

American Enterprise Institute

October 26, 2006

[Edited transcript from audio tapes]

9:00 a.m. Registration and  
Breakfast

9:30 Introduction: Danielle Pletka, AEI

9:45 **Panel 1: Challenges to Reform in Egypt, Jordan, and  
Lebanon**

*Panelists:* Ayat Abul-Futtouh, Egypt, Ibn Khaldun Center for  
Development Studies

Jad Al-Akhaoui, Lebanon, Cedar Revolution activist

Emad Omar, Jordan, Search for Common Ground

*Moderator:* Michael Rubin, AEI

11:15 **Panel 2: Challenges to Reform in Iraq and Bahrain**

*Panelists:* Haider Saeed, Iraq, Activist

Omran Salman, Bahrain, Arab Reformist Project:

AAFAQ (Horizons)

*Moderator:* Michael Rubin, AEI

12:30 p.m. Adjournment

Proceedings:

Danielle Pletka: I am Danielle Pletka. I am the vice president for foreign and defense policy studies here at the American Enterprise Institute. We are really pleased to welcome you to the third in our series on Dissent and Reform in the Arab World. This is the last of our series for this year and we have what I think you will see is a wonderful and impressive courageous group of people who will be talking to you in detail about their own countries. But I wanted to just take a moment as I do in each instance and talk a little bit about why we do this.

As some of you know, the American Enterprise Institute has been running this program for the last year and developing it for more than a year. The premise is that democracy, reform, rule of law, change in the Muslim world in the Middle East will come only with the help resting on the efforts of people in the region. While the United States can certainly do a great deal to support them, to help them, to pry open the doors that need to be pried open using the leverage that is available to us, whether it is political or diplomatic or economic, at the end of the day change is only going to happen because the people in that part of the world want it to happen. And their

ideas, nurturing those ideas, publicizing those ideas, and debating those ideas are really what will make this a richer transition, a more successful transition. It is not going to be something that happens the week after this program ends, that is for sure, but it is only by supporting these kinds of people that we will be able to see, I think, a transformed Middle East.

Previous participants have gone through a great deal of effort as have these participants. They have gone through a great deal of trauma at home having returned, having supported changes in a part of the world where change is not welcome, and we have enormous respect for their courage and for the courage of the people who work with them back home. Often times we say “democracy,” but democracy really is only a short hand for changes that include economic reform, political reform, rule of law, civil, religious, women’s rights; all of these things that we take for granted as part of our own democracy need to be part of other systems as well.

The last point that I want to make to you is that in recent months, some have begun -- and more and more, I think -- Some have begun to question whether this is a good idea: Do we really want change in the Middle East? We have seen change in Iraq and we are not entirely persuaded it is a change for the good. Others have seen change in the Palestinian territories and wonder whether going from a group like Fatah to a group like Hamas is really the kind of change we want to see. The Egyptian government has been very successful in persuading many that were there to be change in Egypt, it would be change in favor of the Muslim brotherhood, possibly one man, one vote, one time, but certainly more intolerance, less acceptance of diversity, fewer rights. I wonder whether that is true but they have gone a long way in persuading people that it might be true, and many have started to question whether this is the right idea.

President Bush very famously repudiated American policy of the last six decades in a speech at the National Endowment for Democracy some years ago. And he said that our search for stability through dictators was wrong and that in the future, our search for stability will be through institutions and through liberty and through individuals who fight for those things. We continue to believe that that is true. And while there have been set-backs in Iraq - I use that word gently - and while there have been troubling outcomes for some, I think we need to recognize that it is only through the creation of more political parties, through the provision of options to people that they will not seek solace in the Islamic extremism that remains extraordinarily popular throughout the Muslim world as a protest vote to what exists today.

This is not about elections. It is about building institutions; it is about building a constituency for change; it is about new education systems. It is about a whole panoply of reforms that will take a great deal of time but that will, in the end, result in the kind of genuine stability that rises from the grassroots of the 300 million people of the Middle East and North Africa rather than from the top, rather than from the dictators that have been the source of “stability” for the last half a century; that is why we continue to do this. That is why we will continue to support it, and that is why we have so much admiration for the people who are actually on the frontlines doing it.

Without further ado, I am going to turn to my colleague, Michael Rubin, who does a great deal to run this program and to our three panelists who he will introduce. He has some notes to share with you. I only want to say one more thing, which is thank you for being here. And turn off your cell phones.

Michael Rubin: Good morning. I am Michael Rubin. I am a resident scholar in foreign policy here. What I want to do is just give a quick update as to some of our participants from the last two “Dissent and Reform in the Arab World” programs. Issam Abu Issa, the Palestinian anti-corruption activist was yet again unable to get a visa from the U.S. State Department. He initially had a visa; he was coming to the House Banking Committee, I believe, to testify on corruption under the Palestinian authority; his visa was revoked. He was unable to testify and the State Department has yet to be able to get the matter sorted out. He has now been waiting eight months for his visa.

Neila Charchour Hachicha from Tunis, after she spoke here the last time, the Tunisian government arrested her husband on trumped-up charges. Her husband has been in prison and it has become a very, very difficult situation in Tunisia. The case of her husband and the pressure being put on her by the Tunisian government are a direct result of her advocacy for greater freedom of expression, greater press freedom inside Tunisia.

Fathi Eljahmi, we hosted his brother Mohammed Eljahmi, the Libyan democracy activist. Fathi Eljahmi is in prison in Libya. As you may recall, back, I believe, it was on March 12, 2004 before we had a rapprochement with Libya, George Bush got up and he cited the case of Fathi Eljahmi as a sign that Muammar Gaddafi was changing. Two weeks later, Gaddafi threw Fathi Eljahmi back in prison. He has been in solitary; he has been denied medical care for his diabetes and other conditions, and the White House has been silent. Senator Joe Biden has spoken up in favor of Fathi Eljahmi but most officials in the U.S. government have remained silent.

And lastly, I just want to cite sitting in the second row here, Hafez Al-Bukari, who has had some trials and tribulations regarding his work for press freedom, press openness, press independence in Yemen. But I am very happy to congratulate him and his colleague Ali Saif, who have done a wonderful job in covering the Yemeni elections this past fall.

The last housekeeping note before I introduce our panelists is Haider Saeed, our Iraqi participant, has been unable to get his visa issued in time. It has become quite a process to get Iraqis visas. However, Hassan Mneimneh will come and will present his paper. Hassan Mneimneh, of course, from the Iraqi Memory Foundation, an admirable institution which is cataloging the documents seized from Saddam Hussein.

Without further ado, I want to turn to our panelist, the stars of the show today, who are going to present the papers they have worked on with regard to dissent and reform within their own individual countries. The first to speak is Emad Omar, who is sitting to my right. He is a senior advisor for the Search for Common Ground’s Middle East and Partners in Humanity Program. He is a well-known writer from Jordan, human rights activist.

Next to him is Ayat Abul-Futtouh, who is the managing director of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies in Cairo, Egypt since 2003. She has also been a program manager in the forum of Dialogue and Partnership for Development, a well-known Egyptian democracy activist who has had her share of run-ins and has been quite bold in presenting her vision in advocating for democracy, reform and dissent within Egypt.

And lastly, I want to introduce Jad Al-Akhaoui. Perhaps the reason why we delayed our program from September because we felt it is so important that he be able to come here once the Beirut Airport was open again. He is a Cedar Revolution activist. He is a project manager for Quantum Communications in Beirut. Jad is responsible for much of the background organization of what we saw in Lebanon with people advocating for freedom, for democracy, for an end to occupation and so forth. He has been an advisor to numerous Lebanese figures. He has been an active figure in the Lebanese media. He has, while it is not on his biography, he was one of the gentlemen who interviewed President Bill Clinton and presented Bill Clinton's visions and views to a larger audience in the Middle East.

With that, I turn the floor over to them. You are not here to listen to me. I am going to ask each of the speakers to present their papers for about 10 minutes so that we have plenty of time for questions and answers. Their full papers are available in the packets we handed out. And previous program participants' papers are also available at the front desk as you leave. Thank you.

Emad Omar: Good morning and thanks for coming and for your support. When we are talking about reforms in Jordan, we are talking about three levels of reform – the religious, economic, and political. The economic reform has taken attention more than the political one. The economic reform has been done in cooperation with the international community and the international bodies. There are some achievements on the economic level. We are talking about some examples here like increasing the investment, increasing the export, and amending laws. The critiques of the economic reform focus on the need for more equally shared economic opportunity; one in three Jordanians is still under the poverty line and there is a general sense that there is a shrinkage in the middle class.

As for the political reform steps, it goes back to 1989, after the riots in the south of Jordan. There are also some achievements on this front, such as legalizing political parties, ending the emergency laws, and the agreement of National Charter which is an agreement between the civil society, political parties, and the regime. But also there are some setbacks.

Today, there is an opportunity to push reform forward despite some of the serious and structural flaws and beside the resistance that the reform is facing from what we call the “status quo forces.” And I say that it is an opportunity because today we have two very important documents which were released recently. The first one is the National Agenda; it is a well-tailored, 10-year blueprint for social, economic, and political changes. And the second one is We Are All Jordan, a 30-page plan of action in which the reform priorities were identified and some recommendations were set up. This document is a result of a forum of two days of 700 participants from all different political parties, government, civil society, academics, and prominent people.

So, today we have a vision; we have a process. But the critics believe that the process is slow. It needs tools and mechanisms to implement the vision, and it is still tough to put on one. The equation that dominated the discussion about reform, especially political reform in Jordan, is how to balance between political reform and political stability; with some, they call it “democratic stability.” That is the equation that we need to achieve. Jordan has witnessed a

relatively long period of political stability despite the exception to the rule – terrorist attack on November 2005. Despite this attack, the majority of Jordanians, according to polling surveys, believe that the political reform should continue.

Most Jordanians understand democracy as closely related to civil liberties and political rights; it is the same definition you would find in any First World country. Despite the reforms, despite the achievements, we still have 75 percent of Jordanians fearing punishment by the authorities for criticizing the government. And the political parties as well as the government failing to engage the public. The youth believe -- and out of a youth forum that took place lately in Jordan believes that corruption and nepotism should be at the top of the reform agenda in Jordan.

In August and September we had an extraordinary parliamentary session, and 42 laws were on the agenda of this extraordinary session. And we will count the adaptation of very interesting and necessary law such as the Fiscal Disclosure Law, the National Human Rights Center Law, and the Anti-Corruption Commission Law. There was also the Anti-Terrorism Law adopted by the parliament which has received a lot of criticism by the human rights activist movement. We were expecting an adoption of very important laws that were under discussion for quite a long time such as the Political Parties Law, the Municipality Law, and the Electoral Law; they were shelved for the time being.

Jordan can be a potential model for democratic transformation in the Arab world. The regime as well as the people were all the time obsessed with the idea of the state model for the rest of the region. In order to become a model, today we need to speed up the process; it is slow. The main challenge is how to translate the initiatives and the vision into actions, tangible actions, tangible results, and how to engage the public. I believe that some of the things are possible now. Some of the steps are possible now and should take priority, such as public administration reform, educational reform, especially for the 25 percent of the Jordanian population between age nine and 18, which is of primary school age. And there is a need for judiciary reform and to link economic reform with political ones. Those are key for a way forward. Thank you.

Michael Rubin: Thank you very much, Emad. I am going to turn the floor directly over to Ayat who will discuss dissent and reform in Egypt and some of their ways forward.

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: Thank you, Michael. Thank you AEI for allowing Ibn Khaldun to speak out twice. This is the second time after my boss, Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim spoke for the first time early this year. Thank you to the staff.

Egypt can be very controversial when it comes to democracy because we know the rule of Egypt in the area. During the last three years, Egypt has witnessed large demonstrations led by new democratic movements like Kifaya, the judges movement, and a new coalition of NGO's. They have asked to maintain the law, to free the judges, many, many demands. Whether these demonstrations will succeed in pressuring the regime to open the system for a broader democratic participation or not, this is yet to be seen.

Since the late 1970s the Egyptian government has been receiving unwavering financial and moral support from the Western democracies, actually for many reasons – for better brokering

the Arab-Israeli relations, for managing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and after 9/11, a valuable resource in the War on Terror. Actually, the regime has been using this unwavering assistance to maintain a suffocating grip over the political movements. And the regime has been very, very successful in doing so. And the regime uses Islam in many, many distinct ways to remain unchallenged in power.

First, whenever the notion of a new political reform is mentioned, they raise the specter of Islamists coming to power immediately. Second, they use this to cripple any new civil society movement to keep them weak, fragmented, unable to maintain any constituency among the people because they have the fear that the Islamists might take over the moderate Egyptians. And we have many examples of this: Ayman Nour is behind bars now, Talaat el-Sadat was caught yesterday, Saad Eddin Ibrahim was sentenced to jail for three years, and there is a daily personality assassination against all human rights activists in Egypt. The regime usually points out a vast array of democratic, formal democratic institutions in Egypt. But the reality is these institutions are highly deficient from any democratic principles and they lack any constituency among the people on the grassroots.

President Bush himself usually cites Egypt as a developing democracy. The truth is, however, Egypt is a hybrid system of a deeply-rooted authoritarianism but has aspects of pluralism and liberalism. There is outspoken opposition in the press, active albeit constrained civil society and institutions. So what to do? The solution is, it is either the autocrats or the theocrats. And the challenge is to open the system and whether to allow the Islamists to come to power or not because they have been using this and we are being trapped as such. So the alternative is either the status quo or the theocrats.

My opinion is to open the system no matter what the results are. Otherwise, all the moderates will be crushed and two years from now and we will find no one to negotiate. Whether to include the Islamist within the process or not has been central to any debate about democracy in the region. I am talking about the whole region. Our opinion as a pro-democracy believer, that we cannot prohibit any group so long as they do not espouse violence, they do not violate the rights of others while applying or advocating for their agenda, so long as we are pro-democracy believers. Otherwise we will be contradicting ourselves. We cannot continue serving the community and then exclude them from the process; and our opinion as well is this will not taint the process so long as boundaries are very well defined between the government, the elected government, and the religious institutions.

How can we do this? By the minimum modification of the Egyptian Constitution which mandates that Islamic Shari'ah is the main source of all legislation in Egypt. A new wording could be incorporated like what was used in the international conventions; we can use no law will be passed that is undisputed with all Islamic -- whatever. Any wording, a new wording could help us. And the ambiguity of this wording is intended to allow for others to get included.

Then the second question, why should we include Islamists or any one while they are -- we know their agenda, their tactics, once they are in power they will abandon their new-found admiration of democracy. There are many reasons for that. Number one is for democracy's principle's sake. As I said before, we cannot say that we are a pro-democracy people and exclude others

from the process. Number two, this will protect us from what scholars refer to as the “Islamic free election trap,” which says that any election now will get them into power. While this demarcation is very well defined whether they are in power or not everyone knows his role. Number three, they will be cornered to abide by the principles of the game. Number four, the hallowed purity they lived beneath will be immediately broken down because now they will compromise their ideals, people will come to see them as politicians, maneuverers, lying, compromising their ideals. Number five, they will be forced to abandon their meaningless slogan of Islamist solution, and tell us how Islam will solve some of Egyptian problems like unemployment or housing. I think including them is for the sake of democracy and the process, on the long- term. So this is about Islamists.

Democracy in Egypt and elsewhere must rest on two pillars: values embodied in the culture and institutions guided by these values. Of course, this needs time to be built, especially in a country like Egypt. But until this happens, there are five steps that could be made immediately that will help us to open the system and protect us from this specter. Number one, laws governing the formation and activities of political parties. All parties are not allowed to license unless they take a license from the dominant national democratic parties. This is a bit -- and it is nearly impossible to get license.

Number two, electoral laws that govern the party’s activities must be changed. The law governing the interaction between local NGO and like-minded international organizations and the grassroots must be less restrictive. The sweeping presidential power must be cut back.

And finally, the conditionality clauses included in all international agreements must be applied. Not applying these conditionality clauses is seen as a marked unwillingness from the Western democracies for a genuine reform in Egypt.

Finally, I will end my remark thank you Michael. Movements like Kafaya, club of judges, coalition monitoring the elections during 2005 elections, proved that there is vitality within the civil society institutions in Egypt. These movements if supported morally, politically, and financially, and these legal changes, if made correctly and immediately, we can find in two years from now a third alternative other than the corner that we are facing now. Thank you.

Michael Rubin: Thank you very much, Ayat. Now, we will turn to Lebanon and hear what Jad has to say.

Jad Al-Akhaoui: First, thank you for coming. I am going to be brief. I am going to tell you a story that they tell in Lebanon. When God created Lebanon, he decided to make it beautiful. He created the mountains, sea, water, four seasons, beautiful woman, nice man, everything. And then, one of the angels told God, “Tell me, why did you do it do so perfect?” And he said, “No, wait. I am going to create naughty neighbors.” And this is what we are suffering from in Lebanon right now. When we talk about Lebanon, before talking about reforms, which I find now very premature to talk about economic reform, we have to talk about political reform.

We have two major problems in Lebanon right now. The first, you are going to ask me about it, is Hezbollah; the other is the Syrian relations. Definitely, Lebanon suffered for 30 years of

occupation by the Syrians and we managed, in the last two years, to put pressure on the Syrian regime to retreat from Lebanon. Now if you go back to these 30 years, a lot of corruption happened in that country. They did not help us build a country. They managed to create a country full of corruption, and this is what we are suffering from, and I am so jealous of my two colleagues. They can have points to talk about reforms, and they have conferences, and they have forums. We did not until now because we are still suffering from all our political quarrels until today.

So, this is why, to reach that paper that you are going to read, we need to take some political steps and these steps are going to be first asked from Syria and second, from Hezbollah. From Syria, definitely we need them to recognize that Lebanon is an independent state; Lebanon is not a small Syrian state or small district there. Second, they have to accept the exchange of embassies between Lebanon and Syria. This will be a good recognition of our sovereignty.

The most important part, which is related to Hezbollah, is they have to send back the maps of the Sheba farms that I think all of you know about right now, just to accept that these farms are Lebanese and this way the Lebanese government could present it to the UN and then the UN will discuss our case with Israel and then we will see what will happen. There will be no reason then for Hezbollah to stay armed. We proved to everybody that Lebanese people want democracy and it happened on March 14, 2005; and more than that, we won the majority in the elections, parliamentary elections. We have the majority in the government, although we decided to accept Hezbollah as representative for a major part of the Lebanese society. We included them in the government; they have a lot of representatives in the Parliament and we accepted them as representatives.

But there is one major point that we cannot deal with, and we are suffering from it until now: the arms. We are against all arms in Lebanon, non-Lebanese arms and Lebanese arms, especially Hezbollah. Because we accepted them and we brought them to democracy, they have to admit that they have to respect this country. They have to be loyal to that country, not to be loyal to Syria and to Iran. And then if we managed to do all that, I believe we can reach what is written in the paper.

First, I am going to say basic things on reforms needed in Lebanon. There are four steps: First, we have to remember the past to learn for the future. Second, we have to work on education. Third, we have to rebuild credibility. Fourth, transparency, and accountability. These are the four most important topics for reforms in Lebanon. If we are going to talk about debt and economic problems, yes, we suffered after 30 years of war in Lebanon, from a major debt which went to more than \$48 billion. We started reducing that debt after the Ta'if agreement and after - in the year '91, we started rebuilding the country. We put an end to the war and then we started rebuilding the country; we started going towards reducing the debt.

Unfortunately, last summer on July 12, we suffered again from another war in Lebanon, and we went back to the debt; until now, to be honest with you, I do not know how we are going to get out of it. We are asking for some donor countries to help us, and France has accepted to invite Lebanon for something called Paris III, which is going to invite donor countries to inject some money in Lebanon to help with reconstruction and rebuilding after the last war. I hope it is

going to work, and then we will start talking about living together to build reforms and a good country. Thank you.

Michael Rubin: When I moderate, I like to try to keep the initial presentations short. All the papers for those watching on television and not here will also be available on the AEI website, which is [www.aei.org](http://www.aei.org), and will later be published and distributed in book form, in both English and Arabic. But what I want to do is open the floor to questions about dissent and reform in Jordan, in Egypt, and in Lebanon, and then perhaps more generally across the region. Oftentimes in Washington, moderators ask the first question; they see it as their prerogative. I find it a pretty obnoxious trait, and therefore, I am going to -- I may interject my questions later on, but I would like to open the floor directly to questions for our panelists.

The rules of the questioning, though, are these: First of all, you can ask as many questions as you want, but I am going to direct the panelists only to answer the first question. Second is what I would call "jeopardy rules." Form your speech in the form of a question and then make it very, very brief. And thirdly, identify yourself and state your affiliation; I do not think there is anyone in Washington that does not have an affiliation. And lastly, wait for the microphone, which Ben will bring around.

Are there questions in the audience? Yes, just wait for the microphone and then identify yourself.

Monira Almouri : Good morning. My name is Monira Almouri from Sharq al-Awsat newspaper. I have a question for each one of the panelists. For Ayat, you mentioned the arrest of Talaat el-Sadat. Could you tell us what is the story behind his arrest and what did he do?

For Emad and Jordan, everybody knows that late King Hussein was a great leader and was proud of democracy. Did his absence affect the process of democracy in Jordan? And for Mr. Akhaoui, you mentioned Hezbollah in your speech. But I noticed in your paper that it is not for citation. Are you afraid to be cited? I do not know what the reason is not to be cited here in your paper.

Jad Al-Akhaoui: To be honest with you -- let them answer and then I'll get back to you.

Moderator: As the panelists answer the questions from Sharq al-Awsat, the Pan-Arabic daily based in London, I would like to direct them just to restate the question, paraphrase the question they are answering for the larger audience since we have more powerful microphones up here. And with that, Ill turn the floor over first to Ayat.

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: Talaat el-Sadat has won his seat in the Parliament twice. He competed with the candidate from the ruling party twice. He is very popular in Egypt. He has been very critical of the government and he is a nephew of Anwar Sadat. There are two stories. The first story is that because he is very critical of the regime, he was interviewed in one of the satellites and he criticized the military institutions, defaming them, accused them of being deeply, whatever. The other story is that he was going to run for office in the coming election.

Michael Rubin: Okay, Emad and if you could restate the question for the audience?

Emad Omar: You are asking me if the absence of the late King Hussein has affected the reforms in Jordan. Let me put the answer in this way. As I said in my intervention, reforms go back to 1989. There were times when there was discontinuity in the process during King Hussein's time. And there were also times when there was discontinuity in the process during the current King Abdullah II. But I would say that in the last few years, there is a pick-up again in the process and there is a push for the process and there is now a vision, and more activities to work pushing the reform forward.

Michael Rubin: And while I was the person that had put on the working papers draft not for citation, I will still let Jad answer that and if not, I will.

Jad Al-Akhaoui: You asked me about Hezbollah; it is not mentioned in the paper. It is mentioned -- this paper is about living together, the rules of living together. And I mentioned that we accepted everybody and we have to accept each other because we have 18 religions in that country and we cannot rebuild this country and build reforms in this country without being all together. Now, I mentioned Hezbollah in the paper and I mentioned everything. I talked about it not so directly; now, I am being very direct because this paper is a base of reconciliation and we need to go into reconciliation before rebuilding the country.

Michael Rubin: With regards to the draft not for citation, my fault; I am a slow editor. And when it comes to just having back and forth with the authors to make sure that anything I find is unclear, is elaborated upon to correct every last period, dot every I, cross every T. I always, as a matter of course, when I am editing, unless it is the final draft of the paper, putting "Draft, not for citation." However, as I said, everything in this presentation will be available on-line, both in stream video and in transcripts, and the papers will appear for citation as soon as my slow editing is done. As a journalist, I hope you understand how sometimes editors seem to get in the way of the speed of the process, but that is for the sake of the production. So another question up here and then I will move to the back.

David Schenker: David Schenker, Washington Institute for Near East Policy. I also have one question for all three, if I could. Ayat, the US put a great deal of hope in Kafaya, this movement we looked at; we said it was great. This summer Kafaya signed on to a petition arguing for the abrogation of the peace treaty with Israel. Could you give comment on that and what the implications are for US support for this organization?

Michael Rubin: And I am actually going to interject and ask you to answer that question first. David, keep the microphone and then you can ask the next question. I will just paraphrase the question. The question was with regard to many people in Washington, the US had put a great deal of hope in Kafaya and then this summer they had signed a petition urging the abrogation of Egypt's peace... Anwar Sadat's peace treaty, Egypt's peace treaty with Israel. Would you care to comment on the evolution of Kafaya and their thought process?

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: Everyone exploits the Israeli case, why would not Kafaya? If our regime does, why would not Kafaya do? I am not saying this to diminish Kafaya or anyone, but it is a

political game and do you want to gain more people on the ground? No one would touch Israeli peace treaty. We know that, but still Kafaya has a hope because they were very influential in breaking the barriers of fears. So,...

Michael Rubin: Okay, David your next question.

David Schenker: Thanks, Ayat. Emad, given that Jordan and Israel, Jordan and the United States already have the... sort of our best relationship with an Arab country, no doubt there is hesitancy to press Jordan on issues of reform. What concrete steps would you like the US government to take to press Jordan?

Emad Omar: That is a very good question. I would suggest that the administration keep an eye on the dynamics taking place today in Jordan especially when it comes to the two documents that I mentioned in my intervention, the National Agenda and the "We are all Jordan" plan of action. And to figure out where they can work out with the civil society, as well as with the government to push the things forward and translate those thoughts into actions, results.

And as I also said in my intervention, there are three areas that I think that are very important and possible. The first area is educational reform, the second area is public service or public administration reform, and the third area, which is very important, is linking between the economic reforms and political reforms. In Jordan, there was attention to international standards when it comes to economic reforms. It is also good if the American administration and our friends in the world remind Jordan that also there is an international standard when it comes to the political reform.

Michael Rubin: Last question, David.

David Schenker: Yes, thanks. Jad, very clearly, Shi'a living in Lebanon who were not supporters of Hezbollah are under a great deal of pressure, threat, intimidation, et cetera. What needs to be done within Lebanon to start providing or establishing alternative Shiite political entities or parties to compete for the battle of ideas?

Jad al-Akhaoui: That is a good question. Thank you, David. Actually, let us put it this way. They keep on saying in Lebanon that Hezbollah represents all the Shi'a; it is not true. In the last parliamentary elections, 69 percent of the Shi'a Lebanese voted during elections. There are still 31 percent who did not vote. Ninety-nine percent of the 69 voted for Hezbollah, but the rest did not, so that does not mean that they represent everybody.

The problem now with Hezbollah is they are armed, so no one dares running for elections in the areas where Hezbollah is because they are armed. How come you are going to go for elections if somebody is armed? First thing to be done is to find a solution for the arms of Hezbollah and then we will go for a parliamentary election. Then there are a lot of steps to be done.

First, we have to create jobs because, unfortunately, because of the weakness of the government during the last 30 years, Hezbollah managed to create a government inside the government and

was taking care of all the health care for the people, the education, the hospitals, everything. And it was due to help from Iran, Hezbollah is receiving \$40 million monthly from Iran.

So the only way to try to find a vote for these liberal Shi'a in South Lebanon is to start creating jobs. We have to start creating jobs for the people because Hezbollah is giving them money. They do not do anything; they just wait to the end of the month, and they get \$500. The only thing asked from them is to rally with them in demonstrations and to veil the women, and that is it, but these people are not working. Now, if one day, Iran decides to stop this amount of money to Hezbollah, then we are going to go into a major social crisis. The best way to try to cover this is to create jobs for the people to make them, let them make more money, more than \$500, and then things will change. Thank you.

Michael Rubin: Emad?

Emad Omar: I would like to add one thing. Since the United States is a big financial supporter of Jordan, I think it is also important, if you work out with the government, reflecting some of the ideas and thoughts to the budget, to become an item into the budget. Unless there is a budget allocated for the political reform, then it will be ending only as a slogan. And to make sure that a good percentage of the financial support you give to Jordan goes to political reform.

Michael Rubin: Okay, question in the back. Just please wait for the microphone.

Larissa Aoun: My name is Larissa Aoun from the Middle East Broadcasting Network. My question is for Ayat. Do you think the Islamist party in Egypt have been changing their agenda, trying to be more moderate, knowing that they could have an important role in the political process in the future and trying to win popularity on a local level and on an international level?

Michael Rubin: I am going to just paraphrase that question for the sake of the microphone. The question was from the Middle East broadcasting network and the question involved whether the Muslim brotherhood, whether the Islamic parties in Egypt have basically evolved, whether they have moderated, and so forth. Ayat, I turn the floor to you.

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: This is a personal question? Yes, I think they do. They are politicians. They would abide by the rules. They change their techniques. They proclaim that they have changed their agenda for civic laws. They would abide by whatever happens. But once in power, or close to power, I think they will abandon their newfound admiration of democracy. But we are not debating what their agenda is. We are not searching in their conscious. We are advocating for democracy, for opening the system; we cannot live under this barrier of fear anymore. What were the results? The results that now we are cornered between two options, either the regime or the Islamist, and we are helping our regimes in raising up this specter more and more by doing this.

The second question is why are we ignoring the Islamic -- they are not parties, by the way, and this was the reason. They have grown as such within the last 30 years. What are the alternatives if we do not face this now? What will happen five years from now? We will have to face them,

so sooner is always better. Broader democratic participation, let it be. And there are five or six gains that will come out of it.

Michael Rubin: If I could just ask a point of clarification for the people who are not as familiar with Egypt? When you say that they are not really parties, at least in the last elections, what do you mean by that?

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: They are denied legitimacy in Egypt. They were allowed only to run the elections as candidates under any other -- as individual candidate, independent candidate. And they can manage any other party. This did not prohibit them from growing up. So what is the use of this vicious circle we have been... this is very circular. It is either democracy, or non-democracy. We cannot be self-contradictory as such anymore. Thank you.

Michael Rubin: Are there other questions? Yes, I will go to the center of the room and then come back. Yes. Thank you.

Ted Piccone: My name is Ted Piccone with the Democracy Coalition Project and the Club of Madrid. You started our program by recounting some of the problems that activists have faced who have recently been to the United States or trying to get to the United States. And here in Washington and in Brussels and many other places, there is a real debate going on and a discussion about how can we best promote democracy in your part of the world.

And I am wondering if you could comment on the dilemma that we face and you face as the international community tries to play a helpful role without causing problems for you because, of course, dissent and reform has to be driven by internal forces and you are clearly on the front lines in doing that; and your comments today show that you are very focused on the national dynamics. But we live in a globalized world and reforming the Arab world is very high on the political agenda. If you could comment of how that dynamic is affecting your work and how we could do better?

Michael Rubin: You, sir, stole my question. I do want to point out that the question is incisive, and it goes to the heart of the debate which is occurring not only in the United States in Washington but in the European Union, whether how best to support dissidents, reformers, the issue of stigma and taint. And what I would like to do is direct each of you to answer that question because it is important, and also to address both moral support and political support on one hand and also the issue and the questions raised by financial support on the other.

Emad Omar: I think I have four ideas. First of all, try as much as you can not to link your political agenda to the political reform agenda in the Arab world. It is very important not to link them; isolate them. It is very important for us.

Second thing is to provide an access to the reformist in the international community and to the international media. This is very important.

The third thing is to make sure that the civil society in the Arab world has an access to civil society in the United States, in Europe, and the rest of the world. Try to cooperate with each other and make sure that the civil society is becoming part of the international civil society.

The fourth point is to make sure to push forward those international instruments that provide protection for the reformists and the human rights activists and democrats. I give you example: Human Rights Defenders' Declaration is very important; in the Arab world, almost even the reformists, they do not have an idea about it. It is very important to push it forward. Thank you.

Michael Rubin: Ayat, and then Jad...

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: Western democracy, when they have this bilateral agreement with anyone in the region, they link between these agreements and the progress of democracy in each of these countries, but the reality is that there are conditionality clauses. It says that this aid is linked to the progress of reform and democracy. And this linkage was made by the Western – correctly, of course - to protect their own democracies.

Yet, what happens? EU shies away from applying any conditionality clauses, prefers to deal directly with the governments, not with civil society and institutions. US efforts have not fared much better with more important issues in their agenda. They started to play the realist logic that the EU believes in. So what were the results? The results are that both relied on more positive incentives, opening the markets, giving more aid to the governments. And anyone who would reread the congress' testimony last May would understand. This is untouchable. For Egypt, these conditionality clauses will not be touched. This is very discouraging and demoralizing to people who are behind bars and struggling to apply or to implement genuine reforms. Thank you.

Jad Al-Akhaoui: I will go to a more superficial level. I do not want to go in-depth. I will go for the practical thing. First, we have to stop stereotyping. This is important. Second, the dialogue and the understanding of each other. This is the only way to bridge that gap. And third, I insist on creating jobs. If EU and US would start creating jobs in our area, people at the end of the day are going to start accepting the US and accepting the EU.

Michael Rubin: I am actually going to intervene and ask a follow-up question to all of you on this issue because I want to press it a little bit more. I do want to say that I am going to bump the question of licensing of NGOs and licensing of civil society to our second panel because, in that case, Bahrain is a very interesting example, so I am going to defer that to Omran Salman, that portion of the question. But what I do want to ask each of you to address head on, is the question of taint and stigma.

If a reformer or an international or a national non-governmental organization is doing good work or gets into trouble with the government, taking Egypt, in the terms of an individual, Muhammad Sharqawi, who was victimized after protesting for judicial independence and rule of law. Does it hurt or does it help if the American government or the European government issues a statement on his behalf or anyone else's behalf? Likewise, does it hurt or does it help if the American government or the European government or American NGO's and European NGO's lend

financial assistance to any civil society organizations in your countries or in your impression in the broader Arab world?

And lastly, oftentimes when there is a partnership, whether or not it is financial or otherwise, sometimes it seems that the press in various countries tries to issue a taint and delegitimize dissenters, reformers, and so forth. How do we deal with that? And this was a situation that actually happened in Yemen, so we will go backwards along the line.

Jad Al-Akhaoui: In Lebanon, for example, there is a dilemma. For example in South Lebanon, the American government they have a lot of projects... US Aid... and Hezbollah are accepting it. Now, I do not understand it. For example, during the war... I will give you an example; the first 15 days of the last war, the American University of Beirut which is one of the most important hospitals in Lebanon was working 24 hours. They were helping a lot; they were treating sick people and they were doing a great job. Suddenly, the 15th day, Hezbollah decided just to bother the doctors of the American University.

And so we went and we asked them, "Okay, what is wrong with them?" They said, "You know, they're Americans, we cannot accept it." And I said, "Okay, all your open-heart operations, all your big operations you do it at the American University. So, what is your problem now? All the treatment that you get that your leaders as soon as there is any sick person, he goes to the American University. How come now you decided just to boycott the American University of Beirut?" And they said, "Okay, its fine."

So, I really do not understand this dilemma. It is a dilemma, it is schizophrenia, I do not know. But I believe that big projects that create jobs for the people will not allow anyone to criticize. Like if you go there and you give them \$10,000 to do a project, and at the same time you go, you do \$100,000 to another group who is aligned with the US, it might create some trouble. But if you go, you give both the same amount of money and the result will be the same, maybe in the beginning it will face some trouble but after a while things are going to change and people are going to like it.

Michael Rubin: Ayat?

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: I will try to be brief to answer this 3-part question. First, about expressing concern and the frequent acts against the reformers, of course, it helps. Who else will express? We do not have liberal media. We have only two liberal newspapers with only 10 pages. For how long can they persist in saying things about Muhammad Sharqawi, or Sayed Ibrahim? Things are forgotten. But when there is a small column mentioned in Washington Post or New York Times everyone answers it. So, it is very important to react to what happens. America wants to lead the world and they have to pay close attention to what is happening in this area.

Second, about financial support, I do not understand this question. Actually, when people raise "You are depending on America, on financial aid, on foreign aid," what else do we have? There is nothing called financial aid within our countries. It is totally prevented, it is totally prohibited.

About the businessman or the private sector, they would not jeopardize their own interest by giving money to any civil society institution that might jeopardize the regime they are working under. This is understood. They only give money to charity work. Second, there is nothing called voluntary culture in our country. People would not work for free. They need to eat. They know that their time means money. So any NGO who says that "I will not depend on the financial aid" it might shut down especially if they are engaged in political acts.

About the media, yes, there are a series of accusations that are always ready for any activists; cooperating with the Americans, the enemies, they are a spy, agent, taking hundreds of millions of dollars, secular, which means, of course, it is very, very controversial word in Egypt. Secular, disseminating the Western agenda, the American agenda -- these are the series of accusations, and they are very intimidating in the Arab world. But we know this is a price we have to pay. And we have already paid the price in advance. This is what I want to say. If an NGO comes and asks for help, it already paid the price. So, what is the use of -- it is already determined that she is doing such. I paid the price. So, they should go along. It is not controversial anymore. They should go ahead for what they want. Thank you.

Michael Rubin: Emad?

Emad Omar: I totally agree with my colleagues. But I would add, regarding the financial support for non-government organizations, this is very important and it is very important that you open a dialogue with the non-government organization regarding their local agenda. Do not impose an external agenda on the local civil society because this will jeopardize their reputation and image.

The second thing, when it comes to harassing the non-governmental organizations and the reformists, I would say in the case of Jordan, since there is a good relation between United States administration and our government, I think there are three levels where you can help. The first level is the politicians. You open a low-profile, behind-the-door dialogue with the government, asking them to stop harassing the reformists or the non-governmental organizations. The second thing, the civil society, they need to highlight that there is a problem and to provide accurate information about what is happening and for the media to cover what is happening regarding the harassment of the reformist and the non-government organization. This is very important and very useful.

Michael Rubin: Okay. There were plenty of other questions. Yes, just wait for the microphone please.

Michael Rubin: Mariel, ask your question and I will repeat it.

Michael Rubin: Okay. The question is coming from Mariel Loyola from the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, and the root of the question is in the case of Lebanon, what does it mean when Hezbollah allows itself to take actions which are not rooted in the rules of Lebanon? Is rule of law not a foundation for any state and any hope of democratic reform? The question will first go to Jad and then if any else wants to tackle the question, it is open to that as well.

Jad Al-Akhaoui: I would like to say one thing. The Lebanese government, the first day of this war, said that “We are not responsible for what Hezbollah did.” Unfortunately, this Lebanese government inherited, as I said in the beginning, 30 years of occupation, of Syrian occupation. Now, we have to admit that these people represent a big number. We cannot ignore these people and we cannot tell them, “Okay go to the sea,” and we throw them in the sea. We have to accept them. Now, I said we are ready to accept these people under one condition. They have to be disarmed. The day they will start being disarmed, we can rebuild a country together. The day they keep their arms, we cannot do anything.

Now, the problem does not come from here. The problem comes, as I said also in the beginning, from Syria. They are claiming that they are carrying arms and they are doing all this because they have occupied land. If Syria will give back the maps to the Lebanese government and then the Lebanese government will start raising a case in the UN to put pressure on that, I believe the Israelis, if they see these maps and the Lebanese government will get the recognition of the Shabaa farms that it is not Syrian, then they should go to the resolution 4 to 5 and they will retreat from it. The Israeli think now that the Shabaa farms are under the Syrian occupation. And this will give a reason to the government to go to Hezbollah and to tell them, “Listen, we liberated our land. There is no reason for you to keep arms.” This is it.

Michael Rubin: Okay. That is a very good question. That is the question which I am going to open up to everyone on the panel. How do various groups in Lebanon or in Egypt or in Jordan define and debate the meaning of rule of law? And after you answer those questions, we will go on to the next question.

Jad Al-Akhaoui: The thing is it is a difficult question to explain, to answer. But I’ll tell you how it is. Now, Hezbollah is claiming and it happened during the national dialogue in the last three months before that war; they said if the Israelis will retreat from Shabaa farms, “we are ready to start negotiating our arms. We might go in the army. We might give back our arms and go into the political life and everything.”

Now, the most important thing for the Lebanese government is to make the Israelis any way diplomacy and negotiations to retreat from Shabaa farms. There will be no reason for Hezbollah to keep the arms. Do you see the point? And also, they are claiming that they have two prisoners. Now, it will be negotiated; if they manage to send back the prisoners, fine. Then the government will have all the right to tell them, “You have to stop being armed.” But since there is a small part which is still occupied and they are claiming it is occupied, automatically they have the right to claim that we want to liberate that land. In any country -- let’s not talk about Lebanon, let’s talk anywhere; if a land is occupied, they have the right to create a kind of resistance. Fine, but if this resistance...

Michael Rubin: Sorry. We are actually not going to debate the point. Just finish and then we will turn the floor to Ayat...

Jad Al-Akhaoui: So the problem, as I am saying, is in the Syrian hands. If the Syrians will give back the maps, there will be no pressure point and they will not have any reason to keep their

arms and to do any military action, and then the rule of law has to be done. And if the government will not do it, then something else has to be done.

Michael Rubin: Are there any other comments about what the debate about the rule of law involves in your own countries?

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: The debate is not about the rule of law because everyone, even the Muslim brothers, as my colleague said now, would declare or proclaim that we are going to respect the law. It is implementing the laws. When it comes to closing or to shut down a small NGO that received only \$10,000 dollars, it is implemented immediately. But when it comes to corruption issues, no one can open this. So, it is unquestioned -- everyone would respect the law but how to implement it in Egypt? So, thank you.

Michael Rubin: A good point.

Emad Omar: The rule of law, when it comes to the definition is the standard, but when it comes to Jordan, there is kind of a sensitivity because my belief that rule of law emphasizes the equal rights of all citizens in Jordan; and sometimes it is a sensitive issue in Jordan because we have what I call a traditional and informal governance system in Jordan where it is based on personal contacts and community leadership. So, some of the business is done through those community leadership and through personal contacts.

Michael Rubin: The whole issue of Wastah in Iraq. We have a question in the front and then I am going to open the floor to Hafiz to make a question as well. First, in the front here.

Susan Kinsey: Susan Kinsey, I am an independent human rights consultant. My question is about sectarian democracy. Obviously, it applies most to Lebanon but I am curious about other countries. You obviously have a system where sectarianism is part of the way that people vote. It is embedded in how they vote and how they are allowed to vote and how the government is set up. This was also an issue when Iraq was setting up its new government, or when the U.S. was setting up the Iraqi government. There are those who argue that sectarianism undermines true democracy and the people cannot vote according to their ideals or their political desires, but just according to their identity. And I am wondering if there has been any debate in Lebanon or other places about changing this and whether you thought it would be a good thing and what would happen if it were eliminated?

Jad Al-Akhaoui: If it comes to me personally, I will cancel all these sectarian groups and I would go for not allowing them to go into politics because we have to create a difference between politics and religion. Unfortunately, we have 18 religions in Lebanon. And all of them are well-represented and they are a big religion. And according to the constitution in 1943, they build it this way. Now, when the Taif Agreement happened in 1989, it was just to end the war and they created a consensus for that.

Now, our aim is to change that. Our aim is to go to a country without any religion governing. Everybody who is capable, he can have a position in the government and a post in the government. It is difficult right now; we started like five years ago with the civil marriage thing.

We are not allowed to have civil marriages in Lebanon and everybody... a Muslim who wants to marry a Christian has to go to Cyprus to get married and then to come back. This is a joke. We faced a lot of problems because this is due to the education. And when we say education, we have to start educating the next generation just to go over that and then, I hope, my kids will reach that point.

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: I disagree with you, Susan. A sectarian problem would harm the democracy. It happened in Egypt. Copts nearly did not participate at the latest elections. And I believe, had they participated as full citizens within the society, the results of this election would have been completely different. As it was this came because there are many discriminatory laws against the Copts and they do not feel full citizenship within Egypt. And they did not act as Egyptian citizens. Had they participated, I think the results would have been very, very much different. Thank you.

Michael Rubin: Just again, a point of information for the people in the audience that are not as familiar with Egypt. What proportion of the population would you say are the cops within Egypt, the Egyptian Christians?

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: Nearly 12 million out of 71 million.

Michael Rubin: Thank you.

Emad Omar: When it comes to Jordan, with the issue of religion, we have a homogenous society; most of the society is Muslim Sunni. We have a very small Christian community and we have some small sects. But, generally speaking, the tolerance level in Jordan is very high especially when it comes to the government and the minorities; they receive very good protection. And some of the people believe that the minorities, they have privileges over the others. So, it is not a problem.

Michael Rubin: In the front is participant Hafez Bukari from Yemen.

Hafez Bukari: Thank you. I am Hafez Bukari. I am from Yemen and I am now a fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy. I want to ask Jad, before the recent war, Hezbollah was about to lose its political existence, especially in the Arab world and the Islamic world. But after the war and during the war, Hezbollah got a lot of political support, a huge political victory among the Arab societies and the Arab media. And we found that its posters are everywhere, in the cars. Even the competitive Arabic leaders in the countries, for example in Yemen, the president tried to use Hezbollah posters to ask the people to vote for him. From your point of view, what are the reasons of that, that political victory for Hezbollah in the Arab society and in the Arab media?

Jad Al-Akhaoui: It is the first time in the Arab world since 1973 somebody hit or dared to hit the Israeli army, which is one of the most powerful armies in the area. And usually people want a leader, especially in the Arab world. Since, let's say, Gamal Abdel Nasser, they did not have any leader. They felt that this guy, they are to hit Israel. This is right or this is wrong. This was their idea. But they were happy. I, personally, I am against Hezbollah. I am against this war.

Personally, I was living like a schizophrenic. I was thinking that, "Oh, my God! They hit the ship! They are hitting Israel."

But, I was looking at the result, and the result was really very high. And this is why when we took the position in the beginning of that war against it, we were thinking of the result. Now, they claim that it is a divine victory and all these ads and this publicity -- actually, they did very well. They learned something during the March 14th demonstration. Our main power was media and advertising. And we did a lot of designs and red and white. What they did, they copied the same design, the same colors, the same font everywhere. And they managed to -- they believe in media.

Now, I have to say something. The people of Hezbollah, I think they have some teacher, some consultant, some guides who are guiding them towards media and they know how to use the media very well and they know how to tackle the small issues of any Arab citizens in the area. So, there is a major lack of education, definitely, in the Arab world and I believe this is why everybody felt that we are victorious. We are winners. But this was not the case.

Michael Rubin: Yes, a quick follow-up. Just wait for the microphone and re-introduce yourself. Wait for the microphone please.

Hafez Bukari: There is some rumor in Lebanon that Hezbollah signed contracts with Quantum, your company as a consultant. What is your comment on that?

Jad Al-Akhaoui: It is not true at all. We were talking about it. They came to me. They said, "Did you do the advertising campaign?" Not at all. It is not true.

Michael Rubin: Are there any other questions? I know I have a couple. I am going to ask one last question and then at 11:00, we will take a quick break for coffee and convene our next panel at 11:15. Hassan Mneimneh is here to read Haider Saeed's paper with regard to Iraq, Omran Salman from Bahrain will be talking about his research into impediments to dissent and reform within Bahrain. What we will do also is after those papers are presented, I will ask all the panelists to remain up on the stage so that we can continue with questions and answers in a bit of a broader discussion.

I'll take the prerogative to ask the last question, a US policy question, so to speak, or at least an effective one. When President Bush was re-elected, at his inaugural speech he spoke a great deal about democracy. I think it would be fair to say, even -- I am a supporter of his policies towards long-term democratization in the region and I have personally been quite disappointed in that it seems that the reality of US policy has not matched the rhetoric. At the very least, there appears to be a backlash within various Middle Eastern countries towards dissent and towards reform. This is perhaps most pronounced in the case... almost visible in the case of Egypt.

My question to you is how has the reaction been and how is credibility gauged within your own countries toward American transformative diplomacy, and do you sense an abandonment? And if so, do you see what you believe the long-term harm of the abandoning of the pressure for dissent and reform will be? Yes?

Jad Al-Akhaoui: The first example and the one I can give is after that war; one of the major results, Hezbollah claimed victory. So, yes, we felt abandoned many times. And we felt abandoned in '91 the first time during the Iraqi war and now, we kept on feeling abandoned, and now just after doing this Cedar Revolution, we also felt abandoned because I do not know what happened. The regime in Egypt, the regime in Saudi Arabia felt that if any change is going to happen in Lebanon by the power of the people in the streets, it might affect the regime in Egypt; for example, the Muslim brotherhood will come to power. In Saudi Arabia, the Shia might upraise against the rulers, and they put a lot of pressure to stop everything we were doing. The United States did not tell them to keep us away. Let them continue. Let them go to the end of what they are doing and then we will see. But unfortunately, we felt left out and I think this is due to the alliance between these governments and the United States. I believe Ayat could talk a lot about that.

Yes, definitely, we felt alone. We felt left. But now, again, I'll tell you, we started this procedure and we are going to continue it even if the United States is going to back us or not, but we are going to the end.

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: Surprisingly, I heard from Ibn Khaldun Center who has been -- of course, U.S. had been degraded along with Ibn Khaldun Center and its employees. Yes, we feel abandoned. With Ayman Nour behind bars, we are abandoned. With the daily personality assassinations, we are abandoned. With prosecution of journalists, we are abandoned. With the raping in public, we are abandoned. And U.S. only gave some modest funding for a very small number of NGO's to speak out in very limited areas.

This is not what we expect from U.S. If we really want to lead the region to real democratic reform, this is not what we expect. Hiding behind the Islamic specter cannot last anymore. We have to break this barrier as we broke the barrier of our dictatorship. Otherwise, 10 years from now, the long-term harm will be the rising of more and more for this specter while crushing all moderates. Thank you.

Emad Omar: I share my colleagues concern regarding the abandonment. I would say that it is very important that the United States gets more engaged in pushing the reform agenda in the region, and I think that in the case of Jordan and because of the good relations between our government and the public administration, the United States administration can do better. They can do more and we need them to do more. Thanks.

Michael Rubin: I will now let everyone get their caffeine infusion for other questions which are out there. We will have time after the second panel to ask them. We will restart the session promptly at 11:15 in 11 minutes.

Panel 2: Challenges to Reform in Iraq and Bahrain

Michael Rubin: We are going to get started again on our second panel. I hope everyone has had their caffeine infusion. I know I have. I want to welcome to the floor both Omran Salman and Hassan Mneimneh who will read or discuss, actually, Haider Saeed's paper which will be available on-line and is available out on the front desk.

Firstly, Omran Salman currently directs the Arab Reformist Project, AAFAQ, which is Arabic for "horizons." He is from Bahrain. He served as a senior editor for the Iraqi Democracy paper, which was produced by the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. Between 2000 and 2003, he was a managing editor assistant for Al-Jazeera in Doha, Qatar. He has also worked as a journalist and columnist for two of Bahrain's most distinguished papers Al-Ayam and Akhkar Al-Kaleej. He has published a number of articles; I know I recently saw an article of his after President Bush's statement with regard to Islamo-fascism, responding to that debate in The Philadelphia Inquirer.

Also, I will introduce who Haider Saeed is before I introduce Hassan Mneimneh who will present the paper. Haider Saeed, who again was not able to get a visa in time from the American Embassy in Baghdad, is the current director of the Iraqi Cultural Forum, an independent think-tank in Baghdad founded in 2005. He previously served as a member of the editorial board for Al-mada newspaper in Baghdad from 2003 to 2005. If I am not mistaken, Al-mada is the newspaper which broke the oil-for-food scandal. Oftentimes in Washington, everyone's very self-centered; they think, of course, the American newspapers did it first. No, it was Al-mada, if I recall correctly.

Mr. Saeed currently serves on the Board of Directors of Iraqiyyat - Iraqi Women's Studies Center - established in 2005. He is from Najaf, Iraq. While he is not here today to present his paper, I very much hope that we will have him here shortly so that you can meet him in person. And before I introduce Hassan Mneimneh, who is working for with the Iraqi Memory Foundation cataloguing the Iraqi documents seized by Saddam Hussein, who has a long track record of encouraging transparency in the publication of such documents dating back to 1991, I also do want to congratulate him on being a married man as of a couple of weeks ago. So my congratulations, Mabrouk, to Hassan Mneimneh and with that I am going to open the floor to Omran Salman.

Omran Salman: Thank you very much. I wish that I could talk about the reform in general in Bahrain, but this is so broad that I will focus only on the media, and this is the subject of my paper. But to do so, I want to mention some facts about Bahrain. Bahrain officially is a kingdom and has been ruled by the al-Khalifa family since the 18th century. The family consists of more than 3,000 members, all of whom have received an allowance since birth, in a population of approximately 700,000 people; two thirds of them are Bahraini and the rest are non-nationals. Members of the royal family hold numerous positions in the government's administrative and executive branch.

Bahrain has a bicameral legislature with each house comprised of 40 members serving four-year terms. The lower house called the Chamber of Deputies is elected by universal suffrage while the upper house, referred to as a Shura Council, is directly appointed by the king. According to the 2001 national census, Muslims constitute 81% of the population, 70% of whom are Shia

Muslims and 30% of whom are Sunni Muslims. Despite the fact that Shia Muslims represent the Bahraini majority, Sunni Islam is the predominant sect in the government, military and corporate sectors; it is the same situation like Iraq before the war during the Saddam Hussein regime.

Breaking the media monopoly is essential to dissent and reform in Bahrain. While the private sector owns most of the newspapers and publications, the government retains control over publishing policies and the appointment of important officials such as editors-in-chief and managing editors; usually, they must be Sunni. In a policy paper submitted to the Third Annual Conference for the Arab Organization of Press Freedom, which took place in Rabat, Morocco in 2004, the Bahraini journalist, Maha al-Salehi he wrote an unusual message sent by the Minister of Information to the local press. Nabil al-Hamar informed them of the Ministry's prohibitions. He said that there are a set of forbidden subjects that should not be mentioned, like describing the constitution as a "gift constitution" - Bahrainis often refer to the constitution as such since it was bestowed upon them by the king without their consent.

Al-Hamar also instructed them that the U.S. Naval Base should be called a "facility" so as to diminish the perception of its size and importance among ordinary Bahrainis. If editors fail to abide by Hamar's dictates, they risk dismissal. Thus, it is the editor's job to censor his journalists and their writings.

On March 6, 1999, Sheik Hamad Bin Isa al-Khalifa took power from his father. The new ruler adopted a number of reforms to turn the page on the bloody instability of the 1990s. These included releasing scores of political prisoners, authorizing the return of exiled opposition members. But still, the press freedom expands somewhat as a result of the reforms; there are more foreign newspapers. The press began to tackle issues that it had not touched previously, like criticizing some ministry issues. But the relation between the government and the newspapers' managements essentially stayed the same. So there are red lines in face of newspapers; they do not have to cross it. These red lines are mainly criticizing the king, a member of the royal family or a neighboring country such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan.

In their 2005 report concerning freedoms in the Arab world, the General Union for Arab Journalists stated that Bahrain witnessed a number of interrogation cases involving numerous journalism employees and state security services. So now, we come to the new era; this is the Internet era in Bahrain. As we saw that the majority Shia was excluded from running the main media in Bahrain like newspapers, television and radio - the official radio and TV, actually.

But since the Internet came to Bahrain in 1990s the Shia population actually started to use it as a main tool to express their interests and their views. So in addition, on-line chat room groups become popular. Each Shia village and area maintains its own websites. It was not long before some websites began to feature seminars and lectures conducted directly by the opposition leaders. They even published the articles and commentaries of those journalists prevented from writing in the official press. And accordingly, these websites formed a parallel structure to both state-run and semi-government media. But, unfortunately, the Bahraini government has increasingly sought to curtail this new media. So I will mention some cases here.

In 2005, Bahraini security forces arrested Bahrain On-Line's General Administrator, Ali Abdul Imam for allegedly inciting hatred against the regime. In 2001, the Bahraini government blocked seven websites; on April 7, 2004, the government again shut down the Bahrain On-Line website and other websites. In reality, the monitoring of Internet websites for political reasons related to the freedom of expression is not limited to just Bahraini websites. Another Arab website such as the Middle East Transparency; this is based in Paris, and Civil Dialogue, as well.

As a conclusion, the Al Khalifa family still adopts an air of superiority toward their Shia citizens. The government has been and remains devoted to a policy of sectarian discrimination for more than two centuries. State force to control the media are reflected in the broader sense by the state's unwillingness to fully sanction the suppression of power. The press could be a check on the abuse of power, but state censorship prevents journalists from doing so. Reform of the press in Bahrain will only commence once the government ceases its control of the media, officially organizes the latter's freedom in publishing and exchanging news and commentary about foreign and domestic events and annual portions of British law .

The final conclusion, actually, that I want to mention, in order to continue operating in Bahrain website, blogs and Internet forums do not need foreign monetary and technical assistance. All of these sites are established by individual efforts and small groups; rather they are in need of moral and political support from governments supporting reform and the freedom of the press. This can be achieved by exerting pressure on the government to curtail their influence on the internet while demanding they respect freedom of expression.

In this respect, the assistance that a country like the United States, an ally, even a close ally, of the Bahrain government can provide should be used to influence the Al-Khalifa regime to guarantee the respect of international standards regarding press freedom and human rights. There is an assumption among many Bahraini citizens that the American silence concerning government behavior toward local media, especially the electronic media, indicates nothing but implicit support for these actions. Thank you very much.

Michael Rubin: I just want to take a moment as someone who has read Omran's paper just to highlight a couple of quick points out of it. The paper would be available in quite some detail and Omran tried to highlight some of that detail. I do wish that whoever's cell phone is going would shut it off quickly; pretending it is not yours is not an option. Thank you. Basically the problem in Bahrain has inadequate political space. Because of the inadequate political space a lot of dissent and reform and commentary about democracy, about reform and so forth turn virtual; and with the Ministry of Interior and others interfering in the published newspapers - Bahrain has an extremely long history of published media.

I think the first newspapers go back to the 1930s, if I am not mistaken. A lot of people really seized upon the internet to create forums, and some of these forums based in villages and so forth, in towns, had thousands of subscribers. The government and civil society have basically been playing cat-and-mouse. ISPs migrate, the government tries to play catch-up to constrain some of this open debate; and the reason why this debate is important.

From what I gather from your paper – if I could just act as a discussant for a second - is that on issues that impact dissent and reform, not some of the macro issues which we see everyday. But some of the micro issues such as corruption cases, such as accountability cases, has really become the only forum in which people can discuss some of these issues, and therefore when we pose the question to all the paper writers what are the greatest impediments to dissent and reform, Omran had focused upon the media because once the media, including the internet media, is highlighted and opened it allows for real peaceful discussion of some of the other problems impacting governance dissent and reform. But was that an accurate summation?

What I would like to do is turn the floor over to Hassan to talk about Haider Saeed's paper, and perhaps to talk a little bit about Haider Saeed himself. I would also let Hassan Mneimneh wear the hat of Hassan Mneimneh and talk perhaps a little bit about some of the questions that came up, Maria Loyola's excellent question about the meanings of rule of law within societies in the Arab world.

Hassan Mneimneh: Thank you, Michael. I will have to present to you this paper but I would also like to underline the fact that while I find the argument in it to be extremely well-constructed and compelling, but it is Haider Saeed's argument and I am at a disagreement with some of it. I am not going to act as a discussant; I am going to act as a presenter. I will underline to you afterwards where I find some of those issues I am in disagreement with.

But before doing that, before doing the presentation, I would like to point your attention to the implicit paradigm that is often followed in discussions with regard to the Middle East, that is, one about community. In particular, what we are witnessing is a whole process of identity consolidation and community demarcation. If you notice, for example, in terms of the American assessment of Iraq it was viewed in terms of a Kurdish North, Sunni center, and a Shia south; distinct communities.

I would like to just underline the fact that this is a model; this is not necessarily accepted by everyone, and I would suggest something different that if we look at it as a dynamic process and not as a static fact the advantage of looking at it as a dynamic process is that it allows us some reversibility to it instead of thinking of it in terms of immutability. The reason I am mentioning this is because in Haider Saeed's paper -- in two words, Haider Saeed is complaining about the fact that the current structure in Iraq has diluted the Consociational model in favor of a majoritarian model. You will see how these two models basically have their weaknesses and their strengths and their pitfalls; and his point is that the evolution towards the majoritarian model is a real problem.

I simply would like to point to you that both models are community-based models, but there are other models including ones that focus on individuals rather than on community and ones that view the potential change, the potential push to democracy and reform, in terms of the individual. In any case, now, I'll go to his argument and see how he argues it.

Basically, the claim starts by saying that this is the second permanent Constitution in Iraq to have been predicated on a moral crisis. The moral crisis of the first Constitution, that of 1925, is similar to the one today, is that there is a core Iraqi group that rejects the Constitution. However,

in both cases the occupier - the British back in 1925 and the Americans in 2005 - have permitted the public's ratification of the Constitution.

The Constitution in both cases spurred a conflict between various groups in Iraq. The rejection of the Constitution stemmed from the belief that one of the groups would monopolize power and that the entire political process would be monopolized by this group and therefore there is a perceived dominance issue. However, Haider Saeed points to a major difference between the 1925 Constitution and the one that has been ratified recently. The 1925 Constitution was premised on the notion of the nation's unified will. The nation was viewed as one totality, while, on the other hand, the current Constitution is, albeit implicitly, predicated on the notion of a Consociational agreement that needs to exist between distinct communities in Iraq.

This, he points, brings in two issues. The first issue is the issue of reconciliation with the past. The idea is that the current Constitution is structured in such a way to fix previous mistakes, the fact that, in particular, the Shia and the Kurdish components of Iraqi society had been denied power, and therefore the current Constitution addresses that. But also, it is not only corrective but preventive, that the 2005 Constitution attempts to prevent a reoccurrence of the reemergence of an autocracy that denies groups in Iraqi society the sharing of power. This is what he views as the Consociational model and where he thinks that there is strength in the current Constitution. However, he says, that the current Constitution also, in addition to this Consociational arrangement, which is implicit in it, also presents an Islamist component, what he terms - this is a very interesting term - a "mitigated theocracy."

The idea is it is a theocracy, but with a buffer zone of sorts. And he goes into length; if you read in the paper, you will see he describes exactly how the mechanism of this mitigation of the theocracy, but very quickly, some of the aspects are, one is the establishment of a state not ruled by clerics but guided by them; the Constitution recognizes a certain guidance rule for the clerics.

It also states that the State will work to preserve the religious community, and it also underlines the fact that the national community is defined by an Islamic character. This, he sees, will lead by necessity to the prevention of any law that can threaten or oppose the religious community but also the failing to give legal legitimacy to any possible social phenomenon that is in contradiction or not in agreement with this community. And also the fact that the State is obligated to protect religious, social and ritual values. And the State, therefore, will permit the establishment of a religious society independent of the State, especially in matters of family law. And we saw the temptation, if not the actual execution, of that in the whole debate. Yet, I should say, because that battle is not completely won yet, in what amounts to the regression in terms of the status of the effect of religious law on civil law in Iraq.

This duality or dichotomy within the current constitutional arrangement, Haider Saeed argues, has led to a slip from the Consociational model to a majority model, or to a majority trend. He underlines the fact here that if we are to compare the two texts that are at the foundation of the legal structure or the constitutional structure of Iraq today, the Transitional Administrative Law, the TAL, that was done under the CPA, the Coalition's Provisional Authority, and the temporary constitution and then, the constitution as ratified, he noticed that there is a change.

There is a shift, what he terms a court transformation, that the Islamist trends manifested itself in the 2005 constitution by subjugating the laws to local values, the universal human laws that TAL tried to enshrine as being basically at the very essence of what the state of Iraq, the new Iraq, is going to be, that was diluted by the Constitution through the backdoor of claiming, "Okay, local values have to mitigate that." Haider Saeed argues what is more dangerous is the explicit retreat from the Consociational model and the establishment of a template based on the majority.

The problem with the whole notion of majority, we all know that democracy is majority rule. However, the problem here is the untangling of the interconnectedness between two concepts: the demographic majority, which, in the case of Iraq, is established... the Shia community in Iraq, is an absolute majority and the political majority. The argument that he is making, therefore, is that now we have a situation in the current constitution that leads -- a slippery slope of sorts that might lead down the line to autocracy.

The problem is as follows: The parliamentary system can centralize authority doing away with the concept of reciprocal vetoing. Again, this is part of the Consociational model, the idea that if you accept that a state, such as Lebanon -and actually Haider Saeed does refer to Lebanon - is based on the sharing of power between communities, you implicitly accept or sometimes explicitly actually accept the fact that each one of those communities, has a veto power over major decisions; otherwise, it is not a sharing because if one community - in this case, the Shia community - is the majority, there is no sharing; it is majority and that is that.

He is saying that there has been a doing away with the concept of reciprocal vetoing and a change in the expression of political will from an absolute majority. Actually he means, by that, a super majority - that would have required not just 51% in the Parliament but much more, to one that is a simple majority, which makes it easier for the larger block to control, and in addition to the fact that there are no restrictions on the establishment of political sectarianism.

I am not going to go into all the details of the argument that he makes, but the details of the arguments that he makes are really intricate and powerful. I urge you to read them in order to appreciate them, but the result of his argument is to say, therefore, without excluding the Sunni leadership from responsibility, but therefore that the Sunni community was put as a result of this system in opposition of being basically an excluded minority. Therefore this creates room, creates space if you like, within it for the type of insurgency that we are seeing.

His complaint is that the system as structured today would slip away from the Consociational model towards a majority model, makes it such that the conflict is bound to continue between the Sunni community in particular, which is being excluded, and the others. But it also creates the possibility of the emergence of an autocratic leadership within the Shia community that would basically restore the old pattern of rule, centralized, et cetera.

Fast-forwarding to his conclusion, he underlines the fact that Iraq in need of a more radical thinking when it comes to creating political partnership. This radical thinking would require the involvement of the Sunni community, but he is underlining the fact forming a parliamentary system and distributing government posts based on the Lebanese model cannot settle internal differences. Again, the main point that I would like to point from his paper is the difference

within Lebanon, all communities are effectively minorities. We have one community that is larger than the others, which is the Shia community, but the Shia community in Lebanon is still a minority.

Therefore, the power arrangement system in Lebanon has its internal checks and balances. The Consociational model, far from being perfect -- actually, as a Lebanese myself I can vouch to the fact that it is beyond problematic; it is dysfunctional. But that said, nonetheless, compared to -- it has a far better chance than the Iraqi system in which one community, in this case the Shia community, is an absolute majority, therefore a Consociational model that is implicit rather than explicit does not work.

What Haider Saeed is arguing is that absent a political consultation of solutions, these matters would be settled in a manner similar to the way in which a small Sunni elite ruled Iraq for more than 80 years that is restoring an authoritarian system. The way he sees it, the current arrangement is slipping towards authoritarianism and ultimately, one ruled by a small elite from the demographic majority or a sole dictator that could capitalize on existing sectarian differences.

In either case the dream of a Consociational agreement between Iraq's various factions will remain a distant hope. Haider Saeed therefore ends on the note that here is the problem but unfortunately, he is not with us in order to be quizzed - "Okay, you stated the problem, go ahead and state the solution." - so we have to figure it out for him.

Michael Rubin: Thank you very much Hassan. Before we open up the floor to questions again, what I wanted to do was give an opportunity to you to answer the question from Maria Loyola from the Foundation for Defense of Democracies about how different communities in Lebanon or elsewhere in the Middle East interpret the concept of rule of law.

Hassan: Actually, I thought that this question is probably the most important question that can be asked because indeed that notion, there is plenty of lip service for it throughout. Just away from Lebanon, away from the Middle East going to Tunisia, when the current president who has been now in power for almost 20 years came to power in November 7, 1987, his slogan was "the rule of law." Again, this is not unique. Actually, "the rule of law" is very much a slogan in the Middle East; it is not internalized; it is not part of the real political life, whether it is democratic or not.

In the case of Lebanon, in particular, we have... when I mentioned the fact that it is dysfunctional, to answer your question directly, why would not people object to the fact that Hezbollah has committed what amounts to a breach of Lebanese law and acted in such a way to endanger the Lebanese is because we have a system that is above the rule of law. We have, in effect... and that applies throughout the Middle East. Even the rule of law, even the constitution's structure is viewed as being, actually, not ultimate; there is something beyond it.

Underlying the ultimate character of the constitutional system and therefore highlighting the absolute intransigence in the application of the rule of law remains a major challenge. In the case of Lebanon, while the government was striving to apply a rule of law in one way or another,

the president of the Republic, who by the way, had succeeded in continuing his presidency by breaching rule of law, underlined the fact that, well, what we have in Lebanon is some sort of an implicit arrangement between resistance, which means action outside of the rule of law, and the Lebanese army and the Lebanese State.

Actually, what the Lebanese president did is provide Israel with the full justification for its action when it claims that, well, all of Lebanon is accountable because what the president said that while we cannot fight Israel straight ahead, so we have to use underground means, including an agreement with the resistance that is not explicit. What we are pointing to here is not simply a matter of institutional arrangement, which is absolutely the case; it is also a matter of political culture.

I would venture to say anywhere in the Arab world, we are not at the level in which the absolute imperative of the respect of law and not just, nominally, the letter of the law, but the spirit of it, is not internalized, and this is the major impediment to all of our efforts because ultimately it does not matter if the constitution looks great, or if a system looks great if that system is bypassable.

Michael Rubin: As I begin to do the moderations of questions and answers, I do just want to add one insertion; that over the last couple of days in the Arabic press and especially in the Lebanese press, there has been a great deal of debate about the very issues which Hassan just highlighted. But for those that do not read Arabic, one of the real treasures of the Middle East press, I would say, in English would be the Daily Star of Lebanon who... almost alone, their commentary page, their opinion page, really runs the gambit. It is an oasis that it really does allow opinions which, personally, I like; opinions which, personally, I do not like, opinions which are quite bold for a publication in the region. For those who do not read Arabic but want to sample a very vibrant range of the dissent, the reform, and the debate which just does go on in the Middle East, I do want to just highlight the Daily Star. I guess it is [www.dailystar.com.lb](http://www.dailystar.com.lb) for what they do.

And with that I did see some hands raised for questions. Again, we will start over here. Just to highlight the rules again, Jeopardy rules; always form your statement in the form of a question. Ask as many questions as you want, but we reserve the right only to answer the first one and be brief, identify yourself and your affiliation. Thank you.

Chris Forcino: Chris Forcino, Resources. Omran, I want to thank you for your presentation. I have two questions; one is a point of clarification that Michael went on about, but I want to make sure I understand it. Pertaining to the internet, the internet in the various villages, you said they are set up and then they sort of shut down, if I get it, and then a new one emerges. I just want to better understand the mechanics of that, how that works.

The other question I wanted to focus for one minute on something in your paper pertaining to the newspaper, Al-Wasat. And you had described it in here as originally founded by Mansour al-Jamri and then you said now it seems to have a closer relationship with Sheikh Hamad. And I am wondering: Is that a reflection of editors of papers having to moderate their position over time? Or what explains a "resistance person" now having an affiliation with a government person, if I understand that correctly?

Omran Salman: Yes, thank you. About the websites and the forums, actually, Bahrain authorities used to shut down these forums from time to time when they feel that they went too far in criticizing the Bahraini regime. So what they do, actually, what the forums websites do, they change their address and then terminate, and they send the letters and e-mails to their members, inform them “we shifted our forum and our website to a new address.”

So this is how they do. For the Al-Awsat Newspaper, yes, editor-in-chief of this newspaper is Mansour al-Jamri, and he is well-known ex-opposition leader for Bahrain. And he spent a lot of years in London, advocating for Bahrain reform and change in behalf of Shia majority of Bahrain. But when he returned from London to Bahrain, I think at least that he changed his mind, and the king offered him a newspaper so then he came very close to the king. I can say that he has become a puppet for government. He keeps a distance between him and the government, but a lot of Shiites, they think he is close to the king. But this is the dilemma in Bahrain and even in other Arab countries; when you are outside, you can talk freely and whatever you want to say. But when you come inside you have to follow the rules and the regulars of the realities, so it is difficult, it is not easy. Yes. Thanks.

Michael Rubin: Yes, we have a question here. Please, just wait for the microphone.

Dalal Hasan: Dalal Hasan from the National Endowment for Democracy and my question also for Omran. I wanted to ask you, I mean, lately the crackdown obviously extends beyond just the freedom of expression - the Bandar scandal, in addition to the Bahraini government’s increased sort of scrutiny of daily activities of NGOs and blocking international NGOs from coming in to conduct activities without going through the Bahraini Institute for Political Development which is the government, the agency, I guess, that would regulate NGOs.

Given these developments, I mean, what is the strategy for -- I mean, this year the opposition has decided to participate in elections. After the Bandar scandal, no one really has any sort of faith that the elections are going to be credible, but they are still going to participate. What is the strategy, I mean, given the restricted -- growing constricted space, what is the strategy for civil society for the political opposition? I mean, there has been some degree; you talked about the need for diplomatic pressure. There is a lot of funds that -- people are trying to pump funds into Bahrain, but like you said, civil society is active on its own with or without funding. But the Bahrain government does not seem to be responding to this diplomatic pressure even when it is being exerted. What are people’s thoughts on the ground?

Michael Rubin: I am just going to interject and ask you in the course of answering the question, please explain the Bandar scandal, and also please explain what happened with the democratic institute office in Bahrain.

Omran Salman: Thank you. For the Bandar or the Salah Al Bandar scandal, he is the former adviser to Bahraini government based in London. So Bahraini government brought him to serve as a consultant or adviser. So then he was a part of this plan, this secret apparatus, or something like that. So in some point, he decided to change maybe his mind and to reveal all the plan.

The plan was about to change Bahraini demographic in behalf to Sunni minorities. So they started encourage Shia to convert to Sunnis. Also, the plan was about to make the Shia opposition very weak in the next election so they come to make a balance between Shia and Sunni. The plan was started in the 2005 and is still going on, but this guy decided to talk about it. And, really, it was a very dangerous thing and raised a lot of concerns among Bahrainis, but not that the opposition boycott elections or to start questioning the regime.

The king invited the Shia clerics who are dominant, actually, the Shia political parties. I mean, their word is above all of the political decisions. So he invited them and told them, "We will investigate this report or this Bandar's report, and at the same time I will guarantee you that we will not pass the Civil Code for the women and we will deal of this, so do not have to make it an issue." And they agreed and that is why they told to the four opposition parties or groups to participate in the election. So I do not think that the Bandar scandal will lead to political protests or demonstrations in Bahrain. It was in the beginning, yes, such prediction, but now the regime succeeded to contain it.

For the NGOs, let's talk first about the NDI. Actually, this is an interesting story. The government invited the NDI in the beginning of 2000 -- I mean, one or two; and it was the idea that NDI can help Bahrain civil society groups and entities and they give permission from the king himself, the NDI, that they can work legally. But last May, it seems that the representative of NDI, Fawzi Guleid, his name. The government said he came very close to the opposition and he started internal issues, so they decided to dismiss him and they give him only one week to be out of the country.

Now, the tricky thing -- the American response is to this was really so soft. I saw only one statement from the State Department. They say, "We are sorry, but we think this event should not prevent the progress of reform in Bahrain." And last week, the head of NDI, Madeleine Albright and the director of International Affairs in NDI for North Africa and Middle East, Les Campbell, they went to Bahrain and met with the king and ordered to reestablish NDI in Bahrain. But, unfortunately, the king refused such request and told them in direct way, "We do not need such institutions." Well, I do not know, but in eyes of a lot of Bahrainis when they see this thing happen, they think America is a very big and great country but cannot even convince a very small ally like Bahrain to accept NDI presence in Bahrain. They cannot understand it at all.

Regarding the NGOs in Bahrain, there is a law issued last year; they can ban any financial support to Bahraini NGOs from outside. This is I think a real obstacle in face of Bahraini NGOs so they can work freely and independently in Bahrain. Government last week, they brought the website of the Bahraini Center for Human Rights and they also blocked the five or six websites, minor websites, for NGOs and some of opposition groups and this became regular basis, regular thing that they do it. Thank you.

Michael Rubin: Just a quick clarification before we go to next question. NDI for those of you who might not be from Washington but are watching on television is the National Democratic Institute, which, along with the International Republican Institute are loosely affiliated with the National Endowment for Democracy and do a lot of fantastic work not only in the Middle East,

but around the world on helping with education with regard to democracy, campaigning, systems of parliament and so forth, as well as election monitoring and so forth. So when we are talking about NDI, that is what we are talking about, and the recent closure of their office in Bahrain.

Are there other questions? Yes, in the front. Please identify yourself again and ask your question.

Maury: My name is Maury. My question is for Emad, Ayat, or whoever wants to participate. The relationship between the frozen Middle East peace process and the frozen democracy, the relationship between that -- in the Arab world, as you know, we blame Israel for everything. In the capital of Yemen we do not have electricity because of Israel. In Sudan we have no democracy because of the Palestinian issue. If the Palestinian issue gets solved, is that is going to serve democracy in the region, or the opposite? How do you look at it?

Emad Omar: A short answer to your question if the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would help advancing the agenda of democracy and reform in the region - my short answer is yes. In Jordan, as you know, about half of the population is from the Palestinian origin. And the question of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is very important in the daily life of the people in Jordan, and it is part of the discussion and debate between the government and the public. And so it affects some time the political reform agenda if the government decides to adopt a foreign policy related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without taking into consideration the public opinion. That is also another short answer to your question.

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: No question about it; literally all Arab regimes have used the Palestinian question as a scapegoat and as an excuse for all sorts of practices. And I would say up to a certain point maybe up until well into the '90s, there was a lot of responsiveness and there was a lot of tolerance on the part of Arab societies towards these regimes, tolerance accepting the various impositions, including emergency regulations, martial law, et cetera, on the basis that something may be done, something can be done, something should be done. But actually, one has to point that in the past decades or so there has been quite a receding tolerance on the part of Arab societies and quite a bit of an introspective look.

There is lots of cynicism now with regard to the use of any regime for the Palestinian question. That does not mean that the Palestinian question is no longer part of the interest or part of the attention of Arab societies. It is quite the opposite; it remains there. But any use by regimes to that question have become -- I mean, the attitude towards it is very cynical -- so that suggests that actually the two issues, the Palestinian question and the issue of democracy, are no longer as linked as they might have been in the past.

The moment is today for Arab societies each independently, for that matter, to proceed towards a reform agenda internally, pressing the regime on the internal methods that are required, probably with some regional corporation, but not in any all-or-nothing type of arrangement. I am mentioning this just because, for example, and going back to the Hezbollah issue, Hezbollah for example, is one of those last users of the Palestinian issue, together with the Syrian regime and, maybe, also, I mean, a new user of that issue would be the Iranian regime which is a newcomer compared to the Arab regimes.

But today, it is so important in that use. Hezbollah has two types of discourses; one is the ideological discourse in which not only it wants to eradicate Zionism but it also wants to topple worldwide imperialism. That is one type of discourse. Another discourse is “we can provide you services.”

The first discourse, the one -- it is interesting to note how Hassan Nasrallah, the general secretary of Hezbollah, used these two discourses. In moments of triumph, he resorted to grandiose aims of toppling this and toppling that. Even at one point when he was so sure that Hezbollah has won, he started talking about the end of Israel being near and the end of American hegemony being near. But, then, when reason came back to -- when he came back to his senses because the reality on the ground is that Lebanon was the one destroyed, he reverted back to the other discourse of “We were rebuild, we will provide services, we will be part and parcel of the Lebanese political scene, and we will be accommodating.”

In other words, what I am pointing to is here we have to rely on the internal dynamic of Arab societies to keep on having the agenda being focused on what is real and what is effective. That is, reform internally and avoiding the ideological grand narratives that Hasan Nasrallah or Ahmadinejad or, for that matter, Bin Laden would engage in. But that disengagement is happening, I think.

Michael Rubin: Other inputs on this?

Omran Salman: Well, actually, I think this has become like a game now. It is true that Arab governments used to use this conflict as an excuse to prevent democracy, but why... you do not have to ask that these governments are parts of this game. I mean, from one side they ask United States and Europe to intervene and to help in solving this problem. From the other side they ask the most extremist elements and among Palestinians to escalate and to reject a peace process. So if this issue, this conflict was resolved I think that Arab regimes will create another conflict because they want to keep their authorities, they want to go without democracy.

So the issue is not if we can resolve this conflict or not; I think the issue should focus on why Arab regimes should continue in the same way. They should be reformed, they should accept the democracy. And the issue of Palestinian-Israeli conflict I think can be solved without linked with democracy. Thanks.

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: I have some very small thing to add here. It is very well-known that Arab regimes used the Islamic specter very efficiently as much as they do with the Arab-Israeli conflict. But a more democratic freer society, would they not be able to better contain Israel in the region? So let's not lose our selves talking about democracy. It is opening the system for acceptance for everyone. Thank you.

Michael Rubin: A question, Mario?

Mario Loyola: Mario Loyola again for Foundation for Defense of Democracies. I would like to ask that last question in reverse. I look at the situation in the Middle East and I oftentimes think that is precisely the failure of democracy that prevents the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian

issue because since nobody has a monopoly -- the basic idea of a monopoly of violence is not respected. A very basic Hamas talking point is that as long as the resistance continues, there will be no monopoly of violence.

Well, if that is true then the minorities do not feel bound by any peace settlement no matter what that is, and you will always have a minority that will continue the resistance until there is a full right of return and a smaller, but significant minority that will continue the resistance until the state of Israel does not exist anymore at all. And so, my question is at what point is there going to be any prospect, the situation of political culture, say, among the Palestinians where the minorities agree to be bound by the will of the majority in a peace settlement? I think that without this the resolution of the Palestinian- Israeli conflict is impossible.

Hassan Mneimneh: Mario, in my previous attempt at answering your question about the rule of law, I mentioned the fact that within Arab political culture - and I am generalizing - the constitutional framework is not the highest; there is something higher. But I did not say what it is that is higher. Higher is, to put it in terms that it would not be objectionable to people in that political culture would be the notion of justice. It is the fact that, for example, why is it that it is possible for someone to feel virtuous while at the same time not abide by a constitutional system? Or, for example, in the minority not to abide by the will of the majority, it is because they feel they are convinced that they have justice on their side, that there is justice that needs to be achieved.

If the constitutional system is a block on the way of justice, maybe it was created in order to deny justice and therefore we are not bound by it. This is exactly the logic that Hezbollah uses in order to say, "While Israel is more powerful, it can attack the Lebanese States, so we will create an arrangement in which Israel cannot attack us because we are outside. We are not a national group; we are a sub-national or para-national group."

Same applies there. What part of the reform that we need in terms of Arab political culture is linking the constitutional structure to the notion of justice, insuring that justice is achievable through the constitutional -- and justice with a capital "J" here; I am not saying justice in the legal sense. Justice... that it fulfills ultimately what is best for societies in the plural, both ours and our neighbors, et cetera. I think this dealing kink has to be corrected in order for your question to be answered in the positive.

Michael Rubin: Other questions? I know I certainly have a couple and I will use this opportunity to ask one. In a conversation which -- I had the pleasure of spending several days with many of the panelists and we have gotten into several discussions, sometimes contentious discussions -- one issue which has not been talked about but which is often bantered about is the role of the army. For example, if we look at Turkey, which of course is not in the Arab world, and talk about democracy in the role of the military and democracy, the Turkish Army is oftentimes seen as a check or a balance in favor of seculars and against the encroachment of Islamism. In Pakistan, on the other hand, sometimes the army is seen as a tool of Islamism where Islamists have infiltrated the army, and, therefore, it is not the protector of the system, but it is a threat to the system.

In the aftermath of the Lebanon – Hezbollah - Israeli conflict this summer, there is a lot of discussion with relation to the role of the Lebanese Army. And in Egypt one of the subjects which is often not discussed is the role of the army in Egyptian society, which, of course, will become a greater issue as Egypt enters a succession period, which, given Hosni Mubarak's advanced age, is likely to happen sooner rather than later. And of course, in terms of Jordan, sometimes the army has been talked about as a homogenizer that really -- or if not a homogenizer, a protection for the system.

So what I would like to do is just open a question, if I will, to the panelists to address within the experiences of their own countries what the role of the army is when it comes to dissent and reform, whether it is part of a problem or part of solution. Or if that is not a proper context, what would be when addressing the important role of the army in various Arab countries?

Jad Al-Akhaoui: First, we have to make a little difference between a strong state and a robust state. Hassan told me something about this the last time I saw him. A robust state is different than strong states. "Strong," which means very powerful and they can do whatever they want. They have arms, they have... "robust," that means they can take problems, take coups, but solid. And this is what -- what is not understood in our part of the world, I do not find any translation for the word "robust." When we say "robust," automatically in Arabic it means "kowi" ; that means... [cross-talking]. Yes, but it is not seen like that.

Now, the role of the army, I will give an example. In Lebanon, our army does not have arms. Last time, last week, they said we are going to send all the army to South Lebanon and they were going to give the internal secret security forces to take care of the security in Beirut, for example, in the capital. They found out that they have, like, 12,000 soldiers and they have 4,000 guns and machine gun.

So how are you going to control the security with people who are doing terrorist acts and they do not have arms? They do not have proper arms. If you are going to do a good army to protect the state and to protect the civilians in the state, you have to give them good arms, you have to earn them. But you have to create like a division and a difference between the role of the army and the role of the politicians. And you do not have to let any interference between army and politicians -- these are the things. Unfortunately, in our country, no, they are using the army in the political life and they are making a major use of the secret service for the internal thing, which is not the case in the West. Mainly, this is what to say. I do not know...

Hassan Mneimneh: [Audio glitch] very quickly about the Baath experience with the army, both in Syria and Iraq. The army was used, was infiltrated by the Baath party, which is an ideological party and actually was used in order to get to power. I mean the whole -- the Arab world went through a whole phase in the '50s and '60s of army coups d'etat that made it such that each regime, whether toppled by -- whether replacing one that has been toppled by armies or ones that were still there, meaning the ancien regimes, the monarchies, each regime calculated what it takes in order to ensure that the army does not become a problem.

In the case - I am sure you will hear more - but in the case of Jordan, for example, the army was largely derived from one particular group that was loyal to the monarchy. In the case of

Lebanon, the army split into two once the Civil War happened along sectarian lines. In the case of Syria, well, I mean the regime in Syria and the regime in Iraq, both of them, knew how to handle strong armies by creating alternative armies. So you have the official army and then you have the alternate army in the case of Syria for a long time, which means the defense battalions which is a separate army structure in the case of Iraq that the republican guards -- and when you create alternative armies, you ensure that the main army is in check.

So I do not think we can look at the army. For that matter, I am not a fan of the Turkish model in which the army is presumably a protector and the guarantor of the secular character of the state because this is an imposition from above that ends up being in dissonance, in contradiction, with developments from below. I would rather see the checks and balances being from within society rather from the outside. So I do not see in any case that in the Arab world the army can play a positive role towards the promotion of new political culture. And therefore I would rather think of the army as a tool for defense, as a tool for specific constitutional tasks and limited at that.

Michael Rubin: Yes?

Omran Salman: Bahrain, actually, has a very small army and it is in the hands of the ruler family. In 17th, one left is a group that tried to infiltrate the army, but they failed and the leaders of the movement were executed. And from that time, the army became outside of the political debate and these issues, so has nothing to do with reform. Thanks.

Emad Omar: When it comes to the army and security in general in Jordan, it is a very sensitive issue and usually you hardly find any discussion in Jordan or debate about the army or security. For example, there is no discussion about the military expenditures or the need to divert some of these expenditures toward health, expenses, or educational expenses; that is one thing.

The other thing, that the king has a large executive power and he is the one in charge of both the civil level as well as the security level. If the king has the will to push the reform agenda forward, he would be able to decide what would be the role of the security forces as well as the army regarding this agenda.

Ayat Abul-Futtouh: I cannot agree with what some of my colleagues have said. Each country has its own nature; the army in Egypt, for instance, all info about the army is a complete ambiguity area. We know nothing about its expenditures, what exactly do we have, whether really the military institution contradicts or an obstacle within the succession scenario or not, whether is there a third alternative or a third way other than this is being prepared. But so long there is some groups are willing to dominance the others or to oversight the other group's rights then we need the protection of the army, until the culture of democracy is embodied within our culture.

So I think whenever the constitutional amendment happens and became more civic, until this happen, the army can play a very productive role in protecting the institution. Thank you.

Michael Rubin: Among our panel, as we near the end of our time, are there any pressing issues or responses to what you have heard, what your colleagues have said, what the audience have

said that you want to throw out to the audience right now before I move on to my closing statements and my thank you's? Please...

Omran Salman: Yes, I want to talk a little bit about the issue of reform in the Middle East. So far, we heard here in American and elsewhere, in Europe, that in the Middle East or Arab World, there are only two parties: either dictators or Islamic movements. Me and a lot of people like me, liberals and reformers, they say "No, there is a third way." This is a way of liberalism, reform and democracy. So instead of focusing only how to solve the problem of democracy in Middle East and to focus on dictators and Islamist, let's help and support liberals and reforms and to believe that this way, one day we will be the dominant, the sky and the environment or -- I mean in the Middle East. So we believe there is a third way; this is the way of liberals and reformers. Yes, thanks.

Michael Rubin: Any other very brief statement?

Emad Omar: I would say that resolving the long-standing conflicts in the region, especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, will give more space for moderates and reformists to push forward the reform agenda.

Michael Rubin: Any other comments? Okay. What I do want to do, I have a couple just closing remarks I want to make based on my experience interacting with various people, facilitating in some ways, some of the dissent and reform project. It was a great learning experience for me. I did not have -- as many of you know my academic expertise and my area focus are much more precise; I tend to focus much more in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey and so a lot of this was a learning experience for me.

But a couple larger issues which I would draw out of the various panels: First of all, and from having read the papers and worked to put them together and they will be published again in both English and Arabic and they will be available online, the devil is oftentimes in the details. Many people in Washington and elsewhere talk about Arab reforms specifically, generally broad-brush sort of manner and that is important. But at the same time, what I most learned from reading the papers is just how country-specific many of the various problems are.

When I started this out, for example, to take the case of Yemen, it is all well and good to talk about how there is a free press. But on the other hand when the government controls a monopoly over newsprint, that is a very specific impediment to free expression, and that while we focus on the general need for democracy, dissent, reform, whatever you want to call it, across the Middle East and, frankly, outside the Middle East as well, it is important not just to treat countries as templates inside the beltway Washington political game, but also to look very specifically at the country's specific issues.

Now, on this panel today, there were many points with which I disagreed, many points with which I also agreed. My job as moderator is not to impose my point of view on any of the panelists. But what I do want to point out with this is that when we do have debates over dissent and reform... and this was part of the reason why we have brought three groups and hopefully at some point more to Washington, to hear, unvarnished, the opinions, the expertise of people in the

region, rather than just having everything diffused, if you will, through either US embassies or through newspapers or through magazine accounts, and so forth.

I also do want to commend our panelists today and our previous panelists. They have taken great risk and we saw this with some of our previous panelists, especially with what happened to our Tunisian participants who have been directly punished for their participation here in calling for free association, free speech, and so forth that undercuts or underlines just how much work there is to be done, especially as there is a debate as to how serious Washington is, whether the pressure is going to extend past the next presidential elections, and so forth.

I do also want to make a special note of reiterating, again, the case of Fathi Al-Jami, a Libyan dissident who is not an extremist by any sense, not an Islamist, who was put in prison two weeks after President Bush used him as an example of how Libya was changing. His crime was talking to Al Horda Television and calling for a freedom of speech, freedom of association, and multi-party elections. Now, the very fact that he remains in isolation and solitary confinement in prison, everyday that Muammar Qaddafi's insult to the White House, to President Bush, and to the prestige of the United States, as well as a symbol which is seen across the Middle East as evidence that whatever politicians may say - and in this case I will say, with the exception of Joe Biden, who has been quite active on Fathi Al-Jami's case - it is used as evidence as to why perhaps this rhetoric of dissent is cynical.

And the cynicism really does undercut it because there is a real belief, not only in the United States, but elsewhere, that dissent and reform are necessary. But one of the other key factors underlying this, too often it is easy to dismiss - and many American politicians do this - dissent and reform as an American agenda. But the fact of the matter is long before anyone came to Washington, before 2003, before 2000, I mean, all the way back into the '80s, into the '90s, there have been a small cadre of very active people working to promote dissent and reform in the Middle East.

Just because not enough people in Washington speak Arabic does not mean that they are not out there. And we will be publishing, putting together, a compilation of essays written in various Arabic newspapers from 1991 to the present highlighting the real and continuing debate about dissent and reform in the Arab world written by several prominent commentators not only in the major Pan-Arabic newspapers like Asharq Alawsat and Al-Hayat, but also in many of the local newspaper because this debate is out there. I mean, it is one of these cases if a tree falls in the forest and someone in Washington is not there to hear it, it does not mean it does not exist.

So to take away rather than just the education about individual countries and individual experiences is just to underline how active this debate is within the Middle East, however, one defines the Middle East; within the Arab world, however, one defines the Arab world. It is important to recognize, it is important not to be so self-centered, to think it is all about us and to recognize that, basically, this is going on, the struggle is going on, and we have some very, very courageous people who have traveled from the countries they are representing today just to be here today.

And then before I conclude, I do want to say a couple thank-you's for both this panel and others. Molly McKew, who manages the defense and foreign policy team at AEI; Jeffrey Azarva, my research assistant and translator who -- his work, along with George Sassine in translating many of the Arabic papers, has been absolutely wonderful. My Arabic is not at a level where I can really, without spending hours with my dictionary, get through it adequately. Ben Kramer and Daniel Dale, who were helping with the microphones today; and, also, because they are too seldom thanked, the conference staff outdoors who make sure that all of these are outside in the hallway, who make sure that all of this runs smoothly.

What many people forget is that we oftentimes have one or two or even three conferences a day and it is a miracle, the amount of hard work they had to put in to make sure that everything goes off with clockwork. So I do want to thank the panel and urge that they get a round of applause. Thank you.

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