

# HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE ARAB WORLD

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**WELCOME/MODERATOR:**

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**SPEAKERS:**

**Michael Posner**

Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor,  
U.S. Department of State

**Bahey El Din Hassan**

Director

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

**Amal Basha**

Chairperson

Sisters' Arab Forum for Human Rights

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Washington, D.C.

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MICHELE DUNNE: Good afternoon and welcome to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. If the last few people can take their seats, we're ready to get started now.

My name is Michele Dunne. I am a senior associate here at the Carnegie Endowment and editor of The Arab Reform Bulletin. I want to begin by thanking our co-sponsor for this event, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, who also brought our visitors from the Middle East.

[00:28]

We have a very special lineup of speakers today to discuss an extremely important topic: human rights conditions in the Arab world and U.S. policies. And I would say that today we've got the dream team here to address this important topic.

We have Michael Posner, assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor. I suspect that Assistant Secretary Posner needs little introduction to this audience due to his long career as a distinguished human rights advocate, during which he has many notable achievements, including proposing and campaigning for the first U.S. law on political asylum.

Before joining the State Department, he was executive director and then president of Human Rights First. And thank you very much, Assistant Secretary, for fitting us into what I know is a hectic schedule.

We also have Tamara Cofman Wittes, who is deputy assistant secretary for Near Eastern Affairs at the State Department, overseeing the Middle East Partnership Initiative and the broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, among other responsibilities.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Wittes is a well-known expert on the Middle East and particularly on democracy issues there, having been a scholar at the Brookings Institution and before that at the U.S. Institute of Peace before joining the State Department.

So we have with us both the functional and geographic bureaus of the State Department, and those of you who have worked at State or with State know that's a powerful combination. So thank you to both of them for being here.

[02:12]

And we're especially delighted to have two very prominent advocates of human rights from the Middle East with us today. Bahey El Din Hassan is director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, which is a regional organization, and it is no exaggeration to say that Bahey has emerged as the dean of the human rights community, not only in Egypt but throughout the entire region.

Among his many achievements is the publication of the first comprehensive human rights report on the entire Arab region, compiled by a network of Arab organizations, which has been published for the last two years and is available in English as well as Arabic.

And we have with us Amal Basha, who heads the Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights in Yemen. She also is a longtime advocate for human rights and has been recognized throughout the region and within Yemen by a

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number of awards, including the Al-Saeed Cultural Foundation annual prize and Golden Shield for distinguished work in human rights. She also has extensive experience working in U.N. organizations.

Now, if we had been having this conversation a year ago, shortly after President Obama made his famous speech in Cairo, I think I might have begun by saying that human rights were nearly invisible in his administration's policies in the Middle East, but I think that is no longer true today, and I'm sure that a lot of the credit goes to Assistant Secretary Posner and to Deputy Assistant Secretary Wittes for their efforts.

[03:54]

Human rights and democracy promotion indeed have begun to appear on the administration's agenda in the Middle East. The National Security Strategy that was issued in May makes a clear connection between U.S. national interests and the expansion of democracy and human rights abroad. It calls for the United States to strengthen the power of its own example and also to practice principled engagement with non-democratic regimes, as well as engagement with civil society and peaceful political opposition.

I'm hoping today we're going to discuss, in some detail, what that really means in practice, and also how people from the region view whether or not the United States is actually doing that.

In recent months the Obama administration has also begun to speak publicly about some human rights issues in the region, particularly in Egypt, making statements, for example, criticizing the extension of the state of emergency, calling for investigation of the recent killing of Khaled Mohamed Saeed by security officers, and criticizing irregularities surrounding the recent Shura Council elections.

[05:11]

So there are beginning to be a record of public statements now recently from the Obama administration regarding human rights issues in the Middle East.

I would say that the Obama administration also has more to work with than its predecessors had in terms of capable human rights institutions in the Arab countries. I'm talking about independent organizations. I mean, there are also human rights commissions and government institutions with whom the United States can engage, but I think that the Arab human rights organizations have really started to come into their own.

They still face a lot of harassment from their governments but I think they have gained a lot of credibility among their fellow citizens, and they've also gained a greater ability to influence public debate via the independent media that have appeared in the Arab world. And we have two very prominent representatives of that trend with us here today.

So we're going to begin with some remarks from Assistant Secretary Posner and Deputy Assistant Secretary Wittes about how they see U.S. policy toward human rights in the Arab world. Are we engaging in a truly effective, fruitful way with both government and civil society on these issues in Arab countries?

[06:34]

And then we're going to hear from Bahey and Amal about the actual conditions in the region and how they evaluate the U.S. engagement on these issues at this point. And after that we'll open up for your questions.

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Assistant Secretary Posner?

MICHAEL POSNER: Thank you, Michele, for those kind words and also for organizing this really important meeting. I also want to thank the Heinrich Böll Foundation for your co-support and sponsorship.

The interest in this and the participation from people from so many places is really very encouraging to me, and I regard this in my own tenure as a region and a subject that's as important as anything on which I work. We're at a really critical moment, a pivotal moment in a number of countries, Egypt in particular, where I think it's absolutely essential that we be clear about what we're doing and that we act decisively. So I'm going to say something about that.

Let me just, if I can, by way of introduction, set the framework for the Obama administration and Secretary Clinton's approach to human rights in general, and then focus in on the Middle East region more specifically.

There really are three pieces of what essentially frames my job and the job of this administration, as articulated by the president in various speeches, including the Cairo speech, but including the Nobel speech and speeches in Ghana and Moscow and elsewhere, and by the secretary in a speech he gave last December at Georgetown.

The first premise of what we're doing and the way we're approaching these and other issues is what we're calling principled engagement. We're engaged in the world in a way that I think recognizes that there are going to be differences, recognizes that there are going to be challenges, but says that it's better to be in the middle of the discussion than standing outside.

[08:39]

And so, for example, last spring the United States made a decision to join the U.N. Human Rights Council, which was a decision not taken lightly, and taken with a recognition that the Human Rights Council is far from being a perfect institution. It's a very challenging institution but one where we thought it's better to be inside trying to fix it and correct it and assert our views and our values than standing on the outside.

Last month, or several weeks ago in fact, my colleague Harold Koh and Stephen Rabe from the State Department, went to Kampala to participate actively in the Assembly of State Parties for the International Criminal Court. The United States initially signed and unsigned our support for the criminal court. We're edging our way back into figuring out a way consistent with our national interests how we engage in that institution. There are a range of other examples also on the bilateral level.

We're talking to friends and foes and everything in between. We're engaged in the world. We're engaged on security issues and economic issues and others, but human rights is part of that discussion. That's what principled engagement means.

The second piece, which I think is also critical, is the notion that there is a single universal standard for human rights. It's not a U.S. standard, it's not a European standard, it's not an Islamic conference standard; it is a universal standard based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It applies to everyone, including ourselves.

Importantly, we have to try to hold ourselves to the highest standard so that we can lead by example. The president's decision on the second day of office to issue the three executive orders, ending a policy of official cruelty – I wouldn't have come into the government if that executive order hadn't been issued.

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It was critical that we said no to torture and all forms of cruel treatment by every U.S. official. It was critical that we made the commitment to close Guantanamo – much easier to say it than to do it but we are working on that. And the third thing is to have reasonable humane rights respecting detention policies in the security context.

A huge agenda; I spend a fair amount of my time working on it. They're not easy issues but there's a commitment to lead by example. We're doing a review to the U.N. under what's called the Universal Period Review at the end of the year. We convene 12 experts groups from our own civil society to prepare for that. This will be our own evaluation of our own performance. We're going to continue to do that kind of self-assessment. We want to lead by example. We want to hold every government to the same standard.

[11:32]

And the third piece is a commitment to helping societies change from within. It is, I think, a maxim – it's certainly something I've always believed – that it is impossible, certainly very difficult, to force change from the outside. Societies change from within but there have to be the building blocks. There has to be the framework.

And so, when the secretary spoke last December about a 365-day-a-year approach to democracy, it's not about regime change. It's not about a single day when there is an election, although elections are part of it. It's about building and supporting civil society. It's about free press. It's about access to the Internet. It's about the rule of law, transparency, accountability, the right of workers to organize in the workplace, empowerment of women.

It's the package of things that we call sustainable democracy. That's what this is about in terms of our mission. And for you all, those of you who have come from civil society organizations in the Middle East, our job – my job is to make sure that we're doing what we can to allow you the space to operate in your own society and to push for change from within.

[12:52]

Where we are today – and Michele mentioned the National Security Strategy – we've gone from the rhetoric, which is sort of phase one – and I can't tell you – if it's frustrating for you on the outside, it's more frustrating on the inside to see how slowly it takes to generate momentum on issues in a new administration.

We've got the rhetoric down, and now, in a directive last month, the president, the government has said, we have a national security strategy which is built on four pillars: security – that one is obvious and easy to understand; what we call prosperity, which is about a sustainable development – health, education, science, the like; international order, being part of establishing international ground rules; and, fourth, values. And the values section is really about human rights and democracy.

[13:50]

The national security strategy says that democracy doesn't merely represent our better angels; it stands in opposition to aggression and injustice. Our support for universal rights is both fundamental to American leadership and a source of our strength in the world. It goes on to talk about individual right to speak your mind, assemble, worship, et cetera, and says the U.S. supports those who seek to exercise universal rights around the world.

So now we have the rhetoric and the foundation of a security strategy, and now the question is, where do we go from here and how do we turn this into reality? Let me talk about the Middle East for just a couple of minutes.

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We have a range of huge challenges in this region, as many as we have anywhere in the world. We have issues relating to freedom of association and assembly, and to me this is almost the starting point.

There are many countries in the Middle East that restrict the rights of organizations to exist, to register with the government, to receive foreign funding. They have sucked the oxygen out. They have made it impossible or very difficult for people to organize, to advocate for women, for environment, for human rights. We need to be attentive to that and it is a priority. The secretary is giving a speech in Krakow on Saturday about this issue.

[15:19]

There is the question related to that of what happens to human rights defenders. We had a case just in the last few weeks of a man named Muhannad al-Hassani in Syria who got three years in a prison for – a lawyer, human rights lawyer – for spreading what the government called “false information that undermined national morale.” Three years in prison. We get these cases all the time. We have to speak out. We have to make this part of our principled engagement. These defenders deserve and need our support.

There are a range of challenges relating to freedom of expression: journalists under attack in many countries, bloggers under attack in many countries, access to the Internet denied or made so difficult that it’s virtually impossible or extremely expensive, or both, for people to speak their minds.

[16:13]

There are cases like the recent arrest in Kuwait of Mohammed Abdel Qader al-Jassem, who is in prison for criticizing the amir. He’s in a secure area of the central prison with convicted prisoners. There is a gag order on the media who even want to report on the situation.

I was, in January – in January I was in Egypt and I raised a couple of cases of bloggers and journalists, among them Hani Nazeer, who blogged on religious issues and was detained under the emergency law; Kareem Amer, who was jailed in 2006 – thrown in jail for four years for denigrating religion; and Mossad Abu Fagr, who was jailed in 2007 because he posted on the situation of the Bedouins.

Under the renewed emergency law in Egypt, all three of these people should be released. We’re calling for that. We’re going to continue to press for that.

[17:15]

The emergency legislation itself – we’ve called for an end to the emergency law in Egypt. We’re deeply disappointed that it was renewed on May 11<sup>th</sup>. There are several hundred prisoners that were released but there are many, many, many more who need to be released, and we will continue to urge that the government of Egypt repeal the emergency law, which is contradictory to notions of human rights.

The hardest cases are those of people in prison, people who were detained and abused. Several weeks ago in Egypt, a man named Khaled Saeed was dragged out of an Internet café and beaten to death by police – 28 years old. We’ve raised this issue publicly. We’ve called for a full investigation. These are the tests of whether there is a commitment to human rights, and we’ve got to be resolute.

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In January, I raised the case of a woman named Mona Thabet, who was tortured last year by Egyptian police. The allegation is that both in her neighborhood she was picked up, taken to prison and beaten there, and then again in her home. We're continuing to press for an investigation of that case.

In Iran we have used every public opportunity at the U.N. and elsewhere to challenge illegal detention, torture, denials of due process, attacks on civil society, denials of media freedom, denials of religious freedom to the Baha'is and others. I was in Geneva last February when the Universal Periodic Review of the Iranian government was presented. We were first in line to speak and raise a range of concerns. We raised them publicly at every opportunity. The situation there is dire.

[19:03]

And finally, I want to say something about elections. The Iranian disputed elections a year ago clearly signaled that the government was totally unwilling to allow free expression of political views in that society. It continues to be the case today.

We're concerned also, and have raised these concerns with the Tunisian government for their restrictions on opposition – political parties, political candidates, a range of restrictions on the media and the like. And in Egypt, concerns about reports of fraud and interference in the recent Shariah Council elections. We have two critical elections coming up in the fall for the parliament and the presidential elections next year.

This is a test for us. It's a test for Egypt. It's a test for everybody concerned about human rights. This is a moment where we need to be calling for an open political process. We need to be calling for independent observers, both Egyptian and international, to be able to observe the process. We need to be providing the support they need to political parties and activists to make sure that people register, that their voices are heard, that the issues are debated openly and fairly.

So we're at a critical moment and I think in some ways I've mentioned Egypt probably more than any place. I do think we're at a critical moment here and there are many of us in the administration encouraging pushing that in addition to our longstanding interests, national interests in working with the government of Egypt, in working on a longstanding relationship, it is critical at this moment that we signal and be there for civil society and for those pushing for democracy and human rights who are engaged in a very timely, important fight, and the United States government needs to stand with them. Thank you.

MS. DUNNE: Thank you. Deputy Assistant Secretary Wittes.

TAMARA COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. Well, thanks, Michele, for inviting me to join you, and I want to thank Carnegie and Heinrich Böll not only for today's event but for all of the attention that these two organizations consistently give to this set of issues in Washington.

[21:25]

And I also really want to thank Bahey and Amal and all the rest of the delegation who took time away from their work and came very far to share their views and the information that they brought and the insights that they brought with us in Washington. And I know that over the course of the week you have had a number of engagements with various offices and agencies across the U.S. government as well as this public event today, so I'm very grateful to you for all of that.

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Assistant Secretary Posner spoke about the roots of this administration's commitment to human rights and democracy and sort of the strategic guidance within which we are doing our work. And what I would like to do is just talk to you a little bit about some of the other ways in addition to that public dialogue that Mike discussed – some of the other ways we're working to put that commitment into practice through our diplomatic dialogue with government, through outreach to citizens and civil society, also through public diplomacy and public statements, and also working multilaterally with other governments, including in international organizations.

[22:38]

I think Mike has made very clear that, as an administration, we don't accept the notion that there is some kind of contradiction between pursuing our strategic interests and expanding democracy and human rights and pursuing other strategic interests. In fact, as President Obama said last year in Cairo, we see that countries that respect human rights and that are governed by the will of the people are more stable, more successful and more secure, and that makes them better partners for us in all of our international endeavors.

That also reflects our firm view that security requires more than simply the absence of conflict, that it requires attention to human needs, to human rights and to human aspirations. And what that means in practice is that even in a region that is beset by pressing security challenges and longstanding conflicts like the Middle East, our overall strategy and our specific policies have to do more than simply work to resolve conflicts and fix things that are broken.

We are putting forward a positive agenda across the region, an agenda that's about empowering individuals and communities to control their own destinies, to create their own opportunities and to build their own future. And as Mike discussed, and very importantly, governments of course have a central role in making that agenda for the future a reality and for creating the space for those opportunities to exist.

[24:08]

So let me just talk about a couple of specific cases where I think this approach to the region really comes through most clearly, and the first is Yemen. I think Yemen is in many ways a key example of a country where security challenges are tied very, very clearly to the need for political dialogue, for equal opportunity, for a more transparent and accountable governance, all of which are in Yemen's own national security interests.

The United States supports a unified, stable, democratic and prosperous Yemen, and we believe the government of Yemen's approach to its challenges has to be a comprehensive one that addresses security, political and economic challenges together.

Our strategy in Yemen seeks to address the root causes of instability to encourage political reconciliation, to improve governance and combat corruption, to build the Yemeni government's capacity to secure its territory, and also to protect its citizens and deliver them the services that they deserve.

So all of these are our priorities as we ramp up our development assistance to Yemen in the coming year. And we engage very energetically with the government of Yemen on these priorities, both bilaterally and multilaterally through the Friends of Yemen process to help the Yemeni government undertake necessary reforms and to promote political dialogue as a lasting solution to internal conflict.

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So that's on the diplomatic side. In addition, through programs like the Middle East Partnership Initiative, which I oversee at the State Department, we engage directly with civil society in Yemen to help them advocate for citizens to help them hold their government accountable.

MEPI actually has 26 active projects in Yemen. We have more local grants to local Yemeni civil society organizations than we do to any other country in the region, and that's a testament to the vibrancy and the diversity of civil society in Yemen.

So it gives us an opportunity to provide direct support for Yemeni citizens' work on the priorities that they identify, from combating corruption to promoting peaceful conflict resolution, to countering child marriage.

And, you know, going back to what Mike said a few minutes ago, this emphasis on supporting local voices is not an accident; it's a reflection of the forces that are driving change in the Middle East and North Africa, the proliferation of civil society organizations across the region, and the increased opportunities for activists like the delegation that's in Washington today to do their work.

We see our role and our responsibility as empowering and bolstering the work of these activists. We want to amplify their voice. We want to increase their impact. So as we work to shape the political environment to be one in which civic activism can operate and have an impact, we also try to use programs like MEPI and others to help these efforts take root.

[27:21]

Mike talked a lot about Egypt, and I don't want to go on about this at length, but I do want to say that Egypt is another important focal point for our efforts to support locally driven reform. The United States of course has a strong relationship with the government of Egypt.

We also have a longstanding partnership with the people of Egypt through assistance programs that go back many decades. And it's our firm view that progress in political and economic reform is essential to Egypt's long-term strength and success. So reform is important to sustaining a strong foundation for our continued and valued strategic partnership.

Mike mentioned the elections, and I agree that this is an important moment for the government of Egypt, for those of us who care about the future of Egypt. It's also an important moment – a very important moment for Egyptian citizens. It's an historic opportunity for them to express their views about who should govern their country. And it's our view that Egyptian citizens alone should decide who will run in Egypt's elections and ultimately who will win.

[28:38]

We've been concerned, frankly, by some of what we have seen so far, and Mike detailed that, but we think that the elections in the fall and next year are an opportunity for the government of Egypt to address those concerns and to create a process – an electoral process in which the people of Egypt can have confidence and be encouraged to participate.

You know, this spring at the U.N. Human Rights Council, the government of Egypt heard recommendations from a number of Egyptian NGOs and from the international community about how to improve the protection of human rights in Egypt, and the U.S. government was an active participant in that process. And the

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Egyptian government made commitments to the council, including to combat police violence and to investigate torture allegations.

[29:34]

So when we see cases like the case of Khaled Saeed, we realize that the issue of police brutality is still one that requires serious focus, and we also see an opportunity for the Egyptian government to demonstrate the commitments that it voiced in Geneva to investigate allegations of police abuse and to hold police accountable.

There are many active Egyptian citizens and brave Egyptian NGOs who are calling for specific reforms to move the country down the democratic path. And we're committed to sustaining our support for Egyptian civil society. In fact, through MEPI, DRL and USAID, despite an overall significant reduction in U.S. government bilateral assistance to Egypt, we have sustained and even increased our support for Egyptian civil society organizations and Egyptian civil society in all its forms.

[30:31]

Let me close with just one more quick thought about one of the things that I see in the region as perhaps most significant as we continue down this path seeking to advance universal human rights, and that's, you know, frankly, that the most powerful force in many ways shaping the future of the Arab world is not economic or political or even technological; it's demographic. It's the rise of this coming generation of young people that is going to have a profound and potentially transformative effect on the Arab world.

Now, countries in the region already struggle with creating jobs, providing other basic needs for this youth bulge. And youth, for their part, are struggling to carve a path for themselves in societies where access to opportunities is shaped less by merit or hard work than by patronage and the tight relations of family and tribe.

I think all of us in the administration recognize the importance of helping this rising generation get the tools and access the opportunities they need to realize their aspirations for themselves, for their families, for their communities and for their countries.

[31:43]

So in a variety of ways, we are working, moving forward to develop uniquely tailored programs that support young people as stakeholders in society, that encourage their active participation as citizens, as volunteers, as entrepreneurs, as activists. So woven throughout our work in the Middle East is a commitment to building partnerships with this rising generation, and partnerships that are designed to empower youth and the adults who work with them.

Thanks very much.

MS. DUNNE: Okay, thank you very much, Tamara.

So we have heard now, you know, from the – sort of from the Washington point of view that the U.S. administration is developing its rhetoric on human rights in the Arab world and is engaged in many forms of contact with civil society and so forth now.

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So now we want to hear from the region. What's the point of view from the region? How are conditions – human rights conditions in the region developing? Are these messages from Washington being heard? Is the United States communicating effectively with governments in the region? Do we see the effects of that or not? And are these contacts with civil society also effective?

So I'll turn it over to Bahey El Din Hassan.

[33:02]

BAHEY EL DIN HASSAN: Thank you very much, Michele and the whole Carnegie and the Heinrich Böll, for hosting this event. I am very pleased to have on the same table not only friends but intimate friends like Michele and Amal, but also very prominent advocates for democracy like Tamara and, for human rights, Michael Posner.

In fact, I am proud to sit on the same table with Michael Posner, who I consider myself a student in his school in advocating human rights for several decades. I am proud that I got to know Michael Posner for almost two decades. And he was very, very helpful, not only for the cause of the protection of human rights but also in learning and educating very important human rights lessons.

In fact, I am sure what Michael has addressed other cases, it is just drops of what he is doing, but unfortunately I think that the human rights friends in this administration are a very little minority.

[34:57]

When I met – I had the honor to meet with President Obama on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February this year with another delegation of human rights defenders. In this meeting, I raised with the president a question. I asked, how long has it been since your historical speech in Cairo? And I answered, the gap – unfortunately the gap is much wider than a span of seven months. What to say now after one year?

Just to look into some of the parts of the statement of the speech, President Obama said the United States doesn't accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. "This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is a time for these settlements to stop," end of quote.

What happened on – the reality is that the demand to end the Israeli settlement construction, it has been shelved. Moreover, the United States refused the recommendation of a U.N. commission that both Israel and Hamas conduct an investigation into crimes it committed during the Israeli attack in Gaza, which is very surprising in this regard because the United States itself, several years ago, it investigated crimes committed by American soldiers in Abu Ghraib, and it did the same, what United Nations Commission is looking for. It did it voluntary.

[37:27]

Another quote from the president, he said, "I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed, confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice, government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people, the freedom to live as you choose. Those are not just American ideas, they are human rights, and that is why will support them everywhere."

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And I would like – this is the end of quote – I would like to underline to support – the sentence or the word to “support.” So it is not just promoting those rights but to support, and I don’t think that it means only financial support.

On the background of the statement and speech, what we witness in the region across a year since June 2009 to June 2010, that division witnessed an intensification of repression in fact in the whole region. Even a country like Morocco, it witnessed a repeat in its limited parts of reform which it started several years ago.

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It witnessed also – witnessed an increased operation of Shia minority in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. It witnessed the bloody government takedown in South and North Yemen. It witnessed rigged (remote ?) elections in several Arab countries; at the top of them Tunisia, Yemen, Algeria, Sudan and Egypt.

In his historical speech, President Obama was – as far as I remember, was the first U.S. president to publicly adopt as a cause the Copts and to name it in his speech in Cairo. But the year since then has still unprecedented sectarian violence targeting Copts, which reached its peak with Naga Hammadi – (inaudible) – in January 2010.

This year witnessed a new dangerous – very dangerous development. For the first time, human rights defenders in at least three countries received this with – in this room, two human rights defenders, Amal Bahsa one of them; Kamal Gandubi (ph) another one, but there are several human rights defenders from Tunisia and from Syria also, who received such – so this is as I said. It is a new development.

Of course, this is just – I am just highlighting some dangerous developments on the current – (inaudible) – the speech of President Obama. But of course, I don’t think that anyone would suggest that such intensification of oppression in the region, it is because of the U.S. policy or this is for the interests of the United States. I don’t think that. But, on the other hand, I think that such a deterioration cannot be explained without taking into account the policies and the inclination of the new administration.

[42:32]

Moreover, I think that the United States or the administration made three negative contributions to such human rights – to the deterioration of such a situation. The first one of them is the unconditional support to a regime, the Yemeni regime, which is known as a bloody, repressive, corrupted regime, and this is in fact – as far as not only human rights defenders think but also many academicians think that this is even – it doesn’t help the United States in its fight against terrorism.

In helps in the other way, as many analyses we used to hear by Carnegie and from other think tanks. I mean, it helps to make the environment in Yemen more helpful for recruiting more and more terrorists.

The second – the negative contribution is the blessing to the rigged election in Sudan. This is a very negative development in the attitude and the position of the United States towards having free elections everywhere. And even this makes now many human rights defenders think that it is not wise anymore to seek international monitoring for any coming election. At least they are reluctant because of what happened in Sudan.

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The third negative development is the United States' adoption of the Egyptian government definition for NGOs. I would like to underline that the negative impact of such adoption, it is not financially, and even who suffered because of such adoption of this definition were mainly some major U.S.-based groups working in Egypt.

But the main negative impact is political. It is direct support to the – (inaudible) – position and the attitude of the Egyptian government towards mainly human rights and NGOs. Because of that, now the Egyptian government has almost finished a draft of new NGOs law, which – (inaudible) – such definition, and even some officials said to the media publicly that this was blessed by whatever the U.S. embassy – you said.

And despite that such a law has not been discussed or passed by the parliament yet but this is expected after the new election, but the Egyptian government started to implement some provisions of articles of the suggested law and now several NGOs, who are considered by such governmental definitions that they are not legal, so they don't receive funding, not from the United States but even from European sources.

[47:01]

So I think maybe Egypt is going to witness, after the adoption of this law, that human rights NGOs and human rights defenders would be sent to trials the same like what is happening in Syria, the case which Michael highlighted, Muhannad al-Hassani. The main charge against Muhannad al-Hassani is that he established a human rights NGO, and this is not the same definition of the Syrian government and this is an illegal NGO.

Okay, I am about finished. Let me just see. Yeah.

Finally, I would like to conclude by going back to June 2009. In June 2009, after President Obama's speech in Cairo, there were two interpretations of the speech – interpretation of political analysts and of course civil society people, and even also think tanks here in the United States, that this is a message of engagement with the Arab people and Arab governments.

But there was another interpretation, which is the interpretation of the Arab government. This governmental interpretation concluded that this speech, it is a message of engagement with the Arab governments and the disengagement with the Arab people. I leave it to find what is – on the (current ?), what was the correct interpretation.

Thank you very much, and thank you again for Michele and the Carnegie.

[49:46]

MS. DUNNE: Thank you very much, Bahey. Amal Basha.

AMAL BASHA: Thank you very much. Let me first thank Carnegie for this opportunity to talk to you and to interact with such an august audience. Ten years ago, I came to Washington, D.C., and I met a lot of people. Some were asking me, where are you from? I said, from Yemen. And they asked, East Yemen or West Yemen? And then I was mad. I mean, why my country is not famous? Why these people do not know Yemen? Yemen is the great civilization, the Queen of Sheba, the dams, you know, the terraces, the mountains, the Amal Basha. (Laughter.)

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So it takes just 10 years and now, wherever I go, if anybody asks me, especially when I am in the West, where are you from? I am from a country that is beneath Saudi Arabia. I don't tend to say that I am from Yemen. Yes, Yemen has become, you know, equaled to the terms of the terrorist land, or the land of the terrorists of September 11. Especially now, maybe we have the privilege, now, to have Yemen be the capital, the hideout of the Arabian Peninsula, regional, now. Before, we were just, you know, sending some terrorists to some countries, but now we have a regional base.

[51:39]

So this is the only development in my country. Nothing is developed in that country. If you look at the human development ranks, nothing is developing. In terms of health, education, water, environment, security, everything is deteriorating except this fact – and the fact that security is very developed in Yemen, in terms of the number of agencies.

We have the national security. We have the state security. We have the central security and we have the guard security and we have the private security. Oh, my God. All of these securities and we all in Yemen are very scared. We don't have any sense of security, although this developed apparatus that's created to ensure our security.

So why we are, now, having all of this? Of course, the whole region, unfortunately – it's not a region that is a good environment for human development or from human rights respect. All the activists from this region, we are suffering. Bahey mentioned me and some other friends, but all human rights activists there are fighters. And they are the future victims, maybe, for any kind of violations.

So we are operating as our president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, he is saying that's like dancing over the head of snakes. I think the snakes is everywhere – starting from Egypt to Morocco to Yemen – I mean, it's a very dangerous situation when we are talking about human rights or we want to do something about human rights.

[53:38]

Well, Bahey mentioned that yes, there are some minority who are friends of human rights or democracy. Actually, I'm not aware of how many numbers we have who are friends of human rights, or how many enemies we have. I'm not an academician. I'm not a politician. I'm not a person who really spends a lot of time reports. It gives me a headache. I am a person who is working on the ground. I have an office. On a daily basis, we are receiving tens of requests, tens of complaints.

People are tortured, detained, disappeared. Women are beaten. Children are getting married at the age of nine and 10 and 11. We receive reports of girls who are dying. Ilham Shui – maybe you follow up in some of the newspapers – she died three days after she got married. And we were saying she's a child and the government should feel ashamed, should put a law to prevent early marriage or, what I call it, early crime.

They said no, she is not young. I mean, then we have to argue and then to look at the report of the autopsy. And then she was 16. And I said, oh yes, you were saying 13? But she is 16. And we said, okay. If she is 16 and died, it means that even at the age of 16 she is not supposed to get married.

[55:15]

So the violations in the whole region – it varies, but it's there. And the state's government, or the American government, they are unfortunately – throughout the years. It's not just now because of Obama's policy. You

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know, I've been listening to the national strategy and the human rights strategy and all of this. It's very nice to have all of these strategies and policies. I mean, whatever, you are doing to help, it will help, okay? We have no problem with the papers or the wordings.

Of course, I mean, you are paying a lot of time to make the best that you can – that you feel it's the possible way to help and to support the people of that region. Well, that's fine. But what is the reality now? What is the reality? Some trivial mistakes can really damage all the good papers that you are spending time and expertise and working on. I can give you two mistakes. The two mistakes happened in the last few months, or this year.

Of course, Yemen, now, is undergoing a very intensive security cooperation with Obama's administration. And it started even before. The first mistake was in al-Majalah in December. I don't remember the date, maybe because I don't remember that. But let me tell you that when, during the elections, the American election – we, as women activists, we were – excuse me for the Democrats – we were supporting Hillary because we want to see a woman, especially in the United States. You know, that will create a change all over the world.

Regardless, we don't know exactly who is Hillary, whatever is going to do, what is her mentality, but we need to see women, a strong woman. Yes, and she was wife of Bill Clinton, who has a good reputation in that region, but we were really – as women activists, okay, we want to have a woman: black and white or whatever.

[57:37]

But came Obama and he's nice-looking and eloquent and he is also representing a minority. And we, the women, we are also minorities, regardless of our number, in terms of the quality or the rights that are receiving. We are still treated as minorities. So there is something in common between Obama and the women all over the world. He is representing the minority. So we were so happy to have Obama and we said, okay, sorry for Hillary. Maybe next time we'll support a woman when – (chuckles) – when we have no such good competitors, okay?

And then we were following his statement in Istanbul and in Cairo and we were so happy. Now there is – really, he is saying what he's saying, a change. There is a change in his discourse, a change in the content, a change in the mentality. And we were feeling closer. Okay, now, maybe as human rights activists or women activists, this kind of mentality also is going to help and support, although the previous policy of Bush or the others, they were also helping.

And I can see now my friend Laura Shaw from – she used to work in Yemen – I mean, we had great relationships with many of the people working in the embassy, especially those who are efficient and really hardworking people. Thank you, Laura, for all the work that you used to do in the past.

But now, come to what's happening on the ground, the security cooperation. Look, Yemen is a very poor country? I mean, whatever, you think that you are going to help Yemen – it's going to help. If we think about education, health, poverty, environment, water, women – I mean, it's a verdant country. Everything, if you put there, it can have, you know – it's a fertile; it can lead to – but now, for this security issue, I'll tell you.

[59:59]

These incidents that happened in December, the attack or the strike in one of the operations to attack the terrorists in Yemen, in al-Majalah, around 52 or 53 civilians killed – men, women and children in a rural area – in an attempt to kill or to assassinate one or two of the terrorists, suspected terrorists. And in the second day – but

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Tamara has, you know, maybe corrected me – in the second day we held – I mean, we read in the newspaper that Obama sent a letter to the government of Yemen congratulating Yemen for the quality action.

Yes, I mean, we are the lovers of Obama – we did not believe it. We said, no, no, it cannot be. Maybe there are some people in the embassy that cannot really tell what is exactly happening – misinformation, lack of information – or deliberate, you know, hiding of information. I mean, it cannot be that 52 people – rural, poor – died of the strike from this airplane without pilot – how do you say this? Drone, whatever, okay. (Laughter.)

[1:01:34]

People were killed and then we are receiving – and yes, I mean, it could be – I mean, we don't trust our government. They lie, they loot, they do everything. But we did expect at least, you know, a correction from the embassy to say, no, no, this is not happening. This is not what happened. It cannot be that a congratulation letter going to – think about the pain of the people in that area. And what kind of reaction?

The pain of one person, yes, you can erase it with time. But the pain of the whole village cannot. Maybe that will continue and it will have an impact for longer term. And think that people in that area, in the south – because now what is happening? There is now a political view and investment for the fight against terror. In Yemen, we are a country of war. We have a lust for war. We have a war in the south; we have a war in the north. We have, now, a war against al-Qaida and al-Qaida suspects.

[1:02:47]

The other incident, also, that was in Mareb. The secretary general of one of the local councils, he was an intermediary between the government and the al-Qaida who are there in Mareb. And he is a very famous man and he is a tribal man. He was sent to have negotiation with the people who are in the rural, very remote area. And then what happened? Also, again, the same mistake and he was killed. That was just three weeks ago happening.

And then what happened, now, in that very, I mean, strong and vigorous tribe in Yemen? A war against the government. A war and we have a power cut because the power station is based there. It's an oil – where the oil is, there. And we had power cut for almost two weeks because started the war, now. You have 50,000 armed-to-teeth tribal men. And another war is just because of a simple, stupid mistake: killing the person that you are sending to have negotiations.

So no matter, now, what policies you are doing – I mean, nice strategies – just be careful about such simple mistakes. And even using these preemptive strikes, or whatever – I mean, could there be a better way to fight terrorism and to ensure security, without having this collateral damage that cannot be really clean, in short or longer-term?

[1:04:44]

So now these security measures – in the whole Arab countries, now – whoever is a political opponent, they are represented as terrorists, suspects, have relation with al-Qaida. You know, they have some friends of al-Qaida. They have some links with al-Qaida. So it has been used as a weapon for us to do all of us.

In Yemen, the whole – I mean, there have been a massacre of the journalists. Ten or nine newspapers and magazines – independent, professional – they were accused of security issues and they are tackling security issues.

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They are engaging in I don't know what. Okay, I'm finishing. And in the name of the national security, the protection of unity, we have now so many issues.

And even women's rights – women's rights, now. We are talking about violence, child marriage. And our terrorists, but not who are holding the guns or bombing themselves – but they are terrorists in their mentality – they have called us “the new tsunami.” The women activists, who are fighting against child marriage and trying to put an end to such a crime; they call us the new tsunami.

And they have declared jihad against us. Can you believe it? There is a jihad against women activists now. The same jihad against the West who are trying, you know, to destroy the Islam and the civilization of the Arab, or whatever. I'm sorry for being too long a time. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

[1:06:36]

MS. DUNNE: Normally, I'm a stickler for ending our events on time, but with your permission – those of you who can stay – I would like to extend a bit, till 1:30 or maybe a little bit after, so that we can have a discussion. Because I know we have in the audience a lot of expertise and, I would guess, a lot of questions.

So we've heard from our speakers from the administration that they believe they have come up with a, sort of, serious strategy and have serious efforts to promote human rights in the Arab world. I think we heard from both of them, particularly some very important statements about Egypt and about the kind of critical moment and test that the situation in Egypt now presents.

But at the same time, I think we've heard there's a gap. There's a gap between what the administration is doing and believes it's doing and how is perceived in the region. And I think we heard from both of our regional activists that they feel that – the governments in the region still feel that this engagement is primarily government-to-government and that also, perhaps, the administration has committed a number of harmful missteps and, as Amal said, that human rights advocates in the region feel that they're dancing over the heads of snakes. And they're still not sure they have many friends in Washington.

So let's open this up for your questions. We have several microphones in the room. Please wait for the microphone to come to you. Give me your name and the affiliation that you have. I'm going to take a group of questions. Please do keep your questions concise – no statements, please, just questions – so that we can, so that we can give everyone a chance.

[1:08:29]

Q: Thank you, Michelle, for doing these conferences. They are very helpful and education is very important in these issues. My name is Ali Alyami from the Center for Democracy and Human Rights in Saudi Arabia, here in Washington, D.C. Since I'm talking about conferences, we are organizing a conference on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July on Capitol Hill, so I invite you all to look at our Web site and come to participate –

MS. DUNNE: Is that a question, Ali?

Q: My question – I know, I have to advertise myself a little bit here. I'm a poor guy. My question – Mike, I couldn't think of any better person to do the work you are doing except yourself. I knew you before and I know are doing your best. And I really salute you, sir, for what you do. I just hope people listen to you.

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There's a person here I would like to recognize from Saudi Arabia who should have been on this podium. Mr. Ibrahim Al Mugaiteeb, here, is the only person in Saudi Arabia who started and supervised and managed an organization called Human Rights First. And if anybody needs, deserves your support, you all should support him. It's the only independent, non-government, non-licensed human rights organization. My friend, thank you.

MS. DUNNE: Is there a question?

Q: My question, actually, yes, to Tamara. You said that we Americans are actually empowering the individuals in the Arab world to determine their destiny. I like the vibes of these things. In the meantime, the people who are on the ground – Mr. Hassan and Ms. Basha – and I agree with them because I do these things too here in Washington, D.C. Things are actually going backward since this administration took over and I can give you one example in Saudi Arabia. My question is coming; let's listen. This is dialogue, here.

[1:10:30]

Look, in 2005, there was election in Saudi Arabia – which was a farce, but it was election because Bush pressured the Saudis. And it was supposed to take place in 2009. When Obama took over here, King Abdullah automatically postponed it for two years. My question to our people, Mike and Tamara: What empowerment are we doing? What support are we giving to the people? We are engaged with the Arab regimes instead of supporting people who promote human rights. Thank you very much.

MS. DUNNE: Okay, thank you. This gentleman. Wait for the microphone, please. It's right behind you. Thank you.

Q: My name is Abdullah Habhasan (ph). I'm with the Egyptian-American Alliance. And for long, the Egyptians have accepted the abuse in the police stations, in the prisons and also the election as a fate. But now there is a sign of rebellions all over the country – in Sinai, Sawasawa (ph), in the delta, everywhere.

Now, is America going to really have some kind of international monitoring to the coming election? That's number one. Number two, is there any hope that the light can reach the people in the prisons? Can we have cameras in the police stations or in the prisons? People are really abused, unbelievable abuse. And if they die, no one knows about it.

[1:12:01]

And as we have seen, they have fabricated cases against the boy who got killed, like he is a severe criminal. So we don't trust no more the prosecution; we don't trust the autopsies – government autopsies. That's ridiculous. The system is collapsing. If there is no –

MS. DUNNE: Question?

Q: So are you going to do any monitoring to the coming – or can we have anything to have cameras in the prisons and the police stations? Thank you.

MS. DUNNE: Okay, thank you very much. In the middle here, Laura Schulz. Come forward, please. No microphone – yeah, I'm sorry; we'll get to you. There we go. Thanks.

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Q: Thank you very much. Laura Schulz from the Congressional Research Service. Thank you very much to the panelists and Amal, for your kind comments. My question is for Amal and Bahey, following up on something that Tamara raised – namely, the demographic reality – that is, not just in the Middle East right now, but really to come in the next couple of decades.

What do you think should be the forward-looking strategy of civil society in terms of really engaging and empowering youth so as to prepare for the coming future, particularly in your countries? Thank you.

[1:13:19]

MS. DUNNE: Thank you. This gentleman. Wait for the microphone, please. It will be right there. Thank you.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Hassan and Ms. Basha, for raising two of the most important issues to me, personally: the Coptic plight in Egypt and the woman's plight in all the Muslim world. So my question to Mr. Posner and Ms. Wittes is, what is the American administration is doing regarding the killing of many, many Christians in Egypt, which Mr. Hassan said – the Copts, as you know.

And just for example, the last Christmas Eve, six Coptics were killed coming out from the church after the Christmas Mass, and many, many other killings. What's the American administration doing about the raping and the forcing women to Islam in Egypt, and – (inaudible) – raping, even, and beating Muslim women in Egypt just because they don't wear the hijab (sp), throw acid in their faces, et cetera? What is, specifically, you are doing?

MS. DUNNE: Thank you. One question in the back, there?

Q: (Off-mike.)

MS. DUNNE: Can you speak up a little bit? We're having a hard time hearing you. Another mike.

[1:14:50]

Q: Thank you very much. I am Hamid Abdullah (sp). I'm a human rights activist from Syria who's a refugee – cannot go back – and my father and brother, as well – both in prison, currently. Last week, the State Department mentioned my father's case along with Mohanad al-Hasani's case, and I want to thank you very much for that. My question is for Michele, at first. Based on what you evaluate the human rights support in Middle East is getting better. While the people come from Middle East are saying the situation is getting much worse.

And the second question is for Tamara. Ma'am, I really appreciate your time. I respect you. I'd like to come to all conference you come to talk, but each time, you're talking about – you're raising safety, stability, security, not human rights. Last meeting, in NED (ph), you said "safety" 19 times. I was counting the points – each time you're saying safety.

With all of my respect, my question is, do you agree with Amal that you're building great strategies in the paper, but in the field, U.S. making a huge mistake so approaching the government at the same time they are approaching the human rights activists or the human rights societies? And that's make the interpreting – the governmental interpreting, Mr. Hassan said, it's more in the Arab governments' favor than civil society's favor. Thank you.

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MS. DUNNE: Okay, thank you. We'll start with these questions and I'll come back for a second round, okay? Tamara, since you have a specific question, why don't we start with you?

[1:16:12]

MS. WITTES: Okay, thank you. And thanks to everyone. I think that this was a whole set of very important issues that were raised. Let me try and address the issue of how we engage with civil society and how we engage with governments. And I think that there's been some suggestion from Bahey and from those who ask questions that there's a sort of a zero-sum game, here, that to the extent that we're talking to governments, that, that's bad for civil society activists, and to the extent we're engaging with civil society activists, that, in and of itself, somehow constrains governments.

And I guess that I would reject the notion that things actually work that way. You know, there is a question of U.S. policy; there is a question of the human rights situation in the region. And in the middle, there's an important variable, which is the behavior of Arab governments, okay? And how do we impact that behavior? Now, civil society activists – somebody said, we are working to empower civil society activists, so let me be very clear: Civil society activists in the region are doing a whole heck of a lot. All we are trying to do is give them a boost in their activities. They are empowering themselves.

So it seems to me that civil society works to affect the behavior of governments. That happens both through civil society groups here in the U.S., like Human Rights First, and civil society groups in the region, and often working in partnership. And it's also a role that we believe that we can effectively play to help bolster the role that civil society plays in the region, and trying to affect government behavior. We also dialogue with governments and we dialogue with them about interests we have in common, and we dialogue with them about issues on which we have disagreements.

[1:18:07]

And we speak very frankly to them about our concerns on democracy on human rights, and we believe this is not only important, but essential to trying to make progress on these issues on the ground. So I don't see this as either one or the other. It seems to me that, that is not an approach that's going to move us down the road. And as Michele has said many, many times, we need to walk and chew gum at the same time. I think that's what we're doing. And so even though not all of the dialogue is going to be a public dialogue, that doesn't mean that it isn't taking place and it doesn't mean that it isn't very frank.

MS. DUNNE: There were just a couple of specific questions that I hope that one of you, either Mike or Tamara, would address, okay: Is the United States going to support or push for international monitoring of the Egyptian elections? What about the question of the Saudi elections? Do we feel that – you know, that the government of Saudi Arabia felt free to postpone them indefinitely because of a perceived lack of interest from the United States?

[1:19:17]

MR. POSNER: Let me answer the first, and also the question about Nag Hammadi and the Copts. And then maybe Tamara, you'll say something about – (inaudible). We absolutely support the notion of independent monitoring of the elections, both by Egyptians and international. I think the local observers are going to be accepted much more readily than international observers, but I think our view is, you need both.

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So from where I sit, we're watching the parliamentary elections very closely. It's not just monitoring; it's also the process that leads up to the election. Are parties going to be able to organize? Are voters going to be allowed to register? Is there going to be open access and public debate about all the issues that are being discussed? And then, is the election itself going to be fair?

So I think this is a priority. We're engaged in the process. We regard both the parliamentary and the presidential elections as critical tests of the government's commitment to democracy. And it's an open question, frankly, as to how open they're going to be. On the plight of the Coptic Christians, I agree with you entirely. Again, I was in Egypt in January. I met with representatives of the Christian community. I raised the issue of the killing of the six Coptic Christians in front of the church very actively. I raised it publicly in a press conference.

We raised concerns, frankly, also about the decision of the government to use the emergency law to prosecute the three people they identified. We also raised concerns about them broadening that investigation. So we're very mindful of it. We continue to raise it. I think it is a disturbing part of what is a trend of sectarian violence, and we're very mindful of it and we're going to continue to press on it.

MS. DUNNE: Anything on the Saudi issue? And there's also the demographic issue on the youth. Yeah, yeah.

[1:21:27]

MS. WITTES: I mean, on Saudi Arabia, I'll just say, you know, I think that, as we discuss these issues with every government in the region, we also discuss them with the government of Saudi Arabia. There's no exceptionalism there. And you know, I think that what I see – and certainly on my most recent visit to Saudi Arabia earlier in the year – is that there is a lot of dynamism within Saudi society. There are a lot of people who are discussing issues – even in the press, sometimes – issues that weren't necessarily open for public discussion a few years ago – everything from the issue of gender separation to the issue of public participation and voice and corruption.

You know, and I think if you look at some of the public debate after the floods in Jeddah, for example, you saw some significant – you know, people raising significant issues about how the government handled all of the issues surrounding construction and contracts, and so on, and what led to the tragedies there. So I see a lot happening within Saudi society. I think there's a lot there to be encouraged about. And I think that one of the things we can do is support that, and also try to ensure that the space is open, and remains open, for that kind of discussion.

Q: (Inaudible) – election. The election is what I asked.

MS. WITTES: And there's been a delay in the plan for elections, and you know, this is something we continue to discuss.

[1:23:01]

MS. DUNNE: Amal, would you like to comment on any of these issues, including the demographic issue that Lauren raised?

MS. BASHA: Well, one of the issues that was raised about this – the U.S. policies and themes and issues related to the support of civil society. For us, the most important kind of support that Washington or Brussels or

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whoever is willing, really, to help and support is to recognize the civil society as a real partner in the development, in the policy, also, making, in consultation.

What was the good thing about the – the changes in the attitudes of the Americans, as well as their partners – European – was what happens in the Forum for the Future. The Forum for the Future was really an excellent platform, where both the decision-makers, the officials and civil society, they came together and they negotiate and debate face-to-face in a very equal position. That really what empowers us; that really what make us feel that we can talk to power at the same level. This is the kind of things that we need.

[1:24:35]

What we need, also, from the U.S. government – whenever you are having a measure (ph), whenever you are having an event, whenever there is an issue, include the civil society in your dialogue. I mean, what I have noticed is that we are invited to the embassies for small meetings, okay, with the whoever – senior people coming from Washington. We don't want these kind of secret meetings. I mean, we are not doing something secret.

This should be done in an open space so that the governments can hear and listen and see that these people are recognized, their views are taken care of or well-taken. I mean, yes, it's nice to go to the American Embassy. It's safe and nice and air-conditioned and green – (laughter) – but this is not the point. The point is that things should be in public so we feel that okay, we are talking and we are discussing issues related to our country's security, human rights, women's rights, development, whatever, okay? This is the kind of support that really, I want.

For the issue of demography, I did not really understand what is meant, but if you are talking, Laura, about the engagement of the youth, yes. I mean, now, in the whole Arab world now, there is a revolution coming from the youth, thanks to the Internet and the cyber world and those generations. They are really going to take over.

I mean, for us, if you see Bahey and a few activists in each country, there are a few. You can just name some people. From Egypt, you have three, four, five. But now, it's really an army of activists. I mean, I look 10 years back, and I see, oh my god, I mean, if we had this number of activists from the youth, I mean, we could have achieved more than before. But believe me, it's the youth who are coming. We are aging now. Yes, the movement is aging. But there are now promises for more voices and more people who are going to take the lead. Yeah.

[1:27:03]

MS. DUNNE: Okay, Bahey, if you will permit me, I'm going to take a couple more questions and then I'll give you the first go, okay, and then we'll conclude 'cause we're well over our time. This gentleman in the front row, first. And please – I beg you, please questions, brief questions.

Q: Yeah, Ibrahim al-Mugaiti (ph) from Saudi Arabia. Human Rights First society. I just want to clarify something that's very dangerous Tamara said. Whoever hears what she said about Jeddah floods think that, well, the amount – the searing – (inaudible) – of allowing criticism, it means that things are better. You see, Saudi government is just like all the Arab regimes.

If you remember Howar Toshe (ph), whoever knows Syria, I mean, even in a country like Syria, Howar was allowed to critique the government to allow some of the pressure off. So after Jeddah floods, all of us were angry. The king had to set a commission and he had to allow from some public views, but actually, the dialogue is far from being good or strong or transparent. Thank you.

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MS. DUNNE: Thank you very much. Would you pass the mike to the gentleman right behind you, there? Thank you. A brief question, please.

[1:28:24]

Q: Yes, I'm Michael Lame, "Re-Think the Middle East." This is a question for the two State Department officials. What are the tools available to you to encourage governments to change their policies? I assume it's not accidental. So you raise the question with them; they have a reason for doing what they're doing. Can you play hardball? What sticks, what carrots are available to you to change the behavior of those governments?

MS. DUNNE: Okay, thank you. Two last questions. The young woman in the middle.

Q: Hello. Saram Safer (ph) with the Middle East Youth Initiative, Brookings Institution. I have a couple questions. One is for Mr. Bahey. In light of the recent human rights report of Egypt, who Heba Hassouna (sic) was the lead author of, there was a whole chapter –

MR. HASSAN: Who was?

Q: Heba Hassouna?

MR. HASSAN: Heba Handoussa.

[1:29:20]

Q: Handoussa, sorry. Sorry, my mistake. There was a whole chapter on the situation of youth in Egypt, and that chapter had a strong emphasis on the level of education, the quality of education and entrepreneurship in Egypt. So my question is that, what strategies do you propose in order to measure the quality of education, since there's a huge gap between the level of – the number of educated youth in Egypt and most of the Arab countries versus the number of people who are employed? And also –

MS. DUNNE: Okay, thank you. We have one more person we need to get a question from.

Q: I know it's getting late, so I'll be very brief. My name is Ibrahim Hussain. I am with the Alliance of Egyptian-Americans, and originally from Egypt. But I'm speaking here as myself. Back to Mr. Bahey, a question has been bothering for a while. The gentleman asked what tools the State Department has. One of the tools I believe it has is foreign assistance. After Israel, Egypt is the largest assistance. Unfortunately, the military assistance is concluding (ph) and economic and development assistance is shrinking drastically.

What is wrong – really, I'm wondering – what's wrong with putting a condition that, unless there is progress in the human rights and democracy front, there will be a transfer from military to economic development assistance? I'm not saying cut the assistance, but start rearming the army and give to the people. Thank you.

[[1:31:02]

MS. DUNNE: Okay. Thank you. So I'm going to give the speakers each, just, really a minute or so to conclude. I think we'll go Bahey and Amal, then Tamara, and we'll give you the last word, Mike. Please.

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

MR. HASSAN: I will start by the last question, the question of conditioning the U.S. aid to Egypt, or whatever. I think this is a very unpopular issue. I would think of such option if United States has nothing to deal and to – (inaudible) – Egyptian government behavior. In fact, it has a lot to make – and this is not only the – I mean, to – (inaudible) – to respect human rights. And this is not the only means. And the previous experience, I mean, which related to using the financial assistance to condition – to change the policies. In fact, previous experience proves that it works as always. People who are the most victims of such development or such action.

Concerning what could be done if it is not the aid, I think I would be very modest, in fact. And I would be very modest because the context of the U.S. performance in the region is very disturbing, concerning promotion of human rights and democracy. I think that the United States should review and look here again into the style of engagement, which has been developed and adopted by the President Obama administration. Because as I try to explain, it mainly helps for more and more repression. This is what we witness, and I think that the oppressive regimes in the region, they rightly or correctly interpreted (sic) the Cairo speech.

[1:34:03]

This is what happened after one year. And even after one year, several governments, in the same occasion of one year, we are coming to discuss and analyze, as a country, as the Tunisian government, on the same occasion, they adopted a law, which criminalized human rights defenders if they participated in a fora like this and they exchange information which may lead to harm or do something bad for the economic interests of Tunisia. And the targeted people of that is mainly human rights defenders, and then, even by names. And some of them are in the same room, now.

This is what not – I don't think that this would happen if they think that the message of the Cairo speech would be implemented. I think, also, what could be done that the United States should stop doing bad things. I gave several examples of that – (inaudible) – rigged elections. This is, of course, not good for human rights.

So I am not asking what to do is good, but at least to stop doing bad. Unconditional support for a very bloody regime, like Yemen, as Amal explained more and elaborated more and more, this would be a positive step forward. Helping the Egyptian government to limit the space of the civil society by supporting its definition for what is NGO and what is not – it is terrible contribution to the repression of the civil society.

In fact, yesterday, we had a meeting with the undersecretary, Maria Otero, and we were told that even now, more Arab governments – more governments, even not Arab, are looking to copy and paste this and asking United States to – (inaudible) – that in its bilateral cooperation – (inaudible).

MS. DUNNE: Bahey, I think we have to give the others a chance. Thank you very much. Any brief finishing comments, Amal?

[1:36:43]

MS. BASHA: Well, to support the civil society and the human rights. I mean, for us, the moral and political support is far more important than any technical or programs. One statement in support of a detainee or a person who is tortured or a girl who is married at the mountains of Yemen and died, that, for us, counts. Thank you very much.

MS. DUNNE: Thank you. Tamara, any brief concluding –

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[1:37:11]

MS. WTTES: Yeah, I'll just make one very brief comment about freedom of association because I think it's very important to make our position on this issue crystal clear, which is that, as Mike said at the outset, this is a concern for us that we see, yes, across the region, and beyond the Middle East, governments that are seeking to constrain freedom of association, constrain civil society in their own countries, and also constrain the ability of those civic organizations to associate freely with people outside their borders.

All of these are violations of the fundamental right to free association. This is something we oppose in every context, and we oppose it energetically and we oppose it vocally. And we seek to support freedom of association not only through such public statements and through our diplomacy, but also through our direct support for local civil society because I do think governments in the region pay attention to where we put our money, and I think that's one very strong symbol of our support, as well as a practical method of support.

MS. DUNNE: Thank you. Mike?

MR. POSNER: Yeah, just a broad, general last comment: There seemed to be, in this whole discussion, a kind of disconnect between the Washington types – me and Tamara – and our civil society activists from the region. And I think there's probably less disagreement than is obvious, but I just want to say three things. I think, first of all, assessment of what's actually going on – I don't think there's that much difference.

There are particular things that have been said here I wouldn't agree with, but I don't think any of us would say that there's a great trend – positive trend on democracy and human rights in the region. There's a serious problem. There's a serious negative trend in many, many countries, and we've got to be attentive to that. I think we all recognize that. Secondly, there seems to be some disconnect between the sort of efforts that we laid – that Tamara and I laid out, in terms of trying to set broad administration policy and action on the ground.

[1:39:15]

And I would say the civil society is a perfect example. We need to have a unified policy in government that says, we're going to fight restrictions on NGOs, funding, registration, et cetera, across the board. It's taken a while to get that kind of thinking on a global sense. There are 30-some countries in the world that have enacted new restrictions on NGOs. They're not all in the Middle East. And they are learning from each other. That's now something that we're really generating internally, within the government. It has an effect on everybody, then. It affects policy on the ground.

The third and last thing is Bahey's comment about style – the style of engagement. The truth is, I've probably traveled to, now, already 12 or 15 countries in the world; there is not one style for the United States government. In some ways, I wish there was. I wish it was the way I wanted it, at least. But the truth is, embassies have their own personality; ambassadors have their own personality; countries have their own history in relation with governments. In regions – I was just in Central Asia, in the Middle East. I've gone to neighboring countries.

And the way in which the United States carries out its policy is dramatically different from one to the next. I can tell you there's a grand theory behind that. Our engagement is dependent on a whole lot factors. My job – Tamara's job – is to make sure, to the extent possible, human rights, support for civil society, is part of that. I can't say we're succeeding everywhere, but we're certainly trying.

[1:40:45]

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

MS. DUNNE: Thank you. I think we've had an important conversation today – an important exchange about what the U.S. administration thinks it's doing and how human rights advocates in the region think it's working. I hope that this will just be the opening of an ongoing conversation. Please join me in thanking Amal Basha, Bahey Din Hassan, Tamara Wittes, Michael Posner. (Applause.)

(END)