new course in history... We can create a democratic political system free of corruption that truly respects human rights." Minister Ayed said it was not surprising that Tunisia's revolution was the first of the so-called Arab spring because earlier in its history Tunisia had been the first Arab country to abolish slavery and to grant equal rights to women. Tunisia had even adopted a written constitution as far back as 1861.

"***The corrupt old system was bound to fail—and it did fail,***" Minister Ayed said. The critical turning point was the death in January 2011 of Mohamed Bouazizi, a young street vendor who immolated himself to protest repeated indignities inflicted on him and fellow vendors by local police. "This young man said what a lot of Tunisians were thinking: 'enough is enough!'"

Minister Ayed paid tribute to the many ordinary Tunisians—especially young citizens—who participated in the "spontaneous, leaderless, and party-less" revolution that toppled the regime of president Ben Ali. The heart of his presentation was an analysis of the primary challenges facing the current transitional government as it prepares for elections in July. Chief among these are maintaining security and managing the expectations of the people. Although the security situation is improving, "the reality is, the government cannot meet the people's demands immediately," the minister admitted.

The transitional government is focusing on four main priorities: reducing unemployment, restoring economic growth, reducing regional disparities, and assisting Tunisians in need. With a population of 10 million, Tunisia has about 600,000 unemployed, with large numbers of recent graduates unable to find work. The country's tourism and export sectors alone employ about 1 million workers and support 50 percent of the population—and both of these sectors have been severely impacted by the revolution. The government plans to create 20,000 jobs in the public sector and to recruit an additional 20,000 citizens into the military. It also expects a growing economy to absorb another 20,000 workers in the private sector—"a drop in the bucket," he called this, but also "a good start." Program Hope, another new effort, will provide small cash stipends to recent graduates to help them enter the labor market.

To restore economic growth the ministry of finance is starting major initiatives on infrastructure projects and financial reform. "We need a serious reform of our entire financial system," Minister Ayed admitted. "These problems developed over a long time and will require a long-term solution." Efforts to reduce regional disparities include microfinance projects and business advice to small and medium-sized enterprises. On the social front, the government is providing subsidies to families that have suffered financially since the revolution.

Finally, the government has also created a confiscation committee to investigate and recover state assets stolen by the former president and his family. The process was "complicated and technical," he said, and the committee was working hard not to disrupt the workings of viable companies or to destroy banks. Lands and real estate determined to belong to the state will go back to the government, while stolen financial assets—including assets recovered from abroad—will go back to the banks.

Minister Ayed said that while the transitional government knows it does not have a mandate to engage in major structural changes, it simultaneously wants to prepare the ground for the next government while meeting the most pressing demands of the people. "***We believe that the spark that began in Tunisia gave us a tremendous responsibility to make sure that this transition is a successful one. Failure is totally unacceptable***," he concluded.

Mondher Ben Ayed, a Tunisian businessman and a board member of CSID-Tunis, opened his remarks with a review of the security situation. The revolution had revealed that the army and the police were far smaller than most Tunisians had believed. "The army is very small—only 35,000 troops that are not well trained or equipped"—and these are barely able to defend the country's border with Libya, he warned.

As for the economy, Mr. Ben Ayed predicted that the number of unemployed could rise to as many as 700,000 before it starts falling. Some 350,000 persons are employed in the tourism industry in what will surely be a bad year for tourism. "Right now, foreign debt is up, foreign investment is down, and the budget deficit is exploding because of food and energy subsidies to the people…We have lost our trade with Libya…and the banking system is weak with lots of bad debts."

Despite these challenges, Mr. Ben Ayed remains optimistic. "Before the revolution, Tunisia had strong economic fundamentals," a high literacy rate, equal status for women, and a strong middle class. Even with massive corruption, the country experienced four years of 5-percent annual growth. "If we can take out corruption—even if nothing else changes—we should be able to achieve 7 or 8 percent annual growth," he argued. "We need financial aid for a two-year transition period, after which we will be fine."

Mr. Ben Ayed then provided a brief chronology of the various interim governments that culminated in the current system:

a government of technocrats running current affairs, plus a political reform committee independent of the government that is writing a roadmap for Tunisia's political future. "We have had more political change in the past four months than in the previous fifty years," he noted. "And all these changes have been made under existing civil law in an ad-hoc environment." Fortunately, there has been no military interference in this process that has already produced a new election commission and a new election code. Elections scheduled for July 24 will produce a new 200-member parliament that will also draft a new constitution.

An American colleague who visited Tunisia recently complained to Mr. Ben Ayed that, given all the new parties, laws, and public debates, "nothing is clear any more." Mr. Ben Ayed replied to his friend, "Under Ben Ali we had clarity. Now everything is cloudy—but we are moving forward."

Radwan Masmoudi noted that more than fifty political parties had been created in a two-month period after the revolution. He termed this "a healthy development" that demonstrated that "everybody wants to be involved in building the new Tunisia." Of course, many of these parties had similar agendas and ideologies (and even similar names), and he expected that smaller parties would merge with larger like-minded rivals after the elections, leading to a natural consolidation of the party system. While religion will continue to be a major force in the country (Tunisia is 98 percent Muslim, but with a long tradition of moderate Islam, he said), "no one wants a theocratic state—everybody wants a democratic civil state that fully respects human rights and Islamic values and culture." The challenge will be "***to find a good balance between Islamic religious values and democratic values. And I think Tunisia is well placed to develop this model of a moderate Islamic state***," Dr. Masmoudi concluded.

PANEL 2: THE REVOLUTION AND TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY IN EGYPT

Abdallah Schleiffer, professor emeritus, American University in Cairo, moderated the panel on Egypt's revolution and transition.

Emad El-Din Shahin, professor of religion, conflict, and peacebuilding, University of Notre Dame, wanted to

dispel several myths that had grown up around the Egyptian revolution. The first of these was that the uprising was a random or spontaneous development. In fact, Mr. Shahin said, the revolution was the cumulation of social pressures and demands built up over at least a decade. Beginning in 2000, democracy activists began breaking down a series of taboos about Egyptian politics—that hereditary rule was normal and expected, that there could be no serious challengers to president Mubarak, or that grassroots movements could not bypass formal party structures and processes. The Kefiya ("Enough") movement launched its reform agenda in 2004, and when Saad Eddin Ibrahim, a scholar and democracy activist who had been imprisoned by Mubarak, announced in 2005 that he was running for president, he was joined by a number of other plausible presidential candidates.

Likewise, the Egyptian revolution was not a "Facebook revolution." To be sure, social media were instrumental in organizing and informing the crowds, but traditional print media, local television stations, the al-Jazeera satellite network, and even signs, posters, graffiti, and word of mouth, were widely used as well.

What was unique to Egypt, Mr. Shahin said, was that the revolution was "demand-based." At first the people wanted bread, freedom, and social justice. As the protests in Tahrir Square grew these demands transformed into "Mubarak must go!" then "clean up the state!" and finally "the people want the Pharaoh on trial!" ***Another unique feature was the transcendent nature of the uprising: it was based not on religion, ideology, or economic-class concerns but on such universal values as freedom, social justice, human rights, and especially dignity.*** And it was not led by political parties or personalities—the Egyptian youth who were the primary drivers said that the revolution's real "leadership" was its "platform of demands." Finally, "the high discipline of the protesters kept things nonviolent, neutralized the military, marginalized the regime, and garnered international support," Mr. Shahin claimed.

Saad Eddin Ibrahim, chairman of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies in Cairo, and a long-time democracy activist in Egypt, was teaching in the United States at the outbreak of the revolution. In addition to following its progress through television news and the Internet, Mr. Ibrahim received regular eyewitness updates from his wife Barbara, a sociologist at the American University in Cairo, until he returned to Egypt on the day before president Mubarak resigned. He used vignettes of their personal experiences during the revolution not only "to give a human dimension to this historical event" but also to answer the question he is most frequently asked these days: what will the Muslim Brotherhood do in a democratic Egypt?

In the early days of the revolution, Barbara Ibrahim went to Tahrir Square holding a picture of Mr. Ibrahim behind bars (recalling his imprisonment at the hands of the Mubarak regime). For reasons of convenience, she entered through the gate closest to her university office, which brought her by chance to that corner of the square in which the Muslim Brotherhood had erected its stage and microphones. Not only did the Muslim Brothers recognize Mrs. Ibrahim, but they welcomed her and invited this modern secular woman—and an American, no less—to address the crowd from their own platform. "Why did they do this? Because they wanted the same thing as everybody else," Mr. Ibrahim said: freedom, dignity, and an end to corruption.

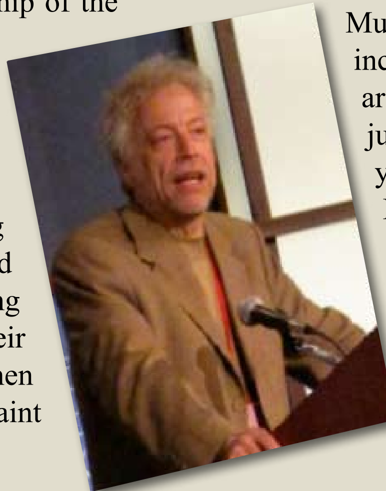
Upon returning to Cairo, Mr. Ibrahim went directly from the airport to Tahrir Square, where he witnessed the revolution's final days and ultimate success, and took note of its multiple historical ironies. First, the old regime made a fatal error in blocking Internet communications: when anxious parents could not reach their children, they went to the square themselves, and the size of the crowds doubled and tripled. CNN and al-

Jazeera provided live coverage of the nonviolent, festive atmosphere, and soon "everybody wanted to be there…You could not believe the electricity in that square." Then the regime tried attacking the protesters—"first by planes, then by trucks, then by horses, and then by camels"—reversing the historical evolution of human transportation. Meanwhile, a former Egyptian security officer named Omar Afifi (now living in exile in the United States) provided long-distance insider's advice to the protesters on how to get around the police crowd-control measures. Finally, when it was all over, many officials of the Mubarak government—including some former students of Mr. Ibrahim—found themselves imprisoned in the very cell block where he was incarcerated years ago.

"Tahrir Square had become a symbol for the entire world," Mr. Ibrahim asserted. If the revolution succeeds in Libya there will be a continuous democratic land mass from Tunisia to Egypt that could "transform the Arab world and end the talk of Arab exceptionalism" with respect to democracy.

Mona Makram-Ebeid, professor of political science and sociology, American University of Cairo, lived in Tahrir Square "for eight days discovering a whole generation we had always sidelined…We thought they were only interested in computers or drugs or that they were totally apathetic. Instead, we find that they are aware, and that they know exactly what they want to do."

Like other observers Ms. Makram-Ebeid was struck by the absence of formal leadership of the revolution. As one young woman in the square told her, "When you are in a boat and everyone is rowing, who needs a leader?" Although the crowds were predominantly young, she did meet Egyptians from all walks of life, including Muslims and Christians who prayed together, and many housewives coming out politically for the first time in their lives. Although women outnumbered men in the square, "there was not one complaint of sexual harassment," she reported.



Westerners often wonder why Egyptians hold their military in such high regard, but this is understandable

when one realizes that nearly every family in Egypt has at least one member serving in the military. Now that the revolutionary euphoria has worn off, however, the hard work of building a new Egypt begins. "We do not just want amendments, we want a totally new constitution," Ms. Makram-Ebeid said. "We want a new election law with proportional representation…We want a secular democratic Egypt…We do not want to be ruled by clerics," she asserted.

Ms. Makram-Ebeid worried about the secrecy under which the transitional military government now operates, the apparent sidelining of women in recent weeks, and the rush to hold parliamentary elections in September, which may not allow new participants (and especially young people) adequate time to prepare. As for the Muslim Brotherhood, "We should incorporate them into the political arena so that they eventually become just another political actor. The younger members of the Muslim Brotherhood are more open, more tolerant, and they look to the future…The best thing we could do is to attract them into the ranks" of a democratic political order.

"A revolution is one thing;

a transition to democracy is another." So said **Nathan Brown,** professor of political science and international affairs, George Washington University. ***Conceding that "what the Egyptians have accomplished so far is encouraging," he nonetheless regarded the task of reconstructing a new political system as "much more complicated."***

His first concern was procedural: "How do you build a democratic political system?" There is a lot of scholarly writing on this topic, but Mr. Brown doubted that those drafting the new Egyptian constitution were familiar with this literature. As Ms. Makram-Ebeid had said, the transitional military government refuses to open up the secretive process by which it makes decisions. ***"The current process is opaque, haphazard, and nonconsensual," Mr. Brown complained. This sets a bad precedent even if the substance of the government's decisions is sound.***

Mr. Brown's second concern was the potential rise of the Islamists. He expected the Muslim Brotherhood to do well in the September elections, even if they have already announced that they will not seek a majority in the new parliament. Unlike other speakers, however, he did not expect the Muslim Brotherhood to transition easily from a banned movement to a democratic political party. Finally, Mr. Brown worried about the remnants of the former ruling National Democratic Party—not that the upper echelons would wage a counterrevolution but that the party would live on through thousands of lower-level officials who would engage in vote buying, voter intimidation, and other manifestations of "thuggish local politics."

One advantage Egypt has, according to Mr. Brown, is that despite that the fallen regime was ugly and corrupt, "a sort of politics was possible." ***As a result, there are many politically sophisticated people around whom new democratic movements can coalesce. Thus, "despite these reservations I am nonetheless optimistic about the future of Egypt," Mr. Brown concluded.***

Like Mr. Shahin had done, **Stephen Zunes,** professor of politics and international studies, University of San Francisco, used his time to dispel what he considered myths in the emerging narrative of the Egyptian Revolution. The first myth, he said, was that the Egyptian military deserved credit for protecting the protesters. In fact, military officers simply did not trust their soldiers to follow orders to fire on the crowds in the square. The second myth was that the United States was a factor in the revolution. In fact, the United States in recent years has provided negligible amounts of financial aid to Egyptian democracy activists, and these sums were dwarfed by the billions of dollars of assistance we sent to prop up Mubarak and the Egyptian military. President Obama did not even call for democracy in Egypt until after Mubarak had resigned, Mr. Zunes noted.

Other myths include the claim that "the Internet did it" or that seminars and workshops with foreign speakers contributed significantly to the developments in Cairo. "None of the foreigners can take credit," Mr. Zunes asserted. "Egypt now joins a long list of countries that replaced authoritarian leaders by nonviolent means." He cited a Freedom House study of some seventy countries that made the transition

from authoritarianism to some form of democracy. The vast majority of revolutions were led by civil society or by strategic nonviolence. "In cases of strategic nonviolence," he added, "the more nonviolent the revolution, the greater the success of democracy." He therefore concluded that "democracy in the Middle East will not come through foreign intervention, sanctimonious statements from Washington, voluntary reforms from above, or armed struggle by a self-selected vanguard. It will only come through the strategic application of nonviolent action by the peoples of the Middle East themselves."

"I am also optimistic about Egypt in the long-term," said **Larry Diamond,** senior fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University. "But in the near term, no one has a clue about how the people will vote in a free election." With parliamentary elections scheduled for September 2011, "it is going to be very hard for new political forces to find their footing." In addition, the current highly majoritarian electoral system favors "local power brokers who are the survivors of the old National Democratic Party order…When people elected under one political system have the authority to design a new system, there tends to be a high degree of continuity," he said. If the Muslim Brotherhood did well in the September elections, it would have no incentive to dilute its power or share it with younger challengers, he warned.

The most likely outcome in the short term, Mr. Diamond said, is "some sort of semi-democracy with a protracted and difficult process of development." ***Genuine long-term progress toward real democracy will require numerous reforms, including political-party development, enhanced civic education, the inclusion of broad segments of civil society in political life, controlling corruption, ensuring the independence of the judiciary, increasing horizontal accountability, and achieving genuine civilian control of the military.*** This will not be accomplished in one or two years, he said, but would require "thoughtful prudent steps over a long period of time" so as not to provoke a counterrevolutionary backlash from the military.

PANEL 3: THE IMPACT OF THE REVOLUTIONS ON THE ARAB WORLD: LIBYA, SYRIA, YEMEN, AND BAHRAIN

Radwan Masmoudi moderated the third panel, which explored the prospects for additional democratic breakthroughs in Libya, Syria, and other countries.

"Every Arab country is different, and so the Libyan experience is different from that in Tunisia and Egypt." So said **Abdallah Schleifer,** professor emeritus, American University of Cairo, in a presentation highlighting why the revolution in Libya did not follow the successful models of its neighboring countries. The first and most obvious difference was that the Gaddafi regime responded immediately and violently to the large-scale peaceful protests in Tripoli. And unlike what Mr. Schleiffer called the "soft coups d'etat" in Egypt and Tunisia, the Libyan military—not the poorly supplied and marginalized regular army, but the well-funded private militia commanded by Gaddafi's sons and other close relatives, and supplemented by several thousand African mercenary troops—remained loyal to the regime.

While poverty, corruption, and the lack of social justice were the driving forces of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, "in Libya the issue is political democracy, and it is an all-out struggle." Discounting claims that the foreign intervention in Libya was "another Iraq" or "about getting Libyan oil," Mr. Schleiffer also rejected the suggestion by Stephen Zunes that strategic nonviolence could work in Libya. He conceded that nonviolent protesters made great gains in the first week of the Libyan revolt, but this was because "there was not much of a formal state structure" in the eastern part of the country, and what authority there was simply collapsed. "Mubarak's big mistake was not having more sons to take over private armies" and in allowing them to study at the American University in Cairo instead of at a military academy, he said. Gandhian nonviolence worked in Tunisia and Egypt only because the armies there allowed it, and strategic nonviolence could conceivably advance the Palestinian cause within Israel, but "nonviolence would not have worked against Hitler," Mr. Schleiffer argued, and it will not work against Moammar Gaddafi or similar dictators.

In January 2011 Bashar al-Assad granted an interview to the *Wall Street Journal* in which the Syrian president claimed that because he was so close to the beliefs and aspirations of his people, Syria was "immune" to the revolutionary fever of nearby Arab lands. **Radwan Ziadeh,** founder and director, Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies, responded by publishing an article entitled "Why Syria Will Be Next," and his conference presentation brought that analysis up to date. "Syria has the same preconditions for revolution as Tunisia and Egypt," such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, and repression. "We do not have oil or resources, neither do we have bread nor freedom," Mr. Ziadeh said.

"Each revolution has a moment of resistance" without which it never would have started. In Syria that spark came in the southern city of Daraa following the arrest of fifteen schoolboys who had written antigovernment slogans on a wall. When their parents assembled to demand their release, the security forces rebuffed them, and as protests grew in subsequent days, those forces killed six protesters. Instead of dispersing the crowd, "within a few hours, more than 30,000 people came out to the main square chanting against the governor and the head of the security service." The demonstrations then spread to other Syrian cities and, as of mid-April, had claimed the lives of more than 200 prodemocracy protesters.

The Syrian regime seems to have learned from the presumed mistakes made in Tunisia and Egypt, Mr. Ziadeh continued. It expelled foreign journalists and prevented international news networks like CNN and al-Jazeera from broadcasting live coverage of the protests. In response, many Syrians posted homemade videos on YouTube and Facebook, giving them a greater

sense of ownership of the movement. The regime also tried to foment sectarian animosity but was met by chants of "The Syrian people are one!" The situation on the ground was difficult, Mr. Ziadeh conceded, and "with no media presence we cannot get full information." He called for greater support from the international community and predicted that "change in Syria will bring change to all the Middle East."

Amina Rasul-Bernardo, president, Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy, reminded the audience that there are large Muslim populations in Southeast Asia, and asserted that reformers in the Middle East could learn from both "the successes *and* the mistakes" of the transitions in Indonesia and the Philippines. The uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt "are not isolated uprisings, they are linked," she said, just as the successive struggles for independence in Southeast Asia took inspiration from nearby countries.

***"The first country to have a peaceful transition from despotism to democracy was the Philippines." But although Filipinos had recently celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1986 People Power Revolution that toppled the Marcos dictatorship, subsequent political events provide more of a cautionary tale*.** That first revolution brought an icon of democracy, the still-beloved Corazon Aquino, to the presidency, and Filipinos had "high expectations that the fundamentals of democracy would be strengthened… Unfortunately, this did not happen," Ms. Rasul-Bernardo said. "The first wave of democrats was so busy attending to the sharing of power that they did not realize the foundations of democratic Philippines were rotten to the core." With the military, allies of the former president, and democrats all jostling for power, the Philippines experienced several coup attempts coups during the Aquino administration. A second People Power Revolution removed corrupt president Joseph Estrada in 2001, and yet a third revolution attempted to remove president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2005. "But Mrs. Arroyo had learned from previous revolutions. She prevented people from massing in the center of the previous revolutions" and went on to complete her second term as president in 2010. The conclusion drawn from these episodes is that people power is not enough: you need a strong civil society "at the core of every democratization."

"I want to make five generalizations about the impact of Tunisia and Egypt on the rest of the Arab world." So began **Mona Yacoubian,** special adviser, Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention, United States Institute of Peace. The first is that "the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt are watershed events. The region will never be the same…there is no going back," Ms. Yacoubian said. "The social contract that has long governed relations between rulers and peoples is now in tatters." The implicit bargain—that governments in the region would provide jobs, housing, and other necessities of life, and that the people would acquiesce passively to their rule—has utterly collapsed. So, too, has the idea common in the West that Arab autocrats were the only alternative to chaos or Islamist extremism.

The second point is that "we will continue to see the reverberations of these changes across the region," as events in one area have a huge impact elsewhere. Ms. Yacoubian cited a recent study

that found there are more than 65 million Internet users in the Arab world and more Facebook users than newspaper subscribers. "In August 2010 Arabic became the fastest growing language on Facebook," she quoted this study as saying.

Third, there are different trajectories for change. The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions succeeded relatively quickly, while in Libya, it appears that despite foreign intervention there may be a protracted civil war. In Bahrain there is also foreign intervention in the form of Saudi troops that are propping up the regime. ***Yemen may offer the model of a negotiated transition if the regime and its opponents can agree on the terms of President Saleh's departure. And in the terribly significant case of Syria, "it is not yet 'game over' for President Assad," Ms. Yacoubian noted.***

The fourth general point is that Egypt will have disproportionate influence as a "critical shaper of trends," whichever way it goes. The demand in Egypt for transitional justice and a full accounting of historical crimes, for example, reveals "a yearning for accountability has to be met" not only in one country but throughout the region. Finally, young people will continue to grow in size and importance as a political force in Arab societies.

PANEL 4: U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE

Daniel Brumberg, senior adviser, Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention, United States Institute of Peace, moderated the final panel, which opened with remarks by **Tamara C. Wittes,** deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State. Ms. Wittes gave an overview and defense of the Obama administration's policy toward the Middle East and North Africa. In an April 12, 2011, speech to the U.S.-Islamic Forum, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that the recent Arab uprisings "exposed myths that for too long were used to justify a stagnant status quo." These included the myths that governments do not need to respond to people's aspirations or to respect their rights, that the only way to produce change is through violence, or that Arabs do not care as much about democracy as other peoples do.

In like fashion, Ms. Wittes said, the Arab uprisings should help refute similar myths about "the role of external actors in advancing democracy and human rights in the Middle East." We now know, she argued, that external involvement does not always mean an unwelcome imposition, that outside actors are not simply totally self-interested or totally altruistic, and especially, that they are not omnipotent.

"The fundamental truth is that stability in the region demands reforms that address citizens' demands for freedom, dignity, and opportunity." President Obama laid out the guiding principles of the new U.S. approach in his June 2009 speech in Cairo, when he said that change must come from within and cannot be imposed, that certain rights are universal and will be defended by the United States everywhere, and that American relationships need to rest on mutuality and partnership with citizens, not just with governments. ***"Any party that wants to be a legitimate democratic actor needs to sign up to some basic democratic principles, such a rejecting violence, committing to democratic rules of the game after as well as before the election, and respecting the equality of all citizens, including women and minorities," Ms. Wittes said.***

The United States cannot—and need not—go it alone. "These are other rising powers that have had their own transitions who can be good partners to the Middle East and North African countries, including Chile, India, Indonesia, and South Africa…The circle of democracy is much wider today than just the West." The United States can best help reformers in the region by working multilaterally "to reinforce the universality of human rights and democratic aspirations" as one partner in "a global multicultural community of democracies," Ms. Wittes concluded.

Following the suggestion of Amina Rasul-Bernardo, **Roland Rich,** executive head, United Nations Democracy Fund, offered another Muslim Asian country—Indonesia—as both a model and a cautionary tale for Egypt. That country was ruled for more than thirty years by Suharto, a former general who groomed his sons and daughter for an expected hereditary succession. The president's policy agenda, which he termed the "New Order," achieved considerable economic success, but the benefits went primarily to the president's cronies and family members, and came at the price of civil liberties. By the mid-to-late 1990s the regime faced serious internal political challenges (including major urban rioting) and increased foreign criticism of human-rights abuses. Confronted with the loss of support of his own military, Suharto resigned the presidency in May 1998 and was placed under house arrest.

Indonesia was what political scientists call a "pacted transition," an agreement by ruling elites to relinquish power peacefully in exchange for personal protection and financial considerations. The initial period under the presidency of Habibie brought an end to censorship, the releasing of political prisoners, and a radical decentralization of power, Mr. Rich said, "but the sad reality was that although the structures of democracy were in place, the next five years were chaotic." Indonesia suffered from ethnic tensions, interreligious violence, terrorist bombings by the local al-Qaeda affiliate, a proliferation of political parties, and the absence of clear leadership from the top. Indonesians themselves termed these years their "demo-crazy" period—and this may be exactly where Egypt is headed, Mr. Rich suggested.

The good news is that, thirteen years later, "the Indonesians appear to have talked their way through the crisis." Indonesia today has an incredibly strong Muslim civil society; some of the larger Islamic charitable groups have many millions of members. But Islamic political parties collectively have never gotten more than 30 percent of the vote in three elections. This demonstrates what Mr. Rich termed "a sophisticated worldview" that allows citizens to identify themselves as Muslims in social and religious terms but not necessarily so as voters.

One unfinished battle (and one the Egyptians will also need to fight) is "to get the military out of political life." Ironically, in Indonesia it is inadequate (not inflated) military expenditures that give the military outsized influence, forcing local officers to run business enterprises just to meet payrolls. "Until the Indonesian budget actually pays for the full costs of its military they will not be able to get the military out of business," he said.

Having devoted the bulk of his time to Indonesia, Mr. Rich closed with a brief overview of the UN Democracy Fund, a U.S.-Indian partnership that makes grants to support projects in civil-society development, free media, women's and youth groups, and human rights. The fund is supported by voluntary contributions from thirty-nine countries of the global north and south, and is a good example of how, in his view, U.S. policy works best when it works multilaterally.

Returning briefly to Indonesia, **Carl Gershman,** president, National Endowment for Democracy, read these excerpts from a speech by President Yudhoyono to the 2010 assembly of the World Movement for Democracy in Jakarta: "***We in Indonesia have shown that Islam, democracy, and modernity can grow together. We are a living example that there is no conflict between a Muslim's spiritual obligation to Allah, his civic responsibility as a citizen in a pluralist society, and his capacity to succeed in the modern world…It is also telling that in our country, Islamic political parties are among the strongest supporters of democracy—and they have every reason to be***." Mr. Gershman then ***praised Dr. Masmoudi and CSID for its decade of work in support of Islamic democracy "long before it was fashionable."***

There has been a "tidal wave of participation" in Egypt, Mr. Gershman said, but like other speakers he worried that the majoritarian election law would favor established political parties there. "I also think the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood is overstated," Mr. Gershman said, citing an April 2010 *Journal of Democracy* article by Charles Kurzman and Ijlal Naqvi entitled "Do Muslims Vote Islamic?" Those authors concluded that Islamist parties achieved their greatest success in the first elections after the collapse of the autocratic regimes that banned them, but then weakened as subsequent elections became freer and more routine. This shows that "democracy is the solution, Islam is not the solution" in politics, he said.

Mr. Gershman also took issue with comments made by Bernard Lewis, the prominent scholar of the Middle East, in an interview in the April 2, 2011, *Wall Street Journal.* Mr. Lewis had said that "to lay the stress all the time on elections, parliamentary Western-style elections, is a dangerous delusion…I don't think we can assume that the Anglo-American system of democracy is a sort of world rule, a world ideal." To Mr. Gershman, "This sounds as if Lewis thinks the Middle East is not ready for democracy. But what we do not want in the Middle East is a hyphenated democracy. We had enough of this in the twentieth century: proletarian democracy, Bolivarian democracy in Venezuela, Islamic democracy in Iran, socialist democracy in China…Let's just have democracy."

Finally, "I believe what has happened in the Middle East is more significant than 1989" because the recent revolutions came from within former colonial countries and were not triggered by outside factors. "They came in a part of the world that was completely bypassed by the Third Wave of democratization. They send a powerful message to people in Burma, Cambodia, China, and throughout the world that democracy and change are possible," Mr. Gershman asserted.

But **Marc Lynch,** associate professor of political science and international affairs, George Washington University, replied to Mr. Gershman, "We need just to let this be 2011, not 1989 or even

1848." In his analysis the Arab uprisings reflect the empowerment of publics, but "from where I sit, it is too early to talk about transitions to democracy."

"We all need a bit of analytical humility," Mr. Lynch continued. "These revolutions may have been inevitable but still we were surprised." The recent shiftings of power may not be the replacement of the old order by a new order, but something "that might better be described as an arms race…We may have sudden spurts with one side advancing over the other—but without anyone winning a conclusive or final victory." And if the autocrats return to power in five years or so, what will happen to the "disheartened, disenfranchised, and disappointed youth who continue to struggle with the massive economic and social problems that sparked these uprisings in the first place?"

"There is also a risk of exaggerating America's role in what happened and then drawing an inference that we must now deliver our gift elsewhere—to Syria, to Iran, to places that would require violent force," Mr. Lynch continued. This would be a "fatal misreading" of recent events, he said. "I believe the United States has an important role to play in nurturing change, in building regional frameworks….and in the design of meaningful democratic institutions… But we should not imagine that this was a region crying out for American leadership."

The spread of democracy in the Middle East will almost certainly change the foreign policies of countries like Egypt in ways that the United States will not like, he predicted. Although the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions focused almost exclusively on domestic issues, an underlying theme was "the impotence and cowardice and incompetence of the Arab regimes…and the willingness of those governments to cooperate with the United States on controversial foreign policy issues" such as Palestine and Israel. "We will need to confront what it really means to have democracy in the Middle East—not as a slogan but as a real messy democracy where it is harder to get our way." And we have to expect that in many cases, "the people we would like to see win will not win," Mr. Lynch argued.

"We might as well be clear from the get-go," added **Shadi Hamid,** director of research, Brookings Doha Center: "For more than five decades, U.S. policy in the Arab world was a failure." The so-called stability paradigm was a contradiction in terms: there was no stability. Former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice said constantly in 2005–2006 that the status quo was untenable. So we should have seen this coming.

Mr. Hamid agreed with Mr. Lynch that "there has been a tendency to idealize the Egyptian revolution." As Americans, "we have this perception that when there is openness and democracy, pro-American liberals will emerge." In fact, the silent majority in Egypt is hardly liberal, if recent opinion polls can be trusted. We should also not pretend that Israel and foreign policy had *nothing* to do with the Egyptian revolution, he continued. "One of the main reasons Mubarak was seen as illegitimate was his perceived closeness to the United States and Israel." Despite the reputed festive atmosphere in Tahrir Square, Mr. Hamid heard plenty of anti-American and anti-Israeli rhetoric during his days there. ***And these attitudes are held not only by radical Islamists but by many ordinary citizens. "Egyptians do not like U.S. foreign policy, and***

they do not like Israel, " Mr. Hamid reported. He predicted that the coming reorientation of Egyptian foreign policy will be more pronounced than any domestic or economic changes, with a strong shift toward Iran and Hamas the most likely next steps.

"There is a perception in Washington that the Obama administration has managed the revolts in the Arab world fairly well…This is yet another example of how opinion in Washington is worlds apart from opinion in the Arab world." When Secretary Clinton visited Cairo recently, for example, the main coalition of Egyptian youth refused to meet with her because of U.S. support for Mubarak that continued almost to the bitter end. And U.S. favorability ratings in several Arab countries were actually lower in 2010 that they were in the final year of the Bush administration, according to a recent University of Maryland/ Gallup poll. One positive note, he said, was that the U.S.-led NATO intervention in Libya was one of those rare events where "a U.S. policy decision has converged with Arab popular opinion." It is too early to tell if this is "a sign of good things to come" or "a one-off intervention" that does nothing to refocus the broader U.S. orientation to the region.

Despite fifty years of mistakes, "Arabs still look to the United States for leadership, not to China or Russia… Arabs want the United States to succeed but then they hate us for failing." They understand that most states pursue their national interests most of the time, but they see the United States as different. What is more, the United States also sees itself as different and calls itself "the exceptional nation." President Obama claims that the United States is a friend to all who seek freedom, but "the Arab perception is that we are always on the wrong side of history."

"If you put the bar very low, the Obama administration has done a good job…But why put the bar so low? This is a special time in our history and in the history of the region, and it requires bold, visionary policy making," Mr. Hamid concluded.

FINAL PLENARY SESSION

Dennis Ross, special assistant to the president and senior director of the Central Region, National Security Council, focused his remarks on what the Obama administration is saying—and doing—to assist the democratic transitions in the Middle East. "It is no exaggeration to say we have not seen this kind of upheaval for a long time. When you look at what is going on there is both incredible opportunity but also real risk."

Mr. Ross began by admitting that for many years, most experts on the Middle East did not think this kind of democratic change was possible. "We operated under a set of assumptions that included the idea that governments and their security services were too strong, and that they would use violence to protect themselves. We assumed that the peoples in the region were too fearful to challenge the weight of coercion. We assumed that the Arab street was so preoccupied with the Palestinian cause that this superseded addressing their own aspirations. And we believed that governments were adept at diverting attention from domestic change."

All of these assumptions are highly questionable today, but "the main reason for the changes we are seeing is the loss of fear." ***In Tunisia it was Mohamed Bouazizi, the young fruit vendor who stood up to police harassment and took his own life rather than suffering repeated indignities. In Egypt it was the 500,000 people who joined the Facebook page "We are all Khaled Said," dedicated to the young businessman who was beaten to death by security forces in June 2010***. One could give other examples from Syria, Bahrain, Algeria, and other countries. "What is driving these events is not religion or nationalism, it is a desire for empowerment and a demand for dignity in the face of humiliation."

"The Obama administration is not the source of this change, and we are not driving this change," Mr. Ross continued. But the administration has been guided by several basic principles. "First, we oppose the use of violence, whether by those protesting or by governments. Political change needs to emerge peacefully. Second, we have insisted that governments respect certain universal principles and values, such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and access to information. Third, governments need to respond to grievances with meaningful and credible reform."

Mr. Ross then listed specific actions the Obama administration had taken based on these principles. In the case of Syria, "We have been speaking out in favor of the protesters, and we will continue to do so." In Libya the administration helped mobilize a broad global response "to prevent a humanitarian disaster, human slaughter, and huge refugee flows." This resulted in two UN Security Council resolutions authorizing a no-fly zone over that country "to create time and space for the Libyan people to carry out their own transition… and to fulfill their own destiny." In Egypt the administration engages in regular dialogue with the interim government and the armed forces, as well as with civil society and nongovernmental organizations. "We continue to convey very clear messages on the need to permit peaceful protests… and we will hold the military government to its own commitments," he said. With its international

partners the United States is also working to promote economic stabilization and to increase private investment. And in Tunisia recent reforms like the establishment of an independent election commission "give us reason to be optimistic about the direction of things." Of course, "we also know from history that successful transitions are not guaranteed, that they take time, and that they do not move in a linear direction."

Successful transitions in the Arab countries "could also create a very different basis for cooperation and ultimately peace," Mr. Ross suggested. For decades, autocratic governments tried to divert popular anger at their own shortcomings toward others, especially the Israelis. One of the most remarkable features of the current uprisings, he said, was that "the focus is on domestic sources of abuse, the security apparatus, corruption in government, the lack of economic opportunities, or the lack of an opportunity to participate in a political way." People throughout the region "want to be empowered…they want greater responsibility for shaping the future of their own countries." What is striking about the Middle East today is that "the region, unlike many others, has very little internal trade and very few transnational institutions. All this needs to change." Eventually, "as a new generation of leaders emerges, they can look at coexistence—and not hostility—as an appropriate reality for them."

"The only thing we have full control over is our own actions," added **Keith Ellison,** U.S. Representative from Minnesota. "So I want to address what we Americans can do." He began by noting what he termed "the thinness of our network of connections" to the Middle East, which he said rested on three pillars: energy resources, Israel, and terrorism. The United States has successful commercial relationships with Middle East countries, but these relationships do not really benefit average citizens. "This is a region that has fabulous oil wealth but also lots of poverty and unemployment." Mr. Ellison recommended the creation of other types of businesses—Internet and export firms, for example—and reported that he was helping business firms from his own congressional district establish commercial ties in the Middle East. He believed this was important not simply in business terms but also in building personal relationships between Americans and peoples in the region.

In like manner he recommended that the U.S. Congress establish exchange programs with parliaments in emerging democracies that would allow visiting legislators to learn about constituent service, parliamentary procedures, and other elements of democratic lawmaking. And he hoped that more American communities would create Sister City partnerships with cities in the Middle East, as Minneapolis had done with Najaf, Iraq. Academic exchanges are also critical, he said. In several Arab countries a majority of the population is under age eighteen. "But these young people will grow up to become parents and grandparents. What if their formative experiences of the United States were not of a country that supported the dictators who oppressed them, but of a country that provided educational exchanges, Fulbright scholarships, and other opportunities?"

In this context Mr. Ellison mentioned a discussion he recently had with a group of university students in Gaza. Although the young Palestinians had grown up one mile from the border with Israel and held strong views on why Israelis were so different from themselves, no one in the group had actually ever *met* an Israeli—except for one young man who had been an exchange student in Texas. There he had encountered a fellow hip-hop music enthusiast from Israel whom he considered "a nice guy except when we discussed politics."

"The United States is always going to have a special relationship with its ally Israel, but the United States needs more than one friend in the Middle East." For many years the rationale for this special relationship was that Israel was the only democracy in the region. "But if things work out well, that may not be true in six months. There may be many democracies and several countries with which we can also have rich relationships on the basis of democracy," Mr. Ellison said.

Finally, our approach to terrorism in recent years "has been rooted in assumptions about what people are like in the Muslim world, and some of those assumptions were based on prejudice… We operated on the assumption that the people of this region needed a dictator to interact with the rest of the world." Ironically, al-Qaeda and other radical groups used a variant of this assumption to argue that the United States wanted Arabs to live under dictators. "The Arab spring has exploded this myth, and it is a stunning rebuke to al-Qaeda," Mr. Ellison concluded.

"What is happening in the Middle East today—including Egypt and Tunisia—is important for the whole world." So said **Zalmay Khalilzad,**

former U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the United Nations. At previous points in history Europe was the greatest source of security threats but that distinction now belongs to the Middle East. "Many of the problems in the region are shaped by the domestic politics of those countries—by the dysfunctionality of politics in the region," in which local governments provide neither political freedom nor economic prosperity.

Mr. Khalilzad used his time to present five recommendations on how the United States "can engage in a constructive and positive way to assist the development of all the new potential, but also taking negative possibilities into account as we go forward." First, we need to help new democracies "level the playing field" between established political forces and new democratic entrants—not simply through neutral election laws but also in terms of the timing of elections and the financial resources available to contest them. Second, we need to engage with friendly monarchies in the region to help them stay "ahead of the curve" with respect to reform. "I know change from the top is not easy: there is always a chance of losing control. But not changing makes problems inevitable." To avoid additional instability, "moving toward more constitutional governments (Bahrain, for example) at different rates would be a lesson learned from these countries."

The third key is to avoid anarchy. ***"Those who are enemies of democracy and reform want anarchy to discredit those ideas," and terrorist groups flourish in anarchic environments by taking control of small areas or operating beyond the capabilities of the state, he said***. Fourth, the United States needs to avoid protracted military engagements that contribute to the radicalization of the communities in which we operate. The administration had prudently limited its initial intervention in Libya but "an unresolved situation that goes on for a long time itself produces unintended consequences," he warned. And fifth, "as much as would like to see multilateral responses to these things, we also have to recognize that sometimes *effectiveness* in carrying out the mission in a timely manner has to be the criterion." Looking at the broader picture, the United States also needs to consider how certain actions affect the balance of forces in the region. The U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, for example, will be favorable to Iran. An Egypt that is inward-looking for a while "will not play the kind of regional role that it can."

"I conclude that democratization will produce major challenges," Mr. Khalilzad said. "A democratic Middle East is going to be more demanding of us—and a *democratizing* Middle East will be even more so!"

Radwan Masmoudi closed the event by thanking all who had worked to make the twelfth annual CSID conference a success—the day's speakers; CSID staff, volunteers, and supporters; and four key partners who provide critical funding for many CSID projects: the Middle East Partnership Initiative, National Endowment for Democracy, UN Democracy Fund, and United States Institute of Peace. Responding to new opportunities, CSID is establishing offices in Egypt and Tunisia even as it continues its democracy workshops, training, and research in many other countries. "There is critical work still to be done, and failure is not an option," Dr. Masmoudi concluded.

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