

MIDDLE EAST UPRISINGS: OPTIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

PANEL 2: OPTIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

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[00:00:09]

NATHAN BROWN: If people could take their seats, we'll get started in, like, 15 seconds. Good afternoon and welcome back to this joint program with the Kennedy School and the Carnegie Endowment. I think the idea for the two panels was that the – was very sensible, that we would spend a little bit of time trying to understand what's going on in the region and then try to understand what the United States should do about it.

The problem is that the first panel didn't do its job. We wound up saying we basically don't know what's going on and we're now completely confused. But – (chuckles) – and by the way, any time we got to a complex question, we say, well, that'll be for the next panel. (Laughter.)

So now this is the next panel where all your questions, all your remaining questions will be answered and we will take this enormously unstable, confusing and inchoate situation and decide how the United States can bring order, justice and freedom. We've got three speakers. I will introduce them very, very briefly because they should be known to this audience.

First is Nick Burns who has had about as distinguished a career as a diplomat that you can imagine and usually when you use the word distinguished you refer partly to hair color. But I first met Nick in his first diplomatic assignment in Cairo in the early '80s. He looked exactly the same, exactly. He's now I guess Dorian Gray Professor at the Kennedy School. (Laughter.)

Our second speaker is Steve Walt, who I have known almost as long, sort of. I didn't know him a lot in the meantime. But shortly after I met Nick, I TA'ed for Steve Walt and he was enormously difficult to TA for because he was so darned clear. There was nothing left to do in discussion section because the students understood everything. So my job, I guess, was to make Steve Walt complicated.

Our third speaker is Chris Boucek, who is my colleague here at Carnegie who has taken on a specific – really an admirable task on a day that's the hottest day of the year in the mid-'90s. He's going to be talking about Arab winter at a time when minds are – we should only have more winter is I think what people will be thinking.

So we'll go in that order. Nick is going to talk a little bit about the Obama administration's reaction. Steve will move to a new strategy for the Middle East and then Chris will bring things to a frosty conclusion. So Nick?

[00:02:46]

NICHOLAS BURNS: Thank you very much. I don't know how to respond to Nathan's introduction. I won't even attempt except to say that Nathan was a Fulbright Scholar in Cairo in the early 1980s, so poor and so destitute on U.S. government Fulbright funding he would arrive at our house in Zamalek with his laundry to do and my wife appreciated that and still does. (Laughter.)

MR. BROWN: And it's still clean.

MR. BURNS: Nathan's a great scholar. We invited Nathan twice to Harvard this past semester to talk about the Arab awakening, the Arab Spring and we're very happy to have this new union of sorts with Carnegie and the Kennedy School. We have a very expansive Middle East program at the Kennedy School. We want to build it further and we'd like to continue this, Marwan. So thank you very much for shepherding us through today.

I'm just going to be brief and talk about something very difficult to do and that is how has the Obama administration done, how has the United States done in responding over the last five months to these extraordinary changes in the Arab world. And I'll do that and then look forward to what my fellow speakers have to say.

I'd say to first set the context, if you're going to judge the Obama administration, what's the framework from within which they have been operating? First, I do believe that the president on Inauguration Day two-and-a-half years ago faced the most challenging international agenda of any president since President Franklin Roosevelt as he took his third oath of office in the year of our entry into the Second World War in early 1941.

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I mean, think of what he faced because this does provide a sense of how he's had to juggle competing American priorities. The global recession isn't over for the United States at 9 percent unemployment. We are still fighting two land wars in the Middle East. We've never done that in America history with the exception of the two-front war in the Second World War.

The priority in the Middle East for President Obama had been and I think remains Iran and finding a way to stop Iran from becoming a nuclear weapons power. And of course he's had to deal with a nuclear weapons power trying to destabilize the most important region in the world to the United States – East Asia – and that power is North Korea.

And of course he's had the complex transnational problems that are at the heart of the international agenda, everything from climate change to drug and crime cartels to pandemics to terrorism and WMD.

So when you think about the Arab awakening occurring in the midst of all these other priorities, some of which frankly to the United States, a globally-oriented country, are more important in their potential impact on what's happening in the Middle East or at least more dangerous to us and more cataclysmic.

Think about the fact that the president has also surely recognized because he's a very smart guy and he's got a good team of advisors that what's happening in the Middle East – and you heard this from the first panel – is potentially the most significant development in the modern history of the Arab world and that is change and transformation in 22 states if that is what we are witnessing.

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So I look upon President Obama and his team in a very sympathetic way, maybe because I've been in government and served both Republican and Democratic administrations. And by the way, there are a lot of people in the audience who are former U.S. government officials, former American diplomats with a lot of experience around the world.

And I bet they would agree with this, that it's easy to criticize when you're on the outside, when you're in a think tank or a university. It's something else to be inside and reacting the way President Obama has done. So that's my kind of first point.

Second point, how has he done? I think very well. I judge him on one criterion only. Has he protected American interests? I don't believe the United States is responsible for most of the shortcomings in the Arab world. I don't believe the United States is going to be the architect of what happens in the future of the Arab world.

But the United States has to defend its own interests and I would say along with East Asia, the greater Middle East, encompassing Afghanistan, encompassing parts of South Asia, is obviously a region of vital importance for us. I think he's defended our interests pretty well. How would I defend that statement? I'd say on the keystone question in the keystone country, how did he react to Tahrir Square? I think remarkably well.

And here I do not agree with the conventional wisdom that I read time after time in the American press – even some members of the Harvard faculty would say he was too late in ditching Mubarak and climbing on board the bandwagon. I believe the most – the first serious demonstration, as I remember it, was January 25th.

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I remember Friday, January 28th, three days later, President Obama made a late evening – excuse me, a late afternoon/early evening statement from the White House – the first official reaction where he effectively separated himself, as I heard it, from Hosni Mubarak, our very strong partner and ally over 30 years.

And I was amazed that he was operating so quickly. I think what he did was he declined to stand on the soapbox in Tahrir Square and publicly proclaim that Mubarak should go. But he used his influence behind the scenes to push Mubarak out because I think he recognized – the administration knew that Mubarak had lost the credibility of his street and he certainly lost his credulity with most of the international community.

So I just don't agree with the conventional wisdom – and if anyone would like to argue with me I'd be happy to argue about that point. Second, I think the president was right on Libya on two counts. He was right to hesitate. He was right to be skeptical. Libya is not a country of vital interest for us.

And you know, the president, before he deploys American military force, has to say to himself – is this vital, how do I explain it to Congress, how do I gain public support, what do I say to the parents of soldiers who might die there? Libya is not vital. Egypt is. Saudi Arabia is, certainly. Israel and the Palestinian territories are, I think. But Libya, probably not.

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Did we know who the rebel alliance were? No, we had never even met them, had never even made personal contact with them. Did we think that we could go in there without support of the Arab world and the U.N. Security Council? So his initial skepticism was warranted.

But then a couple of things happened in that tumultuous week before French, British and American forces intervened. The Arab League did something the Arab League has never done and which to a former American diplomat is highly ironic.

They said, please intervene in the internal affairs of one of our member states. Please bring your military – this is after Iraq and Afghanistan and all the criticism in the Arab world of the United States and particularly the Bush administration. Please intervene.

That was a Saturday statement. And then the Security Council came forward and the British and French – and I really credit President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Cameron – put together a coalition with the Russians and Chinese and the Indians and Turks and Brazilians were going to abstain.

And then there was the imminent siege of Benghazi. This is now Wednesday in the Security Council. Thursday Qaddafi makes his brutally cynical statements – I'm going to chase every last opponent in Benghazi. And his son said, rivers of blood.

So they ended a siege in Benghazi that could have resulted in who knows how many casualties but probably quite significant number of people might have died in Benghazi.

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If you put those factors together, they all transpired between a Saturday and a Friday evening and the president made the right decision to reconsider his skepticism and say, I've probably got to go in now and do what the United States can only do which is to provide the air cover and air power and offensive strike capacity that frankly our NATO allies do not have in abundance. And so the United States military made the critical difference in the first six or seven days of the NATO operation. And we've had some very stalwart allies in France and Britain leading this. I think the president was right on both counts.

A lot of people will say – I was interviewed this morning on al-Jazeera. Wasn't this inconsistent? Well, you can call it inconsistent. You can also call it statecraft and wisdom and leadership, that your initial position is proven to be overtaken by events and you make a decision to turn your position around. I thought that was quite smart.

Another reason why I think the president has been successful is that I think he's been very – he's prioritized among our interests in 22 Arab states. He is supporting democracy where we think it has a chance of succeeding.

He is supporting, I think, my interpretation, stability where it must succeed for American interests. And again, I don't see this as hypocritical. I don't see it as a double standard, the fact that we've intervened decisively in some places and we've been quite standoffish in others.

It's not the job of the American president to try and be the central actor in each of these individual 22 dramas underway. His job is to try to use American influence hopefully for the good, hopefully to be a good partner with the Arab peoples but to defend American interests. And so I think what he has done in essentially not trying to foment trouble in Saudi Arabia, in Kuwait, in Qatar, in the United Arab Emirates, in Oman is smart.

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There has been no social revolution taking place on the streets to which one would react. These are vital American allies and therefore this balance is important to keep in American policy.

And that gets to another point, Nathan, I'd like to make and that is like all other American presidents, Republican or Democrat, since the Second World War, you know, this is a very difficult juggling act in the Middle East because we have to honor our democratic principles.

We have to stand up for democracy in freedom, even in places like – or especially in places like Saudi Arabia. We have to vocally support women's rights. We should. Individual press – individual rights and press rights. But

there's a time to try to unseat a government or to disavow our government or you withdraw all your support from the government and a time not to.

And I think we had that opportunity where there was a social revolution taking place in Egypt, in Tunisia, clearly in Libya and that opportunity, with the exception of Bahrain, has not been present.

And I told my students – we talked about this all throughout this past semester in our class on international diplomacy – you know, picture President Obama up on a high wire without a net and he's juggling these competing contradictory American priorities that have been with us for half a century.

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Steve is going to talk about them, I know, because Steve and I have had long discussions about this. What's the proper balance? There are times when the human rights democracy agenda has to be number one. And there are times when your security interests also have to come into play and this gets to another criticism of the Obama administration.

What hasn't he articulated some grand design? Why hasn't he explained some uniform American policy that will cover and explain everything that's happening in this broad and diverse Middle East. And I guess what I'd say is it wouldn't be intellectually possible or politically or diplomatically wise to say, I've got one policy for the Middle East on behalf of the United States.

You need to have one set of principles. We're supporting reform. He's been clear about that, the president, in all of his speeches. We want a long-term future change. But we're also going to preserve our economic and geopolitical and military interests in the short-term if we have to in places where that change is not going to take place in the next month or two or year or two. I don't think those are inconsistent. I think that's defending basic American interests.

And I think he's done that pretty well. But that balancing act is difficult and he's going to have to continue to achieve that in the future. Now, what might we look for in the future? What are the challenges going forward? We're five months into this. Snapshots are difficult because we might be – may be at the end of act one of a long multiyear five-act play.

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But if that's where we are, as somewhere around the beginning of a period of historic transformation, what are the challenges for the United States. And I'd say for President Obama and his successors, whether that's in 2012 or 2016, I thought of five things this morning very quickly. First, it's all about Egypt. Tom Friedman said this in his column, I think, Sunday in The New York Times. A lot of people have been saying it.

Not all countries – not all countries are as equally vital to global interests and to the arc of this narrative as it unfolds in the Arab world. Egypt is critical to it – largest country, keystone state, influential sociologically and politically. If the revolution can succeed in Egypt, it's going to have – one would think and one would assume – a positive impact on some of the other countries – not all of them but on some of the other countries. If it fails, then maybe the hopes that a lot of us have for a changed more democratic, more just Middle East are also going to fail.

And so that means if the United States or Europe or Japan or India, Brazil, major countries reacting to this, I would think that most of your economic resources, most of your aid, most of your concessional lending, most of your debt forgiveness ought to be going to Egypt.

And you saw when the G-8 met last week, their statements were all about Egypt and Tunisia because that's where they see the possibilities of reform succeeding perhaps and that's where Western and international interests are. And I think we're right to prioritize and right to focus on Egypt first. I think that's going to be difficult for us because the weakness of American policy is that we've been so – as Marwan said, we've been so security-oriented.

We're accustomed to dealing with regimes and other militaries. We're not accustomed to helping countries build grassroots civil society. And so AID and our banking system is going to be much more important in reaching out to Egypt I think in many ways than the traditional levers of American power – the State department and especially the Defense Department.

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That gets me to point two, which Steve is going to, I know, comment on. As the region transforms, the United States has to transform its policy. I say we have to be concerned with both stability and change. We do. But our policy has been satisfied with the status quo over the last 50 years. It's been built on the status quo and I think Marwan was right to say that.

And so we've got to make this transformation from a security focus to try and define other ways that the American people and our universities and think tanks and our businesses can play a role in engaging the Arab people.

The United States government has not engaged Arabs as much as Arab governments over the last 50 years and I think now we've got to think much more broadly about how we relate to this part of the world and understand that the certainties of American policy have got to change because if they don't change, they might get swept along – swept away with events.

Third, I would say we have to seize this moment and this may be very unpopular to say in Washington. Drive forward on the Israeli-Palestinian – I won't say peace process. There is no such thing – on the prospect of getting them to the negotiating table. It's about as dark and cynical a time as I can remember in this conflict – 63 years running, no security for the Israelis 63 years after their creation, no justice for the Palestinians.

And now we have this huge imbalance at the potential negotiation table between a very strong Israel and a, frankly, weak and still fractured, despite the recent reconciliation, of the Palestinian community. But that's an illusion of sorts. The illusion is that maybe the biggest loser – and I'm sorry to say this – from the Arab awakening over the last five months is Israel. Think about Israel's diminished strategic position.

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Think about what it was on January 1st, 2011, and what it is now. Tomorrow is June 1st, 2011. A more hostile government in Lebanon, stronger Hezbollah, a more perhaps empowered potentially Palestinian delegation where Hamas now has to be – at least the Israelis have to listen to what Hamas have to say. They might not want to meet them and maybe they shouldn't meet them. But that Palestinian configuration is no longer easy for Israel. It's difficult.

Think of the opening of the border that the Egyptian government has put in place and a much more skeptical Egyptian government returning perhaps to the roots of Egyptian foreign policy in the '60s and early 1970s and Egypt is not going to be easy for the Israelis but a difficult challenging partner.

Think of the fact that Israel's had the certainty of dealing with one family in Syria since 1963 and that family dictatorship thankfully is on the ropes and hopefully that regime will fall. But all that is bad news for the Israelis.

And so I would think this is the time when the Israelis might want to appreciate the fact that their strategic position is in danger and that they have in Mahmoud Abbas and Salam Fayyad the two most practical and productive and moderate Palestinian leaders they can hope to negotiate with anytime in the last two decades or looking into the next decade.

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So I think the Obama administration – I applaud the president for his speech and what he said in it about the '67 borders – I think he was trying to rebalance the negotiating table a little bit in saying it. I think the United States has no alternative but to drive forward. I don't know if we have willing partners or capable partners to do that.

Last two points, my fourth challenge for the U.S. is we can't forget Iran. When all is said and done about all these crises, the largest greatest short-term threat is a nuclear-armed Iran. That would change the balance of power in the Middle East against the United States which we cannot want to see happen.

This regime has proven what it is. President Obama went out of his way in 2009 and in 2010 to meet them halfway and they spurned his offer and they turned down every attempt by the United States, with the support of Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany by the way, all behind the United States. Iran turned them down. This government in Iran believes it can outlast the U.S. I think they have made it clear that they're inviting more sanctions. They're inviting more confrontation.

I think the president has handled this very skillfully not to go on a war footing, not to lead with a military response, to test diplomacy. He may still try to do that but we've got to be very worried about how now we contain this Iranian threat. And maybe the biggest question we'll be talking about in future Carnegie-Harvard seminars in the next year or two or three is what's the proper response to a recalcitrant, dangerous Iran.

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Is it to go to war or is it to contain them, not an offensive military strike but a military containment policy? I don't see any other alternative to what is happening. Fifth, I go back to point one. We've got to maintain a balance in what we do.

Our interests – U.S. – are diverse and they span the entire Middle East and we can – we can be very instrumental in supporting reform in some countries. There is no opportunity to do that in the short-term in others. And that balance of interests, maintaining it is going to be the true test of Obama's diplomacy. I think he's done very well in these first five months and I wish them luck in what's ahead.

MR. BROWN: Okay, thank you. Steve?

STEPHEN WALT: Thanks. I want to focus on the implications of the Arab spring for U.S. foreign policy and I'm going to begin with a confession and that's that you can all discount everything I'm about to say.

Back in January, I wrote a post on my blog with the title “Why the Tunisian Revolution Won’t Spread.” (Laughter.) And I want to say my arguments were compelling. The logic was unassailable. I advanced lots of historical evidence to show why my position was correct and of course I was dead wrong. So again, you can discount anything I say after that.

Let me just set the stage a little bit for my view on what the United States should do. First thing we ought to recognize, if you look at past revolutions first of all this sort of event where a revolution takes place in one place and begins to spread and have ripple effects elsewhere is actually quite rare historically.

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Second, the effects tend to vary a lot from case to case even when you do get these sympathetic reverberations elsewhere. We see this, say, with the various velvet revolutions in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union. They didn’t lead to identical outcomes in each case. And perhaps most importantly it takes years to actually know what the real implications are going to be and we are still very much in the early stages.

The final form of the clerical regime in Iran was not established in the first year or so after the shah departed. The Russian revolution went through a civil war before its final form was made. The French revolution took a decade to lead ultimately to Napoleon with many twists and turns along the way. So I think we’re very much in the early stages here.

And all those tendencies of course are obvious even from what we can see now. Tunisia isn’t really like Egypt, which of course is having a different evolution than Libya which isn’t exactly Syria which isn’t like Yemen or Jordan or all the other places, as Marwan said earlier today.

So even when you get a form of revolutionary contagion, you shouldn’t expect identical outcomes and that does mean that American policy is going to have to do a certain amount of case-by-case adaptation to each one. Now, despite all those uncertainties what do I think the big effects are going to be?

First, as was said in the first panel, Arab governments, regardless of the outcomes, I think are likely to become much more sensitive to public opinion, much more sensitive to what the street is saying. Now, that’s obviously true wherever democracy takes root because politicians are going to do what politicians in democracies always do. They’re going to start trying to cater and mold public opinion in very direct ways.

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But I think it’s also going to be true even when autocrats remain in power. They’re going to be more worried about future upheavals, especially if some of their neighbors are becoming far more open and that means even the autocrats are going to start paying a lot more attention to what their populations want. Second point, this whole process is not going to be say and I think that was apparent from the comments that were made earlier.

The major impetus for these upheavals has been a sense of economic stagnation, corruption, overcentralization. But these are not going to be easy things to fix. And the emergence of popular politics in many of these countries may actually make it harder rather than easier as governments try to preserve themselves in power by status policies, by various forms of corruption, by various forms of patronage which is precisely what they don’t need if the goal is really to get economic development going.

Also, if you add to that this very uncertain political environment, this is not exactly the time you would expect a lot of foreign investors to see, say, Egypt or Tunisia as a prime investment opportunity and there are plenty of people from the business community who have already said, that you know, it's time to wait a little bit to see exactly what happens there.

Finally, because the Western governments have major fiscal problems of their own, this is not a moment where you ought to expect some kind of Middle East Marshall Plan to get organized. And I think President Obama proved that a couple of weeks ago when his big Middle East speech offered effectively no new money for Egypt or Tunisia.

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They reallocated some funds and the sums that were being talked about – a couple of billion dollars – was really a drop in the bucket when you consider the economic problems that these countries have. The G-8 has now tried to put together a larger package. They are trying to get the wealthy Arab oil states to pony up some larger sums. But we're not going to see, I think, anything like the amount of money that you might need to get a really rapid turnaround.

So again, the implication is these are countries that are going to face a rocky road for a while. And then my third big implication is this is going to have a significant impact on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular. The conflict was not the major – or even a significant motivation for these demonstrations and upheavals. This was not about Israel.

But there is overwhelming survey evidence to suggest that this is an issue that still resonates very much with Arab publics and if I'm right that Arab governments are going to be more sensitive to public opinion, as Nick suggested a moment ago, these are governments that are going to have to be taking a less cooperative approach towards that entire issue.

So I actually don't expect the peace treaties between Egypt and Jordan to be abrogated. But I do expect both countries to be not nearly as compliant or as sensitive to Israeli security concerns as they were in the past and I think we already see the signs of that – the opening of the Rafah Gate, the Palestinian union agreement, the Palestinian demonstrations on Israel's borders.

Now, as Nick said, this might be argued as a moment when the Israelis ought to be really serious about trying to pursue a peace process because they see a balance of power starting to shift against them. Unfortunately, and this is a real tragic paradox, it's also a moment of such significant uncertainty; you can imagine any Israeli government being wary of making any sort of significant moves until they see how the regional landscape settles down.

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And again, I think time is moving against them; this ought to be a moment of much more creative thinking on their part. But I can also understand why we're not seeing that happen and I think, again, Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit just reinforced the sense in which there's not going to be a lot of creative thinking there.

Last point before I talk about some actual recommendations, I think what we also see in this is that America's strategy is basically obsolete. American interests in the region actually have not changed very much as a result of these events. We have a vital interest in keeping oil and gas flowing to world markets. We have an interest in discouraging the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

We obviously have an interest in reducing the threat of terrorism arising from the region and the United States has a longstanding, in my view primarily moral, commitment to Israel's survival. And none of those things are affected by what's happened in the last six months. Unfortunately the strategy we've followed to try and advance those things has already been under some periods of strain and I think now looks increasingly obsolete.

It was based on this special relationship with Israel – this relationship of unconditional U.S. support and it was based on a close strategic partnership with a set of autocrats who didn't pay very much attention to what their publics wanted. And it seems to me that both those items now are being called into question.

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So what would a different policy look like? Let me just sketch some quick bullet points and then we can come back to them perhaps in detail a little bit later. The basic bottom line here is if the United States wants good relations with the Arab world going forward, it's going to have to adopt policies that are somewhat more congenial to Arab publics and not just to Arab rulers.

That doesn't mean that we have to do everything that public opinion wants in these different countries but we're going to have to be more sensitive to them than we have been in the past. So five basic initiatives – first, we have to embrace the reform movement. The United States should stand ready to reward governments that embark on genuine reform, to distance themselves from those that resist it completely.

Obama's recent speech – and I would argue a long with Nick – some of the policies they've adopted have gone some direction that way. One could argue that it's got to be Nick's balancing act, but with the United States always leaning forward indicating quite clearly what we think the long-term trend here and what we ultimately support there.

I think however we're going to have to actually do a lot more because Arab publics are going to be convinced that American policy has actually changed. We've gone beyond the point at which I think beautifully delivered presidential speeches are going to convince very many people and people are going to be waiting to see what the policy changes really are.

If you've looked at the most recent Pew Global Attitudes Survey of Arab attitudes towards the United States, it suggests that the Arab Spring has not led to any significant improvement in America's image in the region. In fact if anything we've backslid some from the progress that had been made say at about the time of the Cairo speech in June 2009. So that's one. We have to, I think, embrace the reform movement.

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Second, the United States ought to be encouraging what I would call a sort of multipolar Middle East. Our basic objective is that no single power – and particularly not a single hostile power – be able to dominate the Middle East. We want to be able to essentially play a balance of power politics game there and that means we don't in fact want a Middle East that's sharply polarized between different conflicting camps where we have to pick one side or another.

We in a sense want to be able to move rather flexibly as circumstances dictate. We would like a regional order that has more crosscutting and flexible alignments to it. A perfect world would be one where we can shift sides as necessary.

So I think we want to try, again, avoid a situation where we have a Sunni versus Shia divide, a secular versus Islamic divide, an Iranian versus U.S.-led divide. As a long-term objective, I think we want a much more flexible and

multipolar order there. Number three, the United States should concentrate on getting its military forces offshore and over the horizon in the Middle East to the extent that we can.

In other words, return to the policy that we followed from 1945 to 1990 where we acted like an offshore balancer in the region. We had security ties there. We had vital interests there. But the United States did not station ground or air troops in large quantities anywhere in the Middle East.

And when we did use force in the region we tended to use it very briefly, as in Lebanon in '58, Lebanon again in '92 and in the first Gulf War. In the first Gulf War we then did two different things – first, dual containment which helped trigger the rise of al-Qaida and then regional transformation which was the invasion of Iraq.

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I think the results of both those policies suggest that the United States does not want to have a large scale ground and air presence anywhere in the Middle East. And the good news is we don't have to because we don't have to control the region ourselves. We just have to make sure that nobody else is able to control it, which we can do by having the rapid deployment force but by keeping our military forces to the extent possible offshore, over the horizon.

That doesn't mean we withdraw completely. That doesn't mean isolationism. It doesn't mean we end our – excuse me – security commitments there. But it means a fundamental different military posture in that part of the world. Number four, internationalizing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

We have monopolized control of the peace process since at least the early 1990s when the Oslo Process began. We have nothing to show for it almost 20 years later. I think we ought to face the reality that the United States is in fact incapable of being an effective mediator in this particular conflict.

If we were better at it, we would have achieved more by now. In other words, we ought to be sitting to lead from the back and quietly enlisting international support for our vision of a two-state solution instead of trying to do it all ourselves and trying to hold that mediator's role.

So among other things, I would be quietly encouraging the E.U. and others to actually back the resolution for Palestinian statehood at the U.N. in September, even if the administration has to pretend to oppose it in public for all the obvious reasons. And by the way, you should just emphasize, my influence with the Obama administration could not be smaller. (Laughter.)

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So you don't have to worry that they're going to follow my advice on this one. But that's what I would do. By the way, this is not an anti-Israeli position because failure to get a two-state solution is in my view the single greatest long-term threat that Israel faces and therefore anything that the United States can do to break the current logjam and get things moving again is actually in Israel's long-term interest even if the current government there disagrees.

And then finally, and this is a place where Nick and I are still discussing, we I think have to rethink our approach to Iran and we have to be more creative in how we approach that. I think it's going to be a tricky problem to handle Iran particularly in the context of a more difficult relationship that we now have with Saudi Arabia, who has been very upset with our reasons in some ways. So this has to be handled in a fairly gingerly fashion.

But in my view, the United States has now spent the last 10 or 20 years ratcheting up the threat level against Iran in the hope that that will persuade them that they don't need a nuclear deterrent.

And it seems to me there is a fundamental contradiction in that particular approach and after starting with what I would characterize as a modest move towards a combination with Iran, the Obama administration has essentially reverted back to the same policy as the Bush administration, asking for Iran to give up its nuclear program first at which point we will be willing to talk about what's on Iran's agenda.

And I don't think that is going to work, certainly not anytime soon and if our goal is to head off an actual existing Iranian nuclear weapon, we're going to have to think more creatively. And by saying that, that is not code for kinetic action, by the way. I think we have to think more creatively on the diplomatic front.

[00:38:08]

OK, as I said before, American interests in the region have not changed. But I think the strategy that we employ to defend those interests has to be adapted to this new reality we see emerging in the region. Again, the steps I just outlined there do not pretend to solve all of America's problems there. I do think they would make it possible to preserve those core interests and to do so at a much lower cost.

And finally, it would also allow the United States to start spending more of its time and attention on some other parts of the world – most notably Asia – where we're going to want to focus much more attention in the years ahead. Thanks very much.

MR. BROWN: Okay, Chris?

CHRISTOPHER BOUCEK: Well, thank you. I guess one of the great things about speaking last is you can be very brief but also everything has already been said in many ways.

MR. WALT: It hasn't been said by everyone.

MR. BOUCEK: I think what I'd really like to do is pick up on a few themes and then kind of bring us to a few specific cases. I think the first one is to build on this idea that we heard in this panel and the earlier panel that there is so much that we don't know. There's so much that we don't know about what's going on and we are only five – four-and-a-half, five months into this process, which I think is really kind of remarkable.

If you see how much change has taken place already but yet how much more still has to happen, I think a lot of the initial enthusiasm is – there's the potential for this to dissipate and I think that's a big concern that we all have to keep in mind. I think before Tunisia, I don't think anybody really ever thought this would happen in Tunisia.

[00:39:50]

Before Mubarak stepped down, I don't think anybody really ever thought this would happen in Egypt. And I guess for me one of the big lessons is five months in the Middle East should teach everybody not to make any more predictions about what will or will not happen. That said, I guess I'm going to make a lot of predictions.

But I think this initial enthusiasm – I think there's a real potential for this to fall apart and I think immediately after Tunisia and Egypt there was a lot said about this being the end of violent opposition, the end of al-Qaida, the end of Islamist terrorism. And I think as much as that might be nice to think, I'm more and more skeptical of that

because I believe there will potentially – I think potentially there will come a time in Egypt and Tunisia and lots of these other cases where conditions don't improve, right, especially basic economic conditions. And I think especially the ability for people to buy food, to get access to basic needs – when jobs aren't created and these things – five years down the road, there is a real potential for this disillusionment and this disappointment to set in.

And I think we need to keep that in mind when we're thinking about where this is going to go. You know, when I think about the cases that I look at the most, especially Yemen, you know, when this first started in January, there were people including myself who said this could be the end of the regime. When General Ali Mohsen, the second most powerful guy in the country, defected to the opposition, there were people who said this was it. President Saleh only has a few days left. He's done for. Five months later he's still in power.

[00:41:28]

And despite the intense violence that took place this past week, the situation in Yemen really hasn't changed very much. President Saleh is still nominally in control. The opposition still is not in a position to push him out. But yet every day, the economy gets worse. I think this is the big question that we're missing.

We've been talking for a long time about how the economy in Yemen is collapsing but it's really now moving towards meltdown and whoever it is that comes next – if President Saleh is able to maintain power or if there's another government that assumes power – they will have to deal with this economic meltdown of really cataclysmic proportions. Yemen is no longer producing oil on the scale that it was. It's having to import refined products.

The cost of water has gone up over 50 percent. Food prices have gone up 50 percent. Cooking gas has gone up three or four times. The average Yemeni is getting squeezed and the idea that this can go on for months and months, which I think it very likely still can go on that long, will lead to a very, very tenuous situation on the ground for any government that comes next. The foreign currency holdings are down. The real is falling against the dollar.

This is already the most vulnerable population in the Middle East that's being squeezed more and more. And I think we need to start thinking about how we will deal with that challenge next. This political drama, as long as it goes on in Yemen, is – you've taken up all the oxygen but we need to think about what comes next; how do we stabilize Yemen?

And while I completely agree that this is probably the worst time to come up with a policy, especially when you think about there are probably more simultaneous overlapping crises than any time for any administration, I think all the fuses have to be kind of shorting out right now. I think we need to start thinking about how will we craft the situation to best advance our national interests.

[00:43:20]

Where do we want to be 25 years down the road, and what do we need to do today to get there? And I think it's got to be hard when you're in crisis management all the time to think about stepping back. But I think we need to start thinking about some of this. And this brings me to the point of Saudi Arabia which was just touched on which I think, you know, over the past several months we've seen – there's been an awful lot written about the United States and Saudi Arabia falling apart and there's tensions that are coming out in the relationship.

And while I think that's true, the two countries still need each other and they still – we need to better manage this relationship for sure. It strikes me that, you know, Saudi Arabia would probably like to see different things happen in the region than we would like to see. But at the same time we need to be working with all of our allies and all our

friends in the region to get where we want to be. I think it's probably best to stop there so we can get to discussion. So with that –

MR. BROWN: Okay. All right, thank you very much. Steve, you ended the first session by getting the panelists I think to try to talk to each other. I'm going to try to get the two panels to talk to each other a little bit or get you to respond a little bit to the concerns raised by the first panel. Then I will throw it open for general questions. I think there are some common themes here that are emerging actually across both panels and it has to do with uncertainty.

We do not know what's going on exactly and we have no idea what's going to happen. The discussion on this panel has been a little bit about – or has focused sort of on how the United States should react on a strategic level. I'm wondering if I could move it down a little bit less abstractly to specific policy instruments.

[00:44:56]

If the Arab world is changing in ways we don't quite understand but we have an enormous stake in the outcome, where is it that – especially in the domestic scene – we have an opportunity to steer things towards outcomes that we want or do we? I mean, we heard from Tarek in the first session essentially – I will sum up his description of the process in Egypt a little bit uncharitably perhaps to him and perhaps also to the Egyptian military leadership.

If they had read every single report by a think tank or every single book by an academic and done the exact opposite, that's what they're doing, okay, and in terms of a transition process. So on the one hand, we're hearing that the stakes are enormously high. On the other hand, there are things that are sort of going wrong. Do we just have to sit back and watch? Are there specific places where we can intervene to see the kinds of outcomes that we want in the various countries?

MR. BURNS: I'm happy to just take a swing at it and maybe Steve can follow. I guess I'd say, Nathan, that's a really good question to ask, I mean, because governments don't exist at a stratospheric level. They've got to get down and figure out tactics to support policies and I think the Obama administration is likely to act quite differently and use different levels depending on what crisis we're talking about. So when it comes to Egypt, it's clear what the challenge is now. We have to retain confidence with the Egyptian military. That's very important. That's the job of our senior military leadership.

But I think it's mobilizing the nonprofit civil society sector in the United States, our businesses to engage, not with the Egyptian government so much as with average Egyptians, in the same type of relationship that you saw develop between 1989 and 1991 in Central Europe where the real change wasn't really from the American government. It was from American society, outreach to East Europeans to help them build and think about developing a civil society.

[00:46:58]

You have an opportunity. We have it in Tunisia. We certainly do in Egypt. I guess in a sense we have it in Jordan. We certainly have it in the Palestinian territories and we have it in Morocco. On the other hand, I would think our best way to influence events in Saudi Arabia and in the Emirates is to retain the confidence of the senior leadership which is badly frayed. The fact that President Mubarak did separate himself – excuse me, President Obama from President Mubarak – infuriated the Saudi and Emirati and Kuwaiti leadership.

There is a crisis of confidence there and the larger issues for us are we need the Gulf Arab states to contain Iran. We need them to help us contain and deal with the terrorist threat from al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and other

terrorist organizations. And we certainly need them for economic reasons. And so I think the prescription tactically in the Gulf is going to be completely different from what it is in the Levant.

The other thing I'd say and just to – I want to comment on I have great respect for Steve. I think his five points are really fascinating. It's one of the most cogent presentations that I've heard for how we should react to this. And I agree with the first three points, maybe half on the fourth and we disagree on the fifth but we'll continue talking.

MR. WALT: We'll work that out.

[00:48:20]

MR. BURNS: I guess I'd ask a question. If it's time for the United States to relinquish its leadership role in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, who can possibly replace us? We have a 25-, 30-year record. I guess I'd take us back to '73 when Henry Kissinger and Sam Lewis is here and Sam knows a hundred times more about this than I do – but Henry Kissinger effectively keep the Soviets in Grimko from being that mediator.

He is the one who gave us the leading position. We have not succeeded. We've failed. But which country or set of countries has the confidence of Israel and the confidence of the Palestinian leadership? I'd say only the United States objectively, not just because I'm an American.

But I think we're the only country that can play that role. But I'd be happy to be proven wrong. The other thing I'd say is leading from behind – yikes, what a horrible statement. What a horrible slogan for the United States of America. I worry that our domestic politics and the Tea Party and our focus here at home are going to argue that we shouldn't be leading in the world. We must lead in the world, not from behind. We must lead. And so that's another point I just wanted to put on the table very respectfully to my colleague from Harvard.

MR. WALT: Let me take a quick response on that. I mean, when I say that the United States ought to be internationalizing the peace process, that doesn't mean the United States plays no role at all. We won't wash our hands of it at all. In a perfect world, I actually would have liked the United States to lay out its own vision of what the solution would be based either on the Clinton parameters of 2000 or conceivably the Olmert-Abbas talks of 2007.

And then go around and enlist as much international support as we could in the E.U., possibly with Russia, with other allies in different parts of the world who have gotten more engaged by this issue like Brazil in recent years. And then conceivably even take that to the United Nations and say, just as in 1947, '48, the United Nations voted the partition plan because it recognized a threat to peace and security and a humanitarian issue.

[00:50:33]

The international community could also recognize that the continuation of this conflict is both a humanitarian issue and a threat to international peace and security and the United States should in fact be leading a coordinated international effort to finally bring this to an end. What we have done for the last 20 years is not lead an international effort. The quartet is largely a meaningless device. We've wanted to monopolize control over that process and it was going to be our doing to slowly bring these two parties to some kind of an agreement.

This has simply not worked. The United States is incapable in my view of being an effective evenhanded mediator there. So given that we have a vital interest in trying to solve it, I'd like to bring the rest of the international

community in so the United States isn't trying to do it all itself. I don't think, by the way, you know, that you get a peace settlement in 18 months and the doves fly across the South Lawn of the White House.

But I do think that would get – it would certainly reveal that American policy was different. It would put us on the right side of the issue given our moral and strategic concerns there. And I think it might then put President Obama or his successor in a better position in the next presidential term. I can't think of any other way of trying to break this particular logjam but if somebody else has a brilliant proposal that will bring Middle East peace, I'd love to hear it. (Laughter.)

MR. BOUCEK: I think just this question about what can we do to help kind of end these local – when I think about Yemen, I think there's still really the potential for this to come to some sort of a negotiated settlement, right, and I think that's probably what everybody wants to see instead of more escalation, more violence and further deterioration of the stability in the situation on the ground.

[00:52:23]

And it strikes me that the youth protestors and the civil society protestors who are out there are the ones who are talking about the values and our interests that we have articulated as a government, right. They're the ones who are talking about corruption, the ones who are talking about accountability, the ones who are talking about democracy.

But they're also the ones who are getting squeezed out in any settlement and we need to do something to help enshrine the values of this revolution, right, that brought people out on the streets and motivated the official opposition to take up the strong position against the regime.

And if we don't – if we or the international community doesn't do something to help make sure that this wasn't for naught, then this was a huge opportunity that we've lost. And I think you can probably apply that lots of places in the Middle East where these regimes are fighting back and they are working to stay in power and are trying to manage and control the situation. We need to do everything we can to help make sure that this – that what drove people out on the streets gets some staying power afterwards I think.

MR. BROWN: Okay, all right. Thank you. The floor is now open. Let me go, yes, to the back, right here? Yeah, yeah right back there – I was going to say in the blue blazer but I think half the men in this room have a blue blazer on, so – (laughter).

Q: Hi. I'm Bob Dreyfus with The Nation. I want to argue just very briefly that we hugely mishandled the events in Bahrain and if Steve is right that we need to reach out to the Arab publics rather than the Arab rulers, how exactly – and this is like maybe for Nick – how exactly do we develop credibility with those Arab publics if they see the United States as siding so nakedly with American interests in propping up these monarchies and conclude – that they might conclude that it's all about oil and economic interests.

[00:54:24]

MR. BURNS: It's a great question and I guess I'd say for all the positive things I said about the administration – and I obviously believe them at the beginning of this – the two countries – or there are actually two countries that have puzzled me the most is Bahrain and Yemen, mainly because I don't – I don't see a clarity to the American position or a consistent one on those two that I've seen on the others, on most of the other major issues in this Arab awakening. And so I guess I'd agree that this is problematic for the administration.

Now, having said that, Bahrain is about as difficult a question for us – the United States – as you can imagine because we have profound security interests in the Gulf vis-à-vis Iran, the need to contain Iran. We have the Fifth Fleet stationed in Bahrain and you have the intense interest, vital interest of Saudi Arabia in particular – to a lesser extent the Emirates – in what happens in Bahrain.

I think the combination of those hard concrete strategic interests overcame the initial reaction of the administration which was opposition to the government using undo cynical brutal force against Shia protestors in Pearl Square, the arrest of those people, most of whom were quite peaceful. And so I think the administration was overwhelmed by that a little bit and I say that with great respect and without a hint or criticism just because I know how difficult this can be.

But that has obviously colored the way many Shia see the United States. However, ironically if you go to Libya – I have not been, but people who have been say that the United States is actually quite popular now in Libya because we have intervened there.

[00:56:07]

So maybe the Arab people – I think you'll see it – you won't see an Arab reaction. You'll see a Tunisian reaction, a Libyan reaction, an Egyptian reaction, a Bahraini, an Iraqi reaction. But it's going to be different how the United States is perceived in the Arab world.

MR. BROWN: Steve?

MR. WALT: I think the only point I would add to that is that I think going forward the United States is going to have to continue to raise this issue not in that sort of sermonizing rancorous way that I think we sometimes have with other countries but rather in talking to the Saudis and to the Bahrainis to say that this problem is not going away.

The toothpaste is not going back in the tube permanently here and therefore these are governments that have to be interested in a reform process that we in their – we believe is in their interest as well. It's going to be one that probably moves slower than many Americans would be comfortable with.

But it's going to have to continue to move and we want to make sure that as we try to rebuild some of those frayed partnerships, we don't lose sight of what I think the long-term objective is here which is political change, more accountable governments more transparent governments and more equal governments along the Sunni-Shia divide there. And that's going to be a difficult set of conversations because it's going to make some of our partners there quite uncomfortable.

[00:57:37]

MR. BROWN: Okay, thanks. Over here?

Q: Yes, my question is about –

MR. BROWN: Can you wait for the microphone, please?

Q: Sure. My question is about Syria. I was wondering why this subject was not discussed when you were discussing the Arab Spring in the first panel and this panel too. And I was wondering if Mr. Burns can tell us what drives American policy on Syria and what is the assessment of the situation now there. Thank you.

MR. BURNS: Thank you for that very easy question. I appreciate it very much. (Laughter.)

MR. BROWN: We didn't talk about it because it's too hard. (Laughter.)

MR. BURNS: You know, I've been just watching the debate in our own country and have been I agree a little bit puzzled by it. I've been puzzled by the number of Americans who say, well, we've got an interest in Assad's surviving because he's somehow a factor of stability. Some people even say a factor for reform. And I just don't see it. I don't see it at all. Now, here's a guy who has promised reform for the better part of a decade – has not delivered in any meaningful way for the Syrian people.

[00:58:36]

Secondly, he's effectively aligned himself with the most obdurate, radical government in the Middle East in Tehran. And third, has been profoundly unhelpful and even destabilizing in Lebanon and we haven't seen the end of the United Nations investigation of who killed President Hariri. But that investigation must continue.

So here's a government that is supporting Hamas and Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, armed and helped to facilitate attacks on our own soldiers in Iraq, decidedly unhelpful on the Israeli-Palestinian front. Why would we want to see this regime survive? If we sitting on the sidelines just watching this should hope for reform and liberation for Arabs, it should be in Syria. So that – I just feel that for me that's clear. I don't see a debate about it.

MR. BROWN: Chris or Steve, you want to tackle Syria? Okay. Let me first apologize. In fairness to the people in the back, the people in front, all they have to do is like raise a little finger for me to see them. The people in the back are going to have to raise their arms and wave it or both. But so I'm going to try and go – yes, back and forth. Let me go over to this side, the woman about halfway back?

Q: Hi. Thank you so much. My name is Lisa Hanson. I just graduated this week from SAIS. So thank you for having this conversation. My question was on the visit of the prime minister – Prime Minister Netanyahu – and the narrative that came out of that in the press but, you know, carrying on what was said in Congress and in the official party line which was that the reception he received in Congress demonstrated that America is, you know – the American people are 100 percent, you know, pro-Israel and the policies of the Netanyahu government.

[01:00:36]

My question is to what extent is that true, A, and to what extent does that matter. And particularly when it comes to the issue which Israel and Netanyahu criticized Obama a lot for which was not touching enough on Iran because as we know, Israel is very much – they criticize that Obama was not explicit enough about the military option.

So I just wondered – the American public ideologically I think has a lot of support for Israel. But I wonder if it comes down to brass tacks and saying, okay, well we will keep this military option on the table for Iraq and really articulate that. After the engagements that we've been in in Iraq and Afghanistan, how much support there would be in the American public for military option or the threat of a military option and escalating to that level?

MR. WALT: Nick and I may both want to swing on this one. I mean, first of all I think if you look at repeated surveys of the American people, they are more pro-Israel than they are pro-Palestinian, for example.

But they are nowhere near as supportive of Israel as the U.S. Congress and U.S. Senate demonstrated themselves to be last week. If you ask, for example, should the United States threaten to withhold aid to Israel if it refuses to be constructive into the peace process you know, two-thirds to three-quarters of Americans say we should withhold aid from Israel if it's not helpful in the peace process.

I think that was a survey, by the way, by the Anti-Defamation League. So the American people do not want an unconditional special relationship. They like Israel. They want it to do well. They think the United States should be allied with Israel and so do I. But they don't think it should be sort of a special relationship.

[01:02:26]

Needless to say, what you say up on Congress was good old-fashioned interest group politics in the United States. It's no different than what happens when NRA goes up there or the farm lobby as well. And by the way, if anyone wants to know more about this phenomenon, there's a book I could recommend. (Laughter.) As for the issue of Iran, I don't think the American people have any interest in the United States going to war at the present time. We sort of have enough on our plate.

More importantly, I'm quite convinced that the American military has no interest in our using force against Iran at the present time because first of all, it doesn't solve the problem. It may kick it down the road a while back. Second, it's going to further complicate the situation we're facing elsewhere in the region and the American military has been pretty clear about that. So I don't think a military option is going to be exercised.

Moreover, as I said in my earlier remarks, I don't think pointing a gun at Tehran is the way to convince them that they can be secure without having a clear capability. And by the way, you'll recall in 2003 we successfully persuade Muammar Qaddafi to give up his weapons of mass destruction programs and part of that deal was a pledge from the United States that we would not try to overthrow him.

Remember, it's 2003 and that might have been on his mind. Right now if you were a leader in Iran today and you're watching what's happening in Libya right now and you're scratching your head and saying is it a good idea to give up your weapons of mass destruction programs and open yourselves up at some point down the road to the possibility that the United States might change its mind and decide that regime change is what we want to accomplish.

So even if we're successful in Libya, and I hope we will be, it may have unfortunate implication for some other places that we care more about ultimately and what we're trying to accomplish with those governments too.

[01:04:30]

MR. BROWN: Thanks. Nick, you want to –

MR. BURNS: I just want to say it's a great question. I just wanted to say we have someone in the audience, Ambassador Sam Lewis, who I believe is the longest serving American ambassador to Israel – over seven years. He would have a view on this. He might even want to assert his view if we wanted to call on him.

But I'd say three things very quickly. It's really unfortunate when two close friends and partners like Israel and the United States have such a profound public disagreement. I don't remember, Sam, anything like this maybe going back to '82 or perhaps you can think of another time when we've been so openly divided. That's not in our interest. It's not in our interest to have a fight with Israel.

Our differences should be argued out behind the scenes. Maybe this is a former diplomat talking but that's the way it should be done. Second, I sympathize greatly with the Israelis at this moment. Their strategic position is really difficult given what's happened and the uncertainty with Egypt in particular, uncertainty with Hamas and Fatah for second and so they're in a tough situation.

One could understand, as Steve said, that they're going to have to tread very carefully going forward. But third, I really think the president was right to assert the American interest that the only possible solution is sharing the land of Palestine on an equal and just basis, and you do have to go back to the '67 lines and negotiate from there knowing that land swaps will be part of the solution as the president said.

[01:05:56]

But his critics failed to note, he said, in that speech that he gave. And so I thought he gave the right speech and we can debate Iran but that would take us in a different direction. I'd love to do it if someone else wants to ask a question.

MR. BROWN: Okay, Ambassador Lewis, you seem to be satisfied with sagely nodding or would you like to get in on the discussion? (Laughter.)

AMBASSADOR SAM LEWIS: Well, I want to commend Nick for expressing nearly all of my views about the Obama situation and the very difficult handling of a tough situation over the last six months. I also served a lot of Republican administrations as well as some Democratic ones. And I think that it's very hard to exaggerate the complication of this high-wire act that he described earlier.

But I really would like – and on the Iraq – I mean, on the Iran situation – it gets to the question I wanted to ask. None of you have mentioned really the country in the Middle East which after Egypt historically has been the strongest and most influential – Iraq. What is the future of the Arab Spring and its outcome in Iraq and what is the future of our problem in Iraq as we withdraw amid what is at best going to be a pretty chaotic situation, also, beginning to show signs of the Arab Spring?

MR. WALT: Well you were the one talking about Arab Winter. (Laughter.)

[01:07:32]

MR. BROWN: I don't feel like that now.

MR. WALT: I think we should all take a swing at this one. I think that what happens in Iraq is obviously of some significant importance. My guess is that we will not end up with a strongly pro-American Iraq. If anything we may get one that is tilting slightly to Iran. I don't think the rhetoric you sometimes hear that it's about to become an Iranian satellite or things like that is correct. There's too many other reasons for friction between those two countries.

But it's certainly one where Iran will have some influence, much more so than obviously under Saddam Hussein. And I think it's a very real chance that as we withdraw, that we may not get a return to levels of violence that we saw in 2006 but you're going to get continued political contention there where a whole series of potential flashpoints, whether it's the relationship with the Kurds, the fate of Kirkuk, some other parts of the country as well – quite unpredictable and very difficult for me to foresee how that's going to play itself out.

But it's going to have an obvious implication then for the American strategic position in the Gulf just how much of a challenge we face there. I think you can then multiply that question in one other way and this is almost me throwing it back to the previous panel – is to ask a little bit about what the interaction effects between these different countries are going to be.

So if Egypt turns out really well in five years – just somehow by some miracle it's really turned the corner – it seems to me that that puts the status quo regimes that are trying, as Marwan put it, to sort of buy off pressure or repress it in the short-term under much more trouble because now there's an experiment that's worked.

But if on the other hand Egypt spirals down into real trouble, even some level of violence, then conservative regimes can say, look, you don't want to have a grassroots uprising here. Look what just happened over in Egypt. You want slow and steady reform. Maybe you don't want any reform at all. And their capacity to keep the lid on I think goes down.

[01:09:51]

And you could then multiply it: What happens in Iraq is going to be part of that narrative as well. So in some respects, I can imagine many radically different trajectories going forward and I can't tell you which ones I'm willing to bet on at this point, just that there's going to be a considerable amount of ferment for quite some time.

MR. BROWN: Chris, do you want to – (inaudible, off mic.)

MR. BOUCEK: You can go ahead.

MR. BURNS: Sam, I guess I'd say that I think the president was right to get us out of Iraq, to draw down the combat troops, take the troops off the streets, withdraw to the bases and draw down from 150,000 troops when he came into office to get out troops out by the end of this year with one exception.

I would hope we would negotiate with Iraq a residual American force that would stay, not in the streets of Baghdad, not in the streets of other Iraqi cities, but a force that would be designed in effect to help contain Iranian power because as I sit back, at least from my armchair now, that I'm not longer in government, I see two great challenges to the United States in the next 20 or 30 years in foreign policy. It's to prevent Iran from becoming a destabilizing and major military force in the Middle East and second, you know, hopefully live in peace with China and figure out a way to work with China and the Far East.

[01:11:03]

But we can't allow a focus on all the different dramas in the Arab world – they are very important obviously for each person in the Arab world – but for us, helping Iraq to remain truly independent of Iranian control and Iranian influence, which I think is where most Iraqis are even in the Shia community, is I think an important national objective. And that's why I think – I mean, I was for engaging in Iran in the Bush administration.

I thought we should have been negotiating then. The Iranians don't wish it in part because they're divided. There's a huge power play going on in Iran right now. There are divided camps. They don't have the unity to get to the negotiating table with the United States. As long as there's nobody with whom to negotiate, and I think that's where we are, I think we need to keep the pressure on not through offensive war. I wouldn't favor that right now.

But through sanctions and through remaining strong and retaining American military presence strategically to deter them. So that's why I think Iraq – you're right to say – is so critical to what's going to happen in the Middle East.

MR. BROWN: Okay. Let me just throw in a quick observation here and then I'll call for more questions. We've got a little bit more than 10 minutes left. But that is that we're here discussing, you know, American reactions to Arab uprisings and about half the discussion in the question section – not in the discussion – half of the questions have been pre-2011 issues. And I don't mean that as a criticism.

I mean it as sort of a wakeup call that says the pre-2011 issues – Iran, Arab-Israeli and so on – don't seem to be dead. It looks like the list of things that have to be balanced is perhaps even more intimidating than the complex Arab Spring has thrown up. Let me turn to this quadrant. Go ahead in the blue striped shirt, right here.

[01:13:00]

Q: Thank you. My name is Connie – (inaudible). I'm with the American Kurdish Information Network. There is a big gulf between the American interests and security needs and the thirst of Middle Eastern peoples for liberty and justice. Is that gulf bridgeable? Don't you think a better mix of security and liberty is needed in the foreign policy of the United States?

MR. WALT: Yes, but I think this is – oh, and Nick referred to this too. This is the balancing act that most American governments often wrestle with and it's the tension between what you see as a long-term desirable and short-term problems. So I think most Americans would say that if you had more democratic, more human rights respecting, more transparent, more accountable, less corrupt, et cetera, governments in any part of the world, that would be a good thing. But if in the short term you have a good relationship with a government that doesn't have a lot of those qualities, are you prepared to live with the period of turmoil that might be involved before you get to that more perfect world that you might ultimately like to get to.

And if you think you can do it relatively quickly, which I believe was the calculation made in Libya, by the way, that a little bit of military force could quickly solve that problem – it remains to be seen if that is true or not. But in other places where you imagine that getting behind that process could lead to 10 or 20 years of trouble.

Well, if you're a presidential administration and you're thinking about the next two years, the next 18 months or maybe a second term that's only another four years, the tendency to think more short-term and just maintain stability as people have referred to before tends to predominate.

[01:14:54]

So I think yes, America's long-term interest is in fact encouraging political change there and adopting policies that will be congenial to those peoples to the extent that we can. But I'm not going to be at all surprised if American governments facing that short-term/long-term tradeoff sometimes, you know, go for stability as opposed to some of those other ideals.

MR. BROWN: Chris?

MR. BOUCEK: Yeah,

MR. BROWN: If I can turn this into a challenge to you especially, because of the region of the world that you're dealing with – the Arabian peninsula – I mean, you're saying it sounds like it's easy to back freedom and justice and

so on in Egypt and Tunisia, right, where – well, I’m caricaturing, where the revolution has already started. What about the Arabian Peninsula where we have these intense security relationships with well-entrenched governments. What do we do there?

MR. BOUCEK: I think, you know, this point about – that’s been well-made about Yemen policy, which I totally agree with, I think it’s compounded by the fact that you have an organization based in Yemen that has the intention, the capacity and increasingly the space to target American interests and Americans.

So I think while there are those people who, you know, are advocating probably for all of these things about freedom and democracy and everything else, it’s got to be hard to balance that when the counterterrorism community is saying at the same time there is an immediate threat right now. Why would you change anything? Already the situation is going down the drain. Why would you want to make it more conducive to terrorist attacks?

[01:16:17]

And I think it’s – I mean, it’s not just terrorism but I think this – the question right before about Iraq – you know, I think if you’re sitting in Saudi Arabia and you see the Arab Spring or Arab awakening on one hand and the American drawdown in Iraq, you have to think how are the Americans going to want to engage in this region in the future and why is there not a more clearly articulated vision for what it is that they’re going to do.

And I think the Saudis are incredibly concerned not about security and terrorism but also about stability. And I think the uncertainty that all this comes with and the fact that in some cases it’s not going to be 18 months, right. It’s going to be a decade of uncertainty and instability for these things to work out.

MR. BROWN: Thank you. What I’d like to do maybe – we have about a little over five minutes left. Let me just take two or three more questions and then turn it over to the panelists and see if they want to make any concluding remarks. Why don’t we start here? Go ahead.

Q: Michael Lane, Rethink the Middle East. Between the end of World War II in 1950, there were a number of international conflicts created, generated, that are still with us – North Korea versus South Korea, China versus Taiwan, India versus Pakistan particularly over Kashmir, and Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

For some reason, and that’s my question – is it for subjective reasons or objective reasons that those earlier three that I mentioned tend to be viewed as conflicts to manage for U.S. administration, but the fourth one is one that we must solve. And I’m wondering if that’s for good reasons. Bush was criticized for lowering the priority of that and failing.

[01:17:58]

But then Clinton was intermittently – had high priority. Obama from day two had it a high priority and failed. So does it need to be a high priority – we must solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

MR. BROWN: Okay. Marina, go ahead?

MARINA OTTAWAY: I just want to go to a slightly different angle to a question that has already been raised. You have talked about this high-wire act that the Obama administration has carried out and I think that has been successful in sort of defending the U.S. interest in the area. But there is downside of that policy, the fact that we

have no influence whatsoever on what is happening in this – you know, with the change that is taking place because by placing this balancing act, we don't have much credibility with the regimes.

Look at the relationship with Saudi Arabia now – and we don't have much credibility with the other side, the people who are trying to bring about change. And to me the sign of that is the reception that the Obama speech received in the Middle East which it seems to me it was not so much anger. It was certainly not an applause. Essentially it was a yawn.

MR. BROWN: Okay. Let me go over to this side for a while. One final question, I guess front row?

[01:19:28]

Q: Hi. Daphne McCartney from the Project on Middle East Democracy. I think one of the biggest challenges for the U.S. is going to be in countries like Jordan and Morocco where, as Marwan Muasher was saying, they're embarking on these reform initiatives and talking the reform rhetoric but it's still unclear what's going to change, if anything is going to change at all. So how do you get beyond a situation where they're pretending to reform and we're pretending to help them reform? (Laughter.)

MR. BROWN: There is an enormous amount of expertise and a lot of hands up representing that expertise in this room and I apologize to all the people I didn't call on. But I'd like to give the panelists a chance to answer three challenging questions and make any final comments they would like. So why don't we start – actually in the same order. Why don't we start with Nick? Go ahead.

MR. BURNS: Okay. I think that we have to try to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Not that it's a panacea. The day that it is resolved, and it will be resolved at some point. It doesn't mean that there won't be a thousand other challenges for the Arabs, the Israelis, and for us in the Middle East. But it has become so highly symbolic, you know, of the problems in the region and our involvement with it.

This was produced by the failure of British colonialism and the failure of Britain to end its imperial order on a logical basis both in India, as you mentioned in Kashmir between India and Pakistan, as well as in the Middle East. But we have been the steward of global order since 1947 and '48. So therefore we have a responsibility.

And I think it would – I think it is essential that the United States be seen to be leading that effort and sincerely trying to bring the two to peace. I don't see that we can have a stable Middle East without it.

[01:21:21]

Secondly, Marina, you've asked a very tough question. I guess I approach these issues – and maybe it's a great failing on my part – you know, just from almost the prism of government and you deal with the choices that you have, not with the choices that you wish to have. And the choice we have in a place like Saudi Arabia where we fundamentally disagree with the way Saudis – as Americans, as Brits, there are some Brits here – as the way the Saudis run their country and they treat their own people and yet there is no other group to which we can attach our support right now. It's not our job.

It wouldn't be wise for us to foment a revolution, to undercut that state, when we have such profound security interests tied up. And so all of our presidents, all British prime ministers, all international leaders have this balancing act. All of us play it because the continued flow of oil, you know, at normal prices to Europe and to Asia as well in a more limited extent to North America, is vital.

And particularly the fight against al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and particularly the containment of Iran, those are profound security interests which we just can't disregard. And so does that reduce our influence? Maybe in some places, although it's been very interesting, all this talk about China rising. Is China going to eclipse the United States?

Has anyone even asked Hu Jintao what he thinks over the last five months? Not really because China doesn't count when it comes to global stability. China doesn't play in this game. The United States still does. Britain still does. And so I think the United States is enormously influential, continues to be here as we approach a sixth month of this crisis.

I don't think we've been defeated. I think we have more influence in North Africa where we probably didn't want to exercise it now than we had three or four months ago and still a lot of influence with the military in Egypt and hopefully with some of the people in Egypt that will change the country. So I'm not pessimistic about American power in that sense in the Middle East.

[01:23:28]

The last point I want to make is, there was an interesting New Yorker article by Ryan Lizza which many of you might have read. He followed Hillary Clinton around the Middle East and he quoted an unnamed American – Clinton official – State Department official saying, our basic strategic problem is that we're overinvested in the Middle East and we're underinvested in Asia.

And I do think that the Obama administration came to power quite rightly saying that the largest and most important region for us is Asia and yet we're bogged down in land wars in the Middle East and bogged down and immersed in the problems of the middle East. They are important. But what happens in Asia is more important.

And that's why I think – this will be a prediction. I think you'll see the Obama administration rapidly try to disengage in a military sense from both Iraq and I would think over time in Afghanistan, turn to a diplomacy-first strategy in Afghanistan. I include Afghanistan in this wider region - and then finally be able to focus strategically on this huge question how do we live with China, how do we prevent Asia from being dominated by China.

That's much more important and you can see the administration trying to get there but as all other administration in which I served, being dragged back into these problems, that's why we have to resolve in part the Israeli-Palestinian problem so we can get on and deal with the more vital issues confronting us to the east.

MR. BROWN: Okay. Thank you very much, Nick. Steve?

[01:24:51]

MR. WALT: I'll make four points. First of all, on the first question, I agree with Nick. It's something we can't walk away from and that's for two reasons. One, as David Petraeus and his successor have both said, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a huge headache for us as we try and address other strategic problems in the region.

But second of all, because we do have this moral commitment to Israel's security, that's never going to be achieved until you get a full peace settlement and therefore the United States should be using its influence in my view more assertively than we have to try and bring that about for both of those reasons. It's not one we can walk away from. Third reason, though, is it is also one of the ways of taking a card away from Tehran.

One of the reasons I have a different view on Iran is I actually don't think Iran is a particularly consequential player in material terms, in part because the clerical regime is so inefficient and so bad at running the Iranian economy. If they had an inefficient economic system, they'd be actually much more of a problem. They're militarily not very powerful - \$10 billion a year military budget, no power projection capabilities, things like that.

What they've been very good at, however, is by appealing to popular forces around the region and latching themselves onto various causes that resonate, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. You solve that one, you take away one of their principle cards and of course it also facilitates any diplomacy we try to do to, quote, unquote, "contain them."

[01:26:24]

On Marina's point, I agree completely with the characterization of the regional reaction as a yawn. We have gone beyond the point that eloquent American words are really going to persuade anybody. And that brings me to the last question, what can the United States do. One of the things we ought to be sobered by is how the instruments available to us have been weakened by some of our other mistakes in the financial sector and elsewhere.

I was telling Nick and some others before we started that if you go back and look at the Marshall Plan, the Marshall Plan was 5 percent of U.S. GDP. In 1948 we had a GDP of about 269 billion (dollars) and the Marshall Plan was about 13 billion (dollars) and it was grants, not loan guarantees or anything like that. If you did that today, when our GDP is about 14 trillion (dollars), you'd be talking about an aid package for the Middle East of \$700 billion.

Guess what? No one's talking about an aid package of that magnitude or a tenth of that magnitude and for the obvious reason is that we're not in the same financial position we were in in 1948. So one thing to remember is we're not going to be able to shape these perhaps as directly or as massively as we might have at an earlier period. And that's perhaps unfortunate.

MR. BOUCEK: I think I would just add I think on the Israel-Palestine question, how this is connected to so many other grievances is something we can't discount. It needs to be addressed and the way that I think Marwan's point about what do you think of biology class. I mean, I think it's tied into everything else and you can't help but deal with it.

[01:28:04]

I think Marina's point about, you know, this comes with a healthy dose of realism, right, and skepticism and kind of acknowledgment about what the limits of American influence really is. I think especially in these really challenging cases like Yemen and Bahrain and Syria, what leverage what influence does the United States have to bring about the conditions it wants right now without that period of instability and uncertainty and the danger that comes with it.

I think the other point is on Saudi Arabia and I think it was really interesting that in the past, the United States and Saudi Arabia have really never agreed on in terms of Saudi politics but usually have agreed on foreign external issues especially in the region and increasingly that's not the case.

And I think the way Saudi Arabia is looking at asserting its own interests and looking at maybe its interests in the United States – the interests of the United States don't always overlap and I think that's something we should be concerned about, about how we manage that relationship because Saudi Arabia is increasingly a more and more

vocal, more and more powerful player in all of this and most likely is going to be the country that manages this Arab Spring probably the best with the least amount of turmoil or dissension or unrest from the royal family's point of view.

MR. BROWN: All right. My one job was to make sure we started and ended on time. I failed. We're five minutes late. But please don't rush out of the room before joining me in thanking our three final panelists. (Applause.)

[01:29:30]

(END)