CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

GETTING TO PLURALISM: POLITICAL ACTORS IN THE ARAB WORLD

WELCOME/MODERATOR:
JESSICA MATHEWS,
PRESIDENT,
CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

SPEAKERS:
MARINA OTTOWAY,
DIRECTOR, MIDDLE EAST PROGRAM
CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

AMR HAMZAWY,
SENIOR ASSOCIATE, MIDDLE EAST CENTER,
CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

THOMAS FRIEDMAN,
COLUMNIST,
THE NEW YORK TIMES

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JESSICA MATHEWS: Good afternoon. I'm Jessica Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment. It's a great pleasure to welcome you here for what I think is going to be a terrific discussion about what is both a deeply important and often deeply frustrating issue, namely, political reform in the Arab world.

The United States and the wider international community have worked for years to promote political reform and development with varying degrees of application and success. And yet the region remains stubbornly one of the least changed in the world. There are many reasons of course and we are going to hear about a lot of them today but one of them is the lack of understanding of the region on the part of the United States.

We know every minute detail about the Arab-Israeli conflict but we have paid little attention, historically, to the internal politics of Arab countries and we know very little – indeed, almost nothing – about the most important political force in many of them, namely, moderate Islamists. Our work at Carnegie has focused from the beginning on examining and explaining and attempting to understand political transformation in this region and the lack thereof.

The program has published, in English and in Arabic, many books, innumerable policy papers, and advisories on this issue. Three years ago we opened an office, the Carnegie Middle East Center, in Beirut, allowing us a permanent on the ground dialogue within the region. Amr Hamzawy, one of today's speakers is a senior presence in that office. Within a few short years, the center has established itself as the go-to venue for research, commentary and real roll-up-your-sleeves workshop on this and on related economic, political and social issues.

This latest book, "Getting to Pluralism: Political Actors in the Arab World," around which today's discussion is based, is very much the product of the direction we've taken from the outset in our work, and of the resultant direct engagement with a range of Arab political actors many of whom it would be impossible to interact with here. With that, I want to introduce this distinguished panel.

First a very good friend of Carnegie's who needs no introduction, Tom Friedman, the New York Times foreign affairs columnist and best-selling author of many books, including the brilliant, "From Beirut to Jerusalem," the winner of the 1989 National Book Award for nonfiction – a book that is an intense and thought provoking account of a decade of reporting in the Middle East. That reporting earned Tom two Pulitzer Prizes – one for his reporting in Beirut and one for reporting in Jerusalem.

Alongside Tom is Marina Ottaway, the director of Carnegie's Middle East program. And Amr Hamzawy at my right, a senior associate in the Middle East Center. Also want to mention Michelle Dunne, also a senior associate with our program. She is the editor of the Arab Reform Bulletin – an English/Arabic publication and a major contributor to the book. So with that, let me turn the program over to Marina who will begin the discussion by discussing the results of the work. Marina?

MARINA OTTAWAY: Thank you Jessica; thank you all for coming. When we first started working on the issue of political reform in the Arab world quite a few years ago now, I think we had very different expectations about what our conclusions would be because when we started this

project it was a time when there was a real sense in the Arab world that something was about to change. There were real discussions on the issues of democracy.

The first paper that I wrote on this topic was an overview of the debate that was taking place – of the debates, I should say, that were taking place in the Arab world – or in the Arab press – on the issues of democracy. And I know that my poor research assistant went crazy because these articles were coming out one on top of the other on a daily basis, and it was a major undertaking just to keep track of what people were saying, what the discussion was.

And unfortunately, as we conclud this phase of our project we really have come to a very different conclusion: that this drive toward the reform that seemed to be so strong a few years back is drive that really seems to have fizzled out – that there is really not a great push now, there is not a great deal of political dynamism in the Arab world. Amr will say more about this later. I think I will just leave it at this.

The question is, you know, why this situation, why is it that Arab governments have proven so incredibly resilient to change? Why is it that Arab regimes, far from being undermined by the efforts towards the reform by the pressure coming from the outside, seem to be in the process of very much reasserting their control and this is true everywhere. It is true from Morocco, where the King has just launched a new palace party that did extremely well in the last round of elections and likely to do even better, to all the Gulf countries where if you look around at sort of the ruling families, are still as firmly in control as always.

And why is it that the efforts that have been made by – particularly under the Bush administration, but also by the European countries – those various undertaking by outsiders essentially have not brought more fruit? And I think part of the reason – one of the reasons here when you try to understand the resilience and also the failure of efforts at democracy promotion, is that in many ways we need to think about the process of democratization in a somewhat different way than we normally think.

The discussions of democratization usually seem to hinge on two points. One is the importance of values – the change in the value systems that have to take place in a country, the importance of education the importance of civic education, the importance of the organization of civil society in bringing about the change and so on. And secondly, we think about institutions – we have to help these countries build institutions. What have we been trying to do in Iraq and in Afghanistan? What have we been advising countries to do? We have been spending money in trying to build the institutions.

Nobody denies that values are important, that institutions in the long run are important. But I think what we have overlooked and what, in the end, is that democratization is about a power game because, when you have – in order for a country to become more democratic, you have to have redistribution of power in the country. You cannot have democratization without power sharing. You cannot have democratization in an autocratic country without some people losing power and other people earning a greater share of power.

We are not talking about regime overthrow, but certainly there has to be a redistribution of power, a more balanced distribution of power in the country. And I think our conclusion in turn, from the analysis of the various political – from the Middle Eastern countries, is that the explanation

for the resilience of the governments and the failure of sort of the reform project or of the democratization, but even more broadly the reform project, is the imbalance of power that exists among the political actors in the Middle East.

And to put it in a nutshell, we have a situation where the opposition parties, for a variety of reasons which we will try to discuss, are extremely weak. They have not been able, essentially, to summon the support, to summon the ideologies, to summon, if you want, the methods, the organizational structures in order to try to fight effectively against the regimes.

Now I don't want to sound to say, "well, it's all the fault of the opposition." That's not – of course, the regimes have done their best to oppose any, sort of to make sure that opposition would not become more effective, but I would argue that the regimes in power always oppose change, always oppose redistribution of power. There is nothing new about that and, essentially, those countries where a transition takes place are countries where the opposition manages to summon the support, manages to summon the resources essentially to wage that fight and to get to the redistribution of power to force the government to surrender some of its power and therefore to bring about a better distribution of power in the country.

Now let me talk briefly about the various political actors. Who are the political actors that we are seeing? And I'm going to start first of all with the regimes because I think we are, you really, the regimes in power, what we call the ruling establishments in the book are really major political actors in Arab countries because they are the ones who have the resources but also this enormous manipulation ability that has allowed them to remain in power.

We have heard a lot of discussion about reform on the part of Arab regimes. If you remember in the middle of – in the early part of this decade, a lot of Arab regimes, in fact, were introducing reforms. We got very excited about new constitutions that were introduced, for example, by a number of our countries. At one point, we got very excited about constitutional amendments that Egypt enacted – the first direct election of a president rather than an indirect choice of the president by the national assembly simply confirmed by a popular referendum, and so on.

Arab regimes have been very good at providing the impression that reforms were being enacted. The problem is that they have also mastered the art of introducing reforms that really do not change the situation very much. Truly, Bahrain now has an elected parliament. It did not used to have an elected parliament and now it has an elected parliament. Only part of the parliament is elected and essentially, it is rigged such that only half of the parliament is elected. And therefore, even if the opposition won every single seat of the seats that are up for competition, there is no way in which the opposition would every have dominant presence in the parliament.

This is just one of the many examples. There have been real reforms that have been introduced by some Arab governments but they all fall in the realm of administrative reforms. In other words, there is a consciousness on the part of many Arab regimes that they really have, in a sense, that the world is leaving them behind, that they have to become more efficient, that Arab countries are falling behind, you know, much of the world in terms of their capacity to run their own affairs, in terms of the efficiency of their economies and so on.

So that there is a lot of reform and I think there is some genuine reform that is taking place, but it's all technical stuff that really does not mean anything in terms of democracy. There have been all sorts of financial reforms introduced; there have been some economic reforms; there have been some attempts to restructure the administration in some countries.

I mean, one of the countries, a regime that is never going to be accused of being overly reformist, that of Bashir al-Assad in Syria, has made a major effort in terms of trying to make the running of ministries more efficient. They were hiring consultants mostly from Asian countries in order to do this. But of course, these are not the reforms that make a difference in terms of democracy. These are not the reforms that lead to a redistribution of power. Actually, I would argue that they are reforms that, if well-enacted, would in fact increase the power of the government, the capacity of the government to control the situation.

And finally, of course – and this is not something which is very new but it needs to be mentioned – is the fact that the Arab regimes have very good, very efficient— I was quoted by somebody the other day saying I shouldn't say very good – very efficient security apparatuses. Good is perhaps too positive a word. They know how to run a police state and I think that is you know, like it or not, that's the situation it is and that certainly helps the power of – helps these regimes maintain themselves in power and in a sense diffuse whatever efforts the opposition is trying to make.

Now, what if we look at the other side that is what – because well, what I've just said is true of any authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regime in power. What is different from what has happened in many parts of the world? And yet, sometimes change does take place, so the question is, what is on the other side? What is the situation of the opposition political actors?

And I think you need to make a distinction here between two types of political actors. One is, if you want, the secular actors – again, it's not a word that these parties like because secular has bad connotations in the region, but the parties that call themselves liberals or socialists essentially – the parties of the center, the parties of the left. Here, we see this is one set of actors that's very important and then, of course, we need to look at the Islamist parties.

The secular parties, the parties of the center and of the left, are in very, very difficult situations. They have been extremely weak and the reasons for that, I think that there are a number of reasons. First of all is that the liberal parties in the Arab world have never been particularly strong except when they – in those periods when they succeeded in connecting their message to the nationalist cause.

The Wafd party in Egypt in the '30s – the success of the Wafd party was really due to the fact that they were an anti-British party essentially. They were a nationalist party, so the message – the political message which was essentially the message that appealed directly to a fairly restricted part of the Egyptian population. The liberal message – and if you think of Egypt about the 1930s, we are talking about a population that was still largely a peasant population, that there was still fairly low levels of education, not that they are that great now.

But essentially, it was not a message that particularly appealed to the entire population but connected to the nationalist message, it was a very powerful message. The nationalist message, of course, it's too late in the game; these are countries that are independent and that their independence

is not affected in most cases so that essentially nationalism is not a powerful mobilizer of people and the liberal message by itself has proven very weak.

Now there is a good question whether it could be made stronger, but certainly in the way it has been used by liberal parties in the Arab world has been a rather unappealing message because it has hinged a lot on technical issues. You know we have to – I'll try to move on – (inaudible, off mike) – we have to amend such and such articles of the constitution. Well, it's difficult to get excited about that.

It's fairly quite accurate, but you don't get a lot of public support by making such a technical argument so that essentially there has – and in addition, I would argue – and here I'm going to be very critical and I'm sure that some people are not going to like it – I think there has also been a lot of unwillingness among the leaders of these parties to really get their hands dirty and get down into the business of organizing, to the business of really building party structures and so on.

The parties of the left have fallen victim to the changes that have taken place in the world, like socialist parties of the left everywhere, and in addition, you know, the days of socialism are over essentially. But in addition, they have suffered under another difficult handicap in this region: the one of, if you look at what has been the appeal of, you know, of socialist parties, historically, is the concept of social justice, right?

They believe that the system that exists is an unjust system. There is need for more equality. There is need for more justice. When the argument of justice and the need for justice has been appropriated by the Islamist parties, so today, an argument that was indeed a powerful part of the arsenal of the left has now become, really, part of the language of the Islamist parties. And the Islamist parties have been having – okay, have been having trouble, essentially, in developing both a new message and new strategies to deal with the – in order to build a following.

Let me come to the Islamist parties because I think – in many ways, this is the most interesting part. When you look about political actors in this region and the failure of political reform, we are looking at one of the most interesting issues here. We all know that a few years back – and even today to some extent, except that today we are quite wrong with that – there is this great fear that if left unchecked, Islamist parties are going to win elections all over the Arab world, right?

You know, the old story that the election – one person, one vote, one time kind of election and then, sort of, the Islamists can win the elections and then they will come to – and that will be the end of democracy. And it's argument that Arab regimes have used very effectively. In fact, at times, they have used it quite effectively to co-opt some of the members of, particularly, of the liberal position, in the end, to side with them against the Islamist parties.

There is no doubt that there was a period in the early part of the decade when Islamist parties in the Arab world were doing very well. The election towards the middle of the decade really showed a steady improvement in the percentage of the votes gained by Arab parties. If you look at Morocco; you look at Egypt, the way the Muslim Brothers (sic) gained 20 percent of the seats in the parliament, which by Egyptian standards is a huge representation of the opposition; you look at the Islamist Action Front in Jordan – country after country; you look at Kuwait, at the Islamists seemed about to take over Kuwait.

And there was a great deal of expectation that, including by the parties themselves, that in the next elections, they would sweep the field. The first time I met a guy who was then the leader of the Party for Justice and Development in Morocco, he introduced himself saying you are meeting the next prime minister of Morocco. I mean, there was all this kind of hype at that point. He is no longer the leader of the party and his party lost a million votes in the last election, compared to the previous one.

So essentially what we have been – and then you see this sort of decline in the position of the Islamist parties in their success so that you go back and say what happened? Why is this the case? And then you start looking more carefully at the figures of previous elections. And what becomes very clear when you start analyzing – you know, with that wisdom that we all acquire after we were wrong the first time, essentially – what you start to recognize is the fact that even when these parties appear to be that successful, they were successful in the – they were more successful than the other parties, but they never capture a great deal of the – all that much support.

The most important fact here is that probably no political party has captured the imagination and the, sort of, the support of the majority of the population of their countries. Voting turnout – voter turnout is very low in all Arab countries. And I would argue that it's probably – you know, it's difficult to be in the head of people – but I think there's probably more than one reason why it's low. One is the, you know, the fact that people assume that many elections are rigged and they know that in the end, that there is not going to be that much change. But the second is, in the end, that they are not that much attracted to any of the political parties that are competing.

Just as the last point before I give the floor to Amr, when you talk to representatives of Islamist parties today, they're no longer telling you "we're going to win the next elections". They're much more inclined to – at least when they're willing to talk – to discuss what went wrong. Why is it that they have not done better than they have done? There is really a sense of loss, of confusion, I think, on the part of all political actors.

So that essentially, it's not what is missing in Arab countries. It's really not the desire for change; it's not the desire for more political participation; it's not the values that are missing. But it really is the political actors capable of bringing about the change that I think, in the end, a lot of people want. So let me stop here and leave it to Amr to tell us where do we go from here.

AMR HAMZAWY: A pleasure to be here in D.C. after almost a year in Lebanon and to see many friendly faces that I had been missing while in Beirut. So I recognize all of you. And it's a pleasure to share an excellent panel with Tom and Marina and Jessica. Let me start by basically rephrasing what Marina just shared with us, which is basically the major finding of the book, to which Michelle Dunne contributed a chapter as well, together with Marina, on ruling establishments.

The major finding of the book is, to put it in a nutshell, in spite of reform dynamism in the Arab world, in different Arab countries between 2003-2004 and 2008-2009, Arab politics, Arab political scenes haven't changed a great deal. We are still looking at the same authoritarian governments – autocratic governments, which manage their political scenes effectively, be it they depend on security services, be it they depend on effective patronage assistance, be it they depend on strategies that are applied and implemented systematically to weaken leftist, liberal and Islamist opposition, or simply because they have managed to secure, in an effective way, networks of support outside their own countries.

I mean one should not underestimate the significance of regional and international factors and the support they give to Arab autocrats in power. So the major finding of the book –and here, we really looked at three groups of actors: ruling establishments – some of them have labeled, fashioned official reform rhetoric over the last year; some of them have refused to talk about reform apart from a minor talk about administrative reform, normally labeled as modernization in a place like Syria or a place like Saudi Arabia.

We have looked at Arab governments; we have looked at opposition – Islamists and otherwise – and came to the conclusion that, in spite of the dynamism they created in Arab politics, starting in 2003-2004, not much happened. We are still looking at the same political scenes. So the question becomes how to explain why Arab societies, Arab political actors have failed to push for significant democratic reforms.

Marina gave different explanations, looking at how effective Arab governments have been, how weak the opposition has been, and I would like to shift the discussion into, maybe, two different aspects. One – sort of the regional aspect – try to reflect a bit on the changed regional scene and how debates in the Arab world have really changed between 2003-2004 and 2008-2009. And the second aspect is looking at, basically, what is happening – if we are coming to the conclusions that conventional political actors – government and opposition alike – have failed to push for reform, do we still see spaces of dynamism elsewhere in Arab societies? And if so, what are these spaces and what is happening?

Now, with regard to the wider regional scene, it's striking. I mean, you go to Arab newspapers, Web sites, and you compare what you read as of now with what we used to read back in 2003 and 2004 and you will discover that democracy and democratic reform is no longer an issue. I mean, you read – you open a newspaper like Al-Hayat or Asharq Alawsat, or local newspapers, national newspapers – Al-Ahram in Egypt – or opposition newspapers. And it's not in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait – and it's no longer the intensive debate, the extensive debate which we had on democracy, on democratic reform, democratic change, citizenship, how to introduce checks and balances, how to counterbalance the dominance of autocratic governments, which we had in 2003 and 2004. And it's no longer democracy-driven or reform-driven.

What has come back, in fact, to Arab debates – and here, I use a phrase of Arab politics or Arab political scenes have once again become regional instead of turning local. They turned local for some time. Egyptians were preoccupied with their own domestic politics for some time; Jordanians were preoccupied with their own domestic politics, and Moroccans and so on and so forth. So right now, we are back into Arab political scenes which are dominated by regional issues.

It's once again about regional conflicts, not only the Arab-Israeli conflict, not only the Palestinian issue or the Iraqi issue, but regardless of where you look, Lebanon features a great deal, not because of the significance of Lebanese domestic politics – and they are significant; dynamics in Lebanon are significant – but because what Lebanese politics tells us about where Saudi Arabia stands, where Syria stands, whether we are approaching momentum of regional rapprochement or not, and what foreign powers do.

So Arab politics, Arab political scenes, are once again becoming regional. The localization which took place for some time and pushed into a reform dynamism – we saw demonstrations in

Lebanon, demonstrations in Egypt and elsewhere with a clear domestic platform – this is no longer the case.

The second aspect of the wider regional change is a clear disenchantment among Arabs with politics. I mean, I see it and in fact, firsthand, I can report about readers' comments on my – I do write – contribute regularly to Al-Hayat an opinion piece – and whenever I write about democracy, the readers comments, which I get, I mean, to summarize them, are basically, well, Hamzawy's writing once again about democracy. So it's in a very cynical way – so why are you writing about democracy?

People are no longer interested. There is a clear disenchantment with politics, with the potential of democratic reform. We have talked much about it and not much has happened, after all. And the disenchantment is leading active Arab citizens to different venues and spaces of dynamism, which I, right now, will classify as social dynamism. I will discuss them later. They give us a sense of how Arabs are reacting to the deteriorating social and economic conditions for their living, but it's no longer driven by political factors. So we have a clear disenchantment with politics.

A third aspect of the wider regional change – and Marina discussed on it as she discussed change happening in the Islamist spectrum – I would say that we are looking, right now, when we look at Arab politics, the last grand ideological label which we had in the region, which was the label of Islamism, is being pushed aside as well. Islamism is no longer, regardless of where we look – we can look at the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development or the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Islamists operating in the Gulf countries or the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan or even Hezbollah and Hamas – Islamism is no longer the unquestioned, grand ideological label, which it used to be throughout the 1980s, '90s, and even up until 2005 and 2006.

And the fact that Islamism, as the last remaining ideological label, is being pushed back – is no longer dominant in framing public debates and framing debates about politics tells us much about the disenchantment of active constituencies, which created – in fact, created Islamism as an active political and social phenomenon – their disenchantment with politics. Islamist parties and movements have committed to participation in politics in different ways; the outcome of their participation, regardless of the differences between Morocco, Egypt, Jordan and Kuwait, has been very limited.

They haven't managed to push for reform. They haven't changed the nature of Moroccan, Egyptian or Jordanian politics. And in fact, instead of debating politics in a national sense, they are debating what is happening inside their movements, responding to the crisis situation in which they are because of the limited outcome of their participation.

So we have Islamist movements right now, in fact, in a – interesting, academically and intellectually to follow – so in a mode where they are reflecting internally on their rhetoric, their ideology, their platform, and what to learn out of the crisis situation in which they have been throughout the last years. So the last ideological label is withering away as well.

A final aspect of the regional change is the fact that if you compare the situation right now to 2003 and 2004, in 2003 and 2004, there was a great deal of talk about so-called – I'm going to translate from Arabic and put it in English – there was much talk about the "regional reform train" – (In Arabic) – "the Arab reform train." And right now, I mean, you open newspapers or you go to

intellectual or journalistic production and no mention whatsoever of the regional momentum for reform. The regional momentum for reform existed briefly and it's over.

Regimes are therefore no longer trying to catch up. No one is trying to articulate a clear rhetoric on reform. There were some pressures, back in 2003 and 2004, when even Gulf countries – a government like the Egyptian or Moroccan government – to fashion, to articulate an official reform rhetoric to tell their citizens and to tell the outside world – outside powers, external actors from in the U.S. – what they were going to do about reform steps – how the intent to reform their politics, not only their economies.

Right now, regardless where, you'll only find a very shy rhetoric on political reform; you'll find an elaborate and well-articulated rhetoric on economic reform, as if we were back to the 1980s, where the talk was about economic liberalization and privatization and leave politics aside. So the regional momentum for reform is over, as well. So we are definitely looking at a different situation.

Now, when I compare the moment in which we started our research on different actors, which was 2004 and 2005, with the regional moment which are looking right now, it really explains much of the finding – and in fact, confirms the finding of the book, that not much in terms of democratic reform has happened and, as a result, this disenchantment – the change of the regional mood and regional scene – has been taking place.

Let me now, beyond regional – of course, one can go into details – sort of local and national details – and explain why, for example, the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development has lost in terms of its popular vote in the last elections. There were different technical deficits, which you can track down, which you can highlight in relation to opposition actors in the Arab world that have been trying to push for reform throughout the last years.

But apart from these national and local-specific factors, the fact of the mater is, as we said, it's a changed scene in terms of debates – how we debate democracy – and it's an unchanged scene in terms of hard politics. Arab politics, Arab political scenes have remained autocratic, as they have been.

Before going to new spaces of dynamism, let me just, sort of, add one point, which, in a way, puts a caveat on my statement. In spite of the fact that we have not seen much in terms of democratic changes, if you look at politics conventionally understood – if you look at political spaces – there are some openings in Arab political spaces which did not exist before. And most of these openings are related to national and local elections. And elections, per se, offer a momentum for dynamism. Sometimes it's well-used; sometimes it's less-used.

I'm saying in spite of the, sort of, bleak scene when you look at democratic reform, in conventional political spaces, there are still some openings, which are primarily related to elections. Elections have become a regular Arab phenomenon and I do not see it going away anytime very soon. It's becoming very hard for Arab governments – autocratic Arab governments to postpone elections. The last decision by an Arab government to postpone elections was in Yemen. It was not, however, taken by the government alone. I mean, the government was pushed to secure the opposition consensus to postpone national elections for two years.

And interestingly enough, the postponement decision was framed as a step toward democracy. They said – the official rhetoric was, we did not manage to introduce enough democratic reforms to conduct free and fair national parliamentary elections. So we are waiting to introduce the reforms and therefore, postponing the elections. So at least in terms of argumentation, Arab governments are coming to have a hard time postponing elections. So there are some openings in conventional Arab political scenes, primarily related to elections.

And the fact that we are looking at pluralists, in spite of the fact that we have a lack of balance of power between governments and opposition movements – we are looking at pluralist scenes in most Arab countries. There are some exceptions – Libya, Syria, Saudi Arabia. Otherwise, we are still looking at pluralist Arab scenes.

Now, let me move beyond sort of the major finding of lack of political reform into what are the spaces of dynamism in Arab societies? And here, to be brief, these spaces are primarily related to social unrest. You look at a place like Morocco or Algeria or Egypt, and only in the last 2 years, you see an unprecedented rise in labor sit-ins, in labor strikes, in bread-and-butter-motivated demonstrations and protest activities. In Egypt in 2006, we had over 700 protest activities. In Egypt of 2008, it moved beyond 1,000. And these are unprecedented figures for Egypt since 1952.

And the same goes, however to a lesser extent, for a place like Morocco, for a place like Algeria, Jordan and other countries. What is happening here is Arab citizens who have become disenchanted with politics and conventional political actors – government and opposition alike – are trying to reorganize – to organize in a different way outside the sphere of conventional politics.

Organization is taking place in the realm of civil society – but not civil society understood as human rights organizations and organizations defending women's rights – of course, they do exist; they have been with us for a long time – but here, civil society organizations driven by socioeconomic platforms. Citizens are organizing in relation to salaries, wages, social security issues, health care. So in a way, we are looking at spaces of dynamism outside the sphere of conventional politics, but spaces which are structured and organized around daily local and, in fact, political issues.

Now, the second aspect of this new dynamism – and it's on the rise, and of course, the impact of economic and financial crisis from which Arab governments are suffering, even Gulf countries are suffering, will push it to higher levels – the second aspect is that here, we are looking at new organizational forms. We are no longer looking at movements – religious-inspired ideological movements or liberal parties or leftist parties; we are looking at new forms of organization.

Much of what I am describing is related to Internet-based activism, Facebook activism. Much of what we have been seeing in Iran is happening in different Arab countries, but it's yet to reach the same levels which it reached in Iran right after the presidential election. So we are looking at new forms – one, in terms of how they organize and mobilize – as I said, no longer conventional political actors, mass political parties or mass ideological movements; much more sector-oriented, related to very specific socioeconomic demands.

It's an urban phenomenon; these new forms of dynamism are primarily urban-based. Certainly, they are always related to – or let me put it in a different way – they do not have a clear political platform, and therefore, they can easily transcend the ideological barriers which dominated

Arab politics for a very long time between Islamists – religious actors – on the one hand, and non-Islamists, or nonreligious actors, on the other hand.

You look at those who staged the general strike – Egypt's first general strike – April 6, 2008 – and you see a group of activists. Some of them come from different leftist backgrounds, diverse Islamist backgrounds; some of them are members of the Muslim Brotherhood – young members, but are critical of the movement in its conventional wisdom. So here we have a pattern of transcending ideological barriers.

Now, social unrest, social dynamism, new spaces outside conventional politics – what they have been lacking so far is a mechanism, or mechanisms, to channel back this dynamism into conventional politics. And this is exactly where Arab governments stand, and stand in a very effective way.

Arab governments treat these networks of activists, these attempts to organize, if among industrial workers, young activists, urban-based, as I said, Facebook groups – they treat them as repressively as they have been treating Islamists and other opposition parties throughout the last years. Those who staged the general strike in Egypt in 2008 and tried to stage a second one in 2009, some of them were arrested, and detained for a long time.

So here, Arab governments, autocratic governments, still function as the gatekeepers to avoid any channeling back of the dynamism that is taking place, because of deteriorating social and economic conditions, outside politics to channel it back to conventional politics. And this is exactly where we are going to turn as a research group in the next phase – to try to map these new spaces of dynamism – try to understand what's happening, and in what way they might be influential in terms of Arab political developments in the near future.

Let me end on a final note. Once again, I mean, it's quite depressing when you are in the region, to be very frank. I mean you compare – or I compare – the momentum in the region – I left the region to D.C. in 2005, and this was definitely the high time for debating reform and democratization: approaching elections in Egypt; Lebanese emancipation from the Syrian rule, as it was framed back then – now, of course it's framed in a different way, even by actors of the Lebanese freedom uprising, or liberation movement. You compare the momentum in 2005, and, sort of, the great hopes which politically active Arab citizens had, with the current disenchantment with politics, and the feeling of waiting, basically, for what will come next.

I mean, you go to Egypt and Egyptians are no longer debating the issue of succession as they debated it back in 2005 and 2006. And there was a great urge to boycott and prevent the scenario from Mubarak Sr. to Mubarak Jr. Right now, you have more of a submissive attitude: Well, the government will do what it's going to do; I mean, we cannot prevent the government from doing it. You go to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt – the most effective, for a long time, opposition movement – a movement with 88 seats – 20 percent share in the People's Assembly – was great and wide.

Of course, I agree with what Marina said – I mean, they do not command a strategic majority in Egypt. But they have wide segments of the Egyptian population which follow them, and this movement is simply waiting for the next hit by the government to come. I mean, they are

strategically out of balance, and just waiting for the next hit to come after so many successful hits by the security services since 2005.

And the same goes for other countries. So it's a different momentum, and it needs to be reflected on, and needs to be kept in mind when we write about democracy and democratic reform and their potential in the Arab world. Let me stop here.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Thank you. It's a treat to be here with Marina and Amr and Jessica. Thank you for positioning Carnegie as the go-to place for this discussion about democratization in the Arab world. It's, I think, really important. I'm just the discussant, so I've been taking notes on this really interesting conversation so far. And I'd just make a couple of very random comments.

The first is I think we have to remember that the opening that both Marina and Amr referred to of the "Arab spring" happened in a context. It happened in the context of a massive exercise of American power in the Arab world. It didn't just happen; it wasn't just a weather change – that "Arab spring." It happened, actually, with what may have not been intended to be a democratization effort in origin, but has turned out to be a very interesting – I would say – experiment.

Marina referred to the fact, and Amr as well, that nowhere have progressives, basically, been able to take the progressive energy and oust the impacted regimes. And what the United States did in Iraq was decapitate an impacted regime, and then used its power, along with France, to expel the regime of Syria from Lebanon, and then, to put enormous pressure on Mubarak's Egypt to hold elections. So that was the broader context; I think we have to remember what was going on.

So let's look at Iraq, then. What happens when you just decapitate a regime and let the forces emerge? Well, I'd say we learned two things from this. Again, how much of this was designed by the Bush people, how much they thought about, or much it was really their priority – we can debate all of those things. And I don't want to get into that debate today, but what I would say today is you have the most interesting political experiment going on in the modern Arab world in Iraq. You have the first ever attempt in a modern Arab country – I would argue – of what I would call a "horizontal dialogue" as opposed to "top-down monologue."

Arab politics, basically for 50 years, has been one series after another of top-down monologues – I would say for hundreds of years, either from colonial powers, kings or dictators. In decapitating the Iraqi regime, and almost having no other choice, we are now helping, along with Iraqis, to host the first horizontal dialogue between the constituent communities of an Arab state to see if they can, as constituent communities, actually write the first ever, true social contract between the constituent communities of an Arab state.

I would argue that that's a very noble effort. It may be incredibly quixotic; I wouldn't even begin to predict the outcome. But this is a very interesting – it seems to me – liberal experiment. But because it was promoted by the Bush administration, it's radioactive, and liberals cannot discuss or embrace it. But I would say this is something to be watched. I don't know how it's going to come out.

If the constituent elements of this community can find a way to balance the religious, political and economic interests of the major communities in Iraq – Jews, Kurds, Shia and Sunni – I would say it really opens up some very interesting possibilities – it really says the prospects of democracy in the Arab world are alive and well. I would say if they can't, if they fail in Iraq, it's really Hosni Mubarak and Musharrafs out as far as the eye can see. So I think something very important is as stake there – however we got there.

The second point I would make is that, in terms of the wider trend, I think what's interest is what we've seen is – in the last 7, 8 years, everywhere from Iran to Pakistan to Iraq to the West Bank to Gaza to Lebanon to Egypt and to Morocco, for different reasons, we've seen the regime lid – if we think of these regimes as really steel-hard lids – we've seen them either loosened – or in the case of Iraq, just kicked off – in all these countries.

And, again, this is a broad generalization with exceptions. The first forces to emerge in every one of these countries were the Islamists. In Iran, we certainly know the story; in Lebanon, we saw the emergence of Hezbollah as a much more dynamic actor, ultimately; in Iraq, we saw the Shia and Sunni Islamist parties emerge; in the West Bank, the election there turned out to be a vehicle for Hamas to emerge and the like.

I think what the most interesting thing – and Marina and I talked about this at our last dialogue here – I think what's – again, this is as a gross generalization – what's interesting is that in every one of these theaters, from Pakistan through Iran through Iraq through Lebanon through the West Bank and Gaza, is in every theater, the Islamists overplayed their hand. Hezbollah dragged Lebanon unwantedly (sic) into a war with Israel; Hamas did the same; the Islamists in Iraq vastly overplayed their hand; we saw what happened in Iran; and we've seen the like in Pakistan.

And so the good news is the Islamists overplayed their hand, and I think the backlash to that began with the Sunni uprising in Anbar. I think the tribal uprising in Anbar was the first backlash of mainstream communities against the Islamists. And that spread throughout the region. I would say that's the good news. The bad news is that the progressive forces have yet to – I don't want to say "have not" and "will not" – but have yet to really take advantage of that and produce the good governance that you would actually need.

It's one thing to defeat the most radical, nihilistic Islamist forces; it's another to produce a government of Lebanon. We can't even – it's great, you know; Lebanon had an election; Hezbollah was on its heels. Yet the good guys, the progressives, have not been able to, I think, produce decent government to take advantage of that. And I don't know whether that is a congenital problem or a passing one, but I think that's something that has to be watched.

Now, I think that one of the reasons that the progressives did get the energy they got has to do with something Amr raised, and that is technology and the Internet. The reason the Islamists were the first to emerge in all these theaters – not the only reason, but one reason – was they had the mosque. And the mosque was a place you could organize, mobilize, energize, and store weapons outside the grip of the state.

For the first time, the moderates and progressives have a mosque. It's a virtual mosque. It's called Facebook, Twitter and the blogosphere. As we learned in Iran, though, bang-bang beats

tweet-tweet. And on this, I agree entirely with Amr that it reminds me a lot of the debate going on in America today on environmentalism.

I make this point, always, when I'm speaking to young people on college campuses who tend to think, "I blogged about it, therefore I made a difference," I always remind them, when it comes to the environmental movement, ExxonMobil does not have a Facebook page; they're just in your face. And ExxonMobil is not – they don't have a chat room; they're in the cloakroom where the rules get written.

So if you don't get out of Facebook and into somebody's face, you are nowhere. And that applies to the environmentalists, I would say, and applies to Arab progressives. They've done a wonderful job with the Internet, but I think as Amr rightly says, they have not taken it from the chat room into the cloakroom. And that is, I think, a huge failing.

I think the second meta-issue that we need to bring into this discussion, and for me, it's always been very important, if not decisive, when talking about the democratization movement, is the oil. It is not an accident, for me at least, that – I'm a big believer in what I call the "first law of petro-politics" – that the price of oil and the pace of freedom in petrolist (ph) states – states overwhelmingly dependent on oil for their GDP – operate in an inverse correlation.

And there is no question to me that if you look at my favorite country – "favorite" in reference to this comment – has always been Taiwan. You know, Taiwan is a barren rock in a typhoon-laden sea. It doesn't even have oil; it has no natural resources whatsoever, except its people. And the reason Taiwan evolved – I believe, the most important reason it actually evolved from a military dictatorship to a multiparty democracy – was the fact that they had to drill their people, not their oil wells. And the state had no other way to advance itself.

The motto of the American Revolution was no taxation without representation. The motto of the Arab oil state is no representation without taxation; if I don't have to tax you, I don't have to represent you. And that is a huge asset for every one of these regimes – if I don't have to tax you, I don't have to represent you. If I can stay in power by putting a pipe in the ground and sucking up the oil, I simply don't have to represent you.

And because these states have all been able to develop these huge rent machines, basically, so much of what goes for capitalism and entrepreneurship in the Arab world is basically just rent-seeking from the state; looking for monopolies and subsidies. It is not an accident that, I believe, given that economic context, there's only one Arab company ever been listed on the NASDAQ, and that's Aramex, the Jordanian company founded by Fadi Ghandour.

Well, how can you possibly – let's think of Martin Luther – how was Martin Luther a success as a reformer? Well, surely one reason he was a success with his reform is he had German princes to protect him. And if you don't have a different kind of economic structure where you have independent economic forces listed on the NASDAQ, not listed in the ministry of commerce, then you have no independent foundation for independent political movements.

So I think looking at the structure of Arab economies and the relationship of oil to these structures is vitally important in understanding why so few – why none of these states are really what Freedom House would call a democracy. You know, one of the things I think that's deeply hurt the

Islamist movements, as well – if the progressives were kind of bought off and just choked off, it seems to me that the Islamists also have been badly damaged – the Islamic progressives – by bin Laden and company, by the whole nihilistic trend in the Islamist movement – the whole nihilistic end of the Islamist movement.

When we see what we saw in Iraq just two weeks ago, where someone blows up a fuel truck in the middle of Baghdad outside the ministry of foreign affairs, killing Shiites, Sunnis, Druze, Kurds, whoever happened to be on the street, and you really get no peep of protest from, you know, the mainstream centers of Islam – I'm sure someone can pull out a quote from some imam somewhere to show me that it was condemned, but we know what the Muslim world looks like when it's condemning something. It looks like a million people in the streets protesting Danish cartoons. Show me a million people in the streets not protesting cartoons, but people actually created in the image of God, and I'm not talking about Jews, here, or Christians. I'm talking about Muslims.

And the fact that the Islamist movement has not been able to find its voice – whether it's in Iraq, by the way, or Saudi Arabia or in Pakistan – find its voice to speak out against this nihilistic violence whose victims are 101 percent Muslims – I think that's a huge liability when trying to position yourself as a progressive movement aspiring to democracy. So, you know, before I get in any more trouble – (laughter) – I think I'll stop there.

MS. MATHEWS: Okay, I know that Marina and Amr are both dying to respond, and, indeed, there are things I would love to say, but it's now your turn. So let me ask you to wait for the mikes and introduce yourself, and we'll start right here, and then we'll go back there.

Q: My name is Mohammed Shinnawi – (inaudible) – from the Voice of America. For Tom, what's your prescription for reaching some sort of pluralism in the Arab world, and what role, if any, can the administration play, away from regime change?

Q: I'm Howard Wiarda from CSIS. Marina started off by saying there were three possible explanations. One is values in political culture, and the other is institutions and the third was power relations. You devoted all of your time to the latter two; nothing to the first explanation. So I'd like to return to that a little bit, and ask about political culture.

And maybe I'll address this to Amr: My sense is, from working on this part of the world and others as well, that if you're going to talk about democracy and pluralism, you're really dealing with a different kind of phenomenon. And you'd have to define pluralism differently than you would do in a – what do we call ourselves – a Madisonian pluralism conception.

The Islamic conception of pluralism is much more organic; it's much more corporatist in the sense that the state regulates and controls the admission of new groups into the system; regulates them carefully; it's still a top-down system. And I suspect that that's part of the problem with U.S. policy as well, because we're very good at instigating constitutions and electioneering and manipulating electoral tribunals, all of which are institutional, we don't know how to change political cultures at all.

So I'd like to see the panel address this a bit if you could – this notion that even if we succeed in achieving some degree of pluralism, it's still going to mean something quite different, and look very different than a Western European or a United States-style system of pluralism.

Q: Steven Kull, worldpublicopinion.org. In the polling that we've done in the region, we find that majorities of people are drawn both to liberal ideas and to Islamist ideas; it's a kind of internal clash of civilizations. What do you see as the potential for a movement that in some way tries to integrate liberal and Islamist ideas?

MR. HAMZAWY: When you remarked, Tom, Islamists have been overplaying their hand – and so your interesting remark on the issue of Arab perceptions of radical Islamist-committed violence in a place like Iraq, I totally agree. I just would like to put one caveat which is we should not reduce it to Islamists and their constituencies.

It's, unfortunately, a wider phenomenon. I mean, we are still suffering from a great deal of ambiguity when it comes to denouncing violence full-stop; denouncing violent instruments; violent strategies for political objectives; for political ends or otherwise. We are still looking at a very ambiguous, ambivalent scene in the wider Arab public sphere, and it's, once again, depressing.

I mean, look at the discussion which we had during the last confrontation between Hamas and Israel – the Gaza War. And look how Hamas was defended even by Arab liberals, by the way; I mean, not only by nationalists or leftists or Islamists – by Arab liberals who did not feel the urge of putting any demarcation line between legitimate resistance and violence against civilians.

I mean, really, we are looking at a very complex and complicated – and should, by no means, be reduced to Islamists. It's wider than the Islamist sphere. The second issue, on sort of cease-point liberal and Islamist and Arab views, there have been some attempts by Islamist movements to gradually move towards an accommodation of sorts of liberal ideas.

And of course, we have seen it clearly in the case of some parties and movements, like the PGD in Morocco, the Egyptian Muslim Brothers in Egypt – sort of accommodating liberal ideas in the sense of strategically committing to democratic procedures and democratic mechanisms and accepting a measure of pluralism. I mean, they no longer sort of refuse and reject the existence of nonreligious parties in their respective political scenes.

They accept them, they cooperate, they coordinate with them. You know, we have an alliance between an Islamist force and a socialist party in Yemen – Al Islah and the Yemeni Socialist Party. So, however, what we did call in one of our very first writings – Marina, Nathan Brown and myself – the gray zones, inside Islamist movements, continue. And they still hinder sort of a real accommodation of liberal ideas.

On the other side, liberal forces, as Marina mentioned, as Tom mentioned, when you look at the social fabric in the Arab world historically, and when you look at the social fabric, are weakened – and by whatever measurement we take, they will continue to remain isolated and weakened for a long time.

Social fabric does not lend itself to liberal ideas as of now; it might lend itself to enlightened, leftist ideas – if you look at the socioeconomic factors. So the effort will have to be made by the

Islamists, be it as intellectuals or as movements, and as long as they suffer from their gray zones or continue to sustain their gray zones, it will not be a successful attempt to accommodate liberal ideas and Islamist ideas.

Finally, on culture and values, I tend to see it in a different way because when I look at the political histories of a country like Egypt or a country like Iraq, I mean, these countries have gone through liberal phases – I mean, in a Western sense, liberal phases. Back in the 1920s and 1930s and 1940s; we had a sort of functioning liberal democracy in Egypt and Iraq. And so the issue of religion and religious values, and sort of putting forward religion as the only possible value system to which these societies abide, I guess, is a bit misleading if you look at the political histories of them.

As of now, we have been through a long phase – I would say since the 1970s – of Islamist rise; emergence of different radical, militant, moderate, violent, nonviolent Islamist actors. And to my mind, it's coming to an end. It's coming to an end and we Arabs are debating – if they still debate politics – are debating politics no longer against the background of religion, and if Islam accommodates democracy or not, and now are debating politics in a different way.

MR. FRIEDMAN: I'd really love to hear Amr and Marina talk about – Albert Hourani was my teacher and tutor. I grew up on Arabic thought in the liberal age – what happened to the liberal age? Why was there a liberal age – and Amr just made this point – that wasn't really about religion? It was rooted in true liberal ideas; it didn't have to be grounded. And what happened to it? You know, I'd really be interested in your thoughts on that.

Just to your question, you know, I am most hopeful right now – most hopeful. I'm watching Iraq and I'm rooting for it to have a decent outcome. I have no idea whether it will, frankly.

I'm actually most interested in what's going on in Palestine right now; in the West Bank. And the example of Prime Minister Fayyad because he is the closest thing, I would argue, today to something that both Amr and Marina alluded to, which is a modernizer. He truly is a modernizer – on having come out of the global financial world – but who doesn't have the option of being an autocratic modernizer. He doesn't really have that option. He doesn't have Arafat's ability to be the one-man ruler; he doesn't have the iron fist; he doesn't have the security forces.

And so I think Fayyadism as a new idea – this idea that, at least in the Palestinian context – instead of Arafat's view was, you know, we demand and seek and win our rights and then we'll build institutions. And Fayyadism is exactly the opposite of Arafatism – we will build our institutions, and through that, we will get our rights.

Now I don't know whether he's going to succeed either, but what's going on in the West Bank today is much more of a virtuous cycle than the incredibly negative cycle you've had since 2000 because what's happened is that the security forces that he has built with American funding and Jordanian training have brought enough security that Israel has now dismantled two-thirds of the manned checkpoints in the West Bank.

That's increased Palestinian economic activity, and there, also, the Palestinians have that ability for a much more pluralistic, economic – small businesses there; a people can be independent

of the state if the NGOs and the world donors don't smother them with donation money and kill capitalism there.

And so I think what's going on in the West Bank – we're so used to, at least I was before this summer when I went there – to just thinking it's all over, it's a disaster, nothing can happen. But I think people are missing this new cycle, which is more Palestinian security is leading to more Israeli pullback in the Palestinian areas – I'm not talking about settlements at all – and that's increasing Palestinian economic activity and prosperity. World Bank says the West Bank could grow as much as 7 percent this year; real estate prices in Ramallah have tripled.

And so we have just an opening. I wouldn't it exaggerate it and I'm perfectly aware men and women do not live by shoe sales alone. Until and unless this is quickly translated into a politics of control, and not just economic growth, it will ultimately go nowhere. But I would watch the Fayyad experiment because he is a modernizer who does not have the option of autocracy.

MS. OTTAWAY: I'll try to address the issue raised both by Howard Wiarda and Steve Cole because in many ways they are related, which really goes to how do you change the systems of values; how do you integrate these system values and so on?

And I'm not too sure that the political culture of Arab countries is so clearly distinct from some other regions of the world. Yes, there have been elements of corporatism in the thinking of – I mean, there has been a lot of writing about this and so on. There were very strong elements of corporatism in the politics of countries that today we consider to be among the most democratic in the world. That is, the Scandinavian countries for example.

In other words, the systems of values do evolve. One of the problems that you have in Arab countries right now is that governments, because they tend to be so repressive, are stunting the evolution. We have seen a lot of changing taking place in the thinking of the Islamist movement.

It's pretty difficult to ask Islamist movements to more towards a more liberal interpretation essentially, which they have been doing. There have been tremendous discussions within this movement, while at the same time you put in jail – not only you put in jail their members but you target, in particular, the reformers in there because you seem them as the most dangerous ones because they are the ones that are making Islamists less threatening. So that essentially, there is a very serious problem because we expect the opposition to be pluralistic but at the same time, the government is not respecting pluralism. And that hampers this process of evolution.

Again, Japan certainly has moved towards democracy. Don't tell me that there was no strong corporate element in the culture of Japan in the group voting in the early period after World War II. So I don't think there is something so peculiar to Arab countries. I think it's more of a vicious circle that we are seeing where there is really nothing in the political situation to encourage this transformation.

Concerning the – Tom, very good question – about what happened to this liberalism in the country. I am not a historian, but I repeat what I said before: It's very important to remember that the period when those liberal ideas were in the ascendance was also a period of intense nationalism. And essentially, liberalism did ride on the back of nationalism.

That is what clearly linked those people who truly believed in the liberal ideas, which after all, tend to be ideas of intellectuals, the liberal ideas, as they are set forth. And you need something to link them and make them acceptable to the rest of the population. Nationalism played that role in Arab countries. And right now, I think what is missing is a linking mechanism and that is reflected in the incapacity of liberals in political organization in the Arab world to build much of a constituency.

MS. MATHEWS: I'll pass it to Amr for a very quick footnote. Then we'll go into the questions.

MR. HAMZAWY: On liberalism in the Arab world, I mean, as Marina said, politics was more or less hijacked by non-liberal forces and movements starting 1940s and '50s. And since then, we have been going through leftist, socialist, military, Islamist phases, and liberalism has disappeared from politics for different reasons.

However, Tom, if you look outside the political scenes, you get a different history of liberalism. Liberalism still exists, and in fact, we are into a liberal revival in the Arab world. Look at the literary production; look at movies; look at cultural and artistic production; Arab intellectuals – it's very impressive.

I mean these are issues which we really have to keep in mind. I mean, I was not aware of how liberal the Arab literary scene has become before going to Beirut. I mean, what you read is impressive. I mean, this is by no means influenced by Islamist ideologies; by no means influenced by non-liberal notions. It's influenced by liberalism – truly well-founded and grounded liberalism.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Would you agree though, with Marina that it has no political engine right now to ride – no horse.

MR. HAMZAWY: Right, right, it's definitely – it stays outside the realm of politics.

MS. MATHEWS: Okay, let me turn back. One, two, three. Maybe four. Up here.

Q: Thanks. Gary Mitchell from The Mitchell Report. I want to – (inaudible, off mike) – democratization and Islamism were – (inaudible) – that Tom wrote in "Lexus and the Olive Tree," in the chapter, I think, on "The Golden Straitjacket" – (inaudible) – oh, we need the second microphone. (Laughter.) I would paraphrase it by saying, I think you said in there, this is about countries that are getting ready to enter globalization. Tom said that if you do this, your economics get larger and your politics get smaller.

And my question is, given what you described – when you were doing this I wrote down a note that said, where's the energy gone? And you described that a lot of this energy has sort of gone into the social and labor and all that kind of space. And then, Tom, talking about Fayyadism, is it possible that there is good news; that where the energy is going is not in traditional political terms but in institution-building and other elements, or is that a pipedream?

Q: Hi. Nadia Oweidat, the RAND Corporation; Oxford University. Given that the U.S. interference in Iraq actually motivated the only push towards democracy, why isn't the U.S. being more proactive?

MR. FRIEDMAN: Does proactive mean in trying to repeat that, or involved more in Iraq?

MS. OWEIDAT: No, trying to influence – clearly regimes don't listen to their people, don't care about their people. They clearly care about the U.S. actions, so why are they not exploiting this?

Q: Michael Lang (sp), Rethink the Middle East. Perhaps, because this is the United States, we assume that democracy is a good, is a virtue, and so I've missed largely from this panel about what difference would it make if Arab countries were democratic. We know that democracies can launch wars. We know that democracies can be corrupt. We know that democracies, including our own, can mismanage economies.

So is it just, in and of itself, you want Arab countries to be democratic because you think that's good, or do you have some – are you envisioning – what kind of difference could it make for the society, for the region, if they were democratic?

Q: I just have a couple comments directed at Tom. I'm Joel Sawyers, Georgetown University. We entered into the realm of overgeneralization. For example, you mentioned Lebanon as a case where the moderates succeeded but they still need to actually govern. And by succeeded, you obviously referred to the elections.

There's only one smaller problem: that the Christian-Hezbollah March 9th coalition actually won by 54 percent of the vote. The confessional system didn't allocate those seats to them as it normally would in a normal democratic regime. So I think the facts here are important.

The other thing – I kind of cringe when I hear of Salam Fayyad. If you go back to the archives, and hear talk about Mubarak, and how he's a modernizer, he's going to – this benevolent, liberal enlightened dictator is going to bring all this change to Egypt, it's very similar to Fayyad. He has no democratic mandate, he was appointed by someone whose presidency is up, and he has zero support in the West Bank among the people except the only, the support –

MR. FRIEDMAN: That, that's, that's patently not true. I mean, you can just look the latest polls by Shikaki. I mean to say he has zero support there? Patently not true. Not even close. Talk about overgeneralization. That one's out of the ballpark.

MR. SAWYERS: Alright, a plurality – he doesn't even have that. He's popular in Washington and maybe Ramallah.

MR. FRIEDMAN: I'm afraid you're not up-to-date on that. (Laughs.)

MS. OTTAWAY: I think it's wrong to state that it was U.S. intervention in Iraq that really provided the only support for a drive towards democracy. The debates concerning democracy, the debates concerning political change started well before 2003. It's not that it came out of nowhere.

What the U.S. pressure did, it did convince a lot of government to take some steps. But they took cosmetic steps, because the problem is – I think to me the lesson is very different than the lesson from the U.S. attempt to promote democracy in this countries; that unless there are groups in

the country, unless there are political forces in the countries – and here we go back to the weakness of political actors – that can pick up the ball and run with it, it's not going to make any difference because governments, yes they feel under pressure, and then they make a little concessions and then, in the case of the Bush administration, they get the applause – that you are great reformers and so on. And nothing happens because without the domestic political push, really, the situation is not going to change. So I would argue that outside pressure can help only as long as there are real political forces inside the country; strong political actors inside the country.

The question about democracy – what difference would it make? You're not going to hear me arguing that this is going to lead to economic development faster because I don't think there's any evidence that supports that conclusion, clearly.

There are two things: One, certainly to lead to fewer people being thrown in jail. It would allow more debate of the issues, more open debate of the issues and hopefully some sort of solution.

We know very well that debate does not always lead to solution; look at the issue with the health care debate in this country. It's open to discussion whether or not it will lead to solutions. But certainly it's a step in the right direction.

But the most important thing is what I just said: that the debate on democracy was not started by us. The debate on democracy really started the debate on political reform – on what these countries wanted – started from the inside. And, you know, this was a very common feature of Arab countries early in this decade.

So that essentially that's what led our interest in the issue, rather than missionary zeal on our part to say it is important that these countries become democratic. There was a domestic drive at this point, which seems to be petering out.

MR. HAMZAWY: On the question of positive developments, well, as of now, when I look at Arab societies – and I really have countries like, as I said, Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, in mind – Jordan to a lesser extent. What you see is a clear separation between two spheres.

One is the sphere of politics, where participants – be it governments or opposition movements, Islamists, and otherwise – act, behave, speak a language which is understood inside this conventional sphere.

Once you move beyond this sphere, and its discussions, debates – including debates on reform – you get a different picture. You get a picture of vibrant Arab societies; vibrant young actors; organizations which are trying to mobilize, as I said, on the basis of social and economic issues; they speak a different language; they have different organizational forms in mind; they no longer address the big issues and the big ideological, grand ideological labels. They are, in a way, liberal in the sense of accepting pluralism and acting based on an understanding of pluralism and a commitment to pluralism.

But what we lack is a connection between these two spheres. They are, as of now, totally separated. We still lack communication channels. We still lack channels to transfer back this energy – to make it a meaningful energy – because we still need the political box to get into, as all of us

know, into decisions which reflect the public good or aim to reflect the public good. So we still lack these communication channels, these channels in between.

The second issue is I am always reminded of similar moments in the recent past of different Arab countries where a dynamism, or forms of dynamisms, that existed outside the conventional sphere of politics ended up not being channeled back to conventional politics and ended up leading into a new momentum of violence.

You go back to the beginning of militant Islamist movements in Egypt in the 1970s – Islamic Group and al-Jihad – and these people started in Egyptian universities pushing for reform, pushing for change, Islamize state and society. They did not find any way to channel back. Their dynamism ended up becoming a radical movement, each one of them.

So there is a potential for radicalization if you do not come up as societies, as politics, with ways to connect these two. And we had some violent incidents in Egypt throughout the last two years – industrial workers striking; their demands not being met by the government; they resort to violence. In a limited scale, but it still happens.

So it's challenging, and so I'm not sure whether we are up into a positive development trajectory – we'll have to wait and see. So we'll have to better understand these spaces and figure out whether channels are being created to connect to the sphere of conventional politics or not.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Just a couple things, again, if you look at the polling from the West Bank, Khalil Shikaki – in fact, you can find it in this week's "Economist." It will show you that Fatah and the Palestinian Authority are running ahead of Hamas in the West Bank. It's the biggest change there in the last six months, so I don't know what figures you're referring to.

Secondly, Hariri's coalition won the election that was held. Al Gore won more votes in this country when he ran against George Bush, but that wasn't the election we were holding. We were holding a different one based on electoral college.

Some countries hold elections based on party lists; some hold on popular votes. Lebanon's was in mélange. I was there for the election. No one of any significance I knew of, afterwards, was saying, oh um, the election wasn't free or fair.

They lost the election. They know that. Oh sure, you're going to find people. That's not the position today. I wonder if Hezbollah and its Christian partners had won the election with a minority vote, if you'd be here today questioning that.

MR. SAWYER: Yes.

MR. FRIEDMAN: (Laughs) Okay.

MS. MATHEWS: Okay. I wish we had more time because I think we have surfaced an enormous number of issues that we haven't fully explored. I think the question Tom has raised about the role of the Iraq War in the Arab Spring – there's more there for us to talk about.

I think the question, again, Marina has pointed out, democratization is always – involves a redistribution of power, and that seldom happens without violence. But why has the form of violence in the Arab world been so noninstitutional? So random? So I mean, terrorism and suicide terrorism, in particular, are not really institution-building forms of violence. And why has there been no connection to a more creative, more politically-oriented use of violence?

Many, many other issues that the three of you have tabled that I think are rich in discussion but I'm afraid we'll have to leave it at that. Thank you so much for attending today's discussion.

(END)