

**CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE**

**DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN  
THE MIDDLE EAST: RESTORING  
CREDIBILITY**

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THOMAS CAROTHERS: If I could have your attention please, we're going to get underway.

I'm Thomas Carothers. I'm the vice president for studies here at the Carnegie Endowment, and it's my pleasure to be the moderator at our session, "Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: Restoring Credibility."

When the next U.S. president takes office in January next year, he is going to face a very difficult agenda in the Middle East. A whole series of issues will be waiting for him, unresolved and presenting some very difficult choices. These will, of course, include what to do in Iraq, what to do with respect to policy towards Iran, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and many others; those are just probably the top three.

On that list of issues, and to some extent headaches, is the question of political reform, democratization, and the U.S. role relating thereto, and whether the United States can and should continue efforts to promote democratization or political reform or political liberalization—or whatever particular way the United States wants to slice it there—in the region. And this isn't a side issue; this issue will relate to the issues I mentioned. Iraq is, in many ways, very much a case in point but a question of political change in Iran is always on the table as well, as is the question of the future of Palestinian politics and pluralism there, and its effect on the relationship with Israel. So democracy promotion will be interwoven into all of the main issues facing the U.S. administration.

And I think as it looks on this question there will be sort of two, in a sense, obvious or clear paths that it might take, neither of which, I think, are probably to be recommended. One, of course, would simply be to back away from the subject and say we tried that, didn't work out; we got burned. It wasn't good for the region, wasn't good for us. Let's just drop this in some ways. The other would be to just sort of full-speed ahead and say the freedom agenda lives and we need to keep pressing forward.

I don't think either of those options is probably the preference of the region or many of the people in the region, or here in Washington, yet it's been hard so far to start articulating an alternative and what an alternative would look like, what it would consist of and what it wouldn't consist of. So that's really the purpose of today's session. It's just focusing our thinking on what are the choices and how might the United States go about thinking about and then acting on this subject.

Marina Ottaway, who's well known to you, I think, as the director of our Middle East program here and a long time expert not only on the Middle East, but on Africa and comparative democratization all around the world, has just written a policy brief by the title, same title of the event, which we've just published and this event marks that. Marina's going to present her basic arguments. And then we'll be hearing from two discussants, and we're very fortunate today to have two journalists who are both quite expert in the region, and at the same draw upon broader experiences and a lot of analytic sophistication as well as their journalistic perspective: Jackson Diehl, who's the deputy editorial page editor at The Washington Post, and I think also well known to you, a prominent writer in Washington and someone with considerable experience related to this topic; and then Hisham Melhem, who we're happy to have here, the Washington bureau chief for Al-Arabiya and also a

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distinguished writer and commentator on Middle East politics, both here and in the region as well.

So we're going to turn first to Marina and then to our two discussants, and then to you. Marina?

MARINA OTTAWAY: Thank you very much. I'd like to open this discussion with a few rather obvious statements that I still would like to make in order to avoid being misunderstood later on. The first one is that there is no doubt that most regimes in the Middle East are highly problematic. The democratic deficit that was denounced by the Arab human development reporter is very real, so there is no doubt that there is a problem in the area, in terms of the political systems and their working. So that in no way is the argument that I'll go into making about extreme caution, in terms of promoting democracy in the area, is based on the assumption that there is no problem in the area because the problem is there.

The second point that I'd like to make is that there is no doubt that democracy is a good political system. It's a highly desirable political system. Again, my caution has nothing to do with doubt about the democratic system.

The third point, again rather obvious, is that attempts at democratic transitions can be highly problematic and that, in some cases, end up doing more harm than good. So that yes, there is a good – we all know that the way to – the road to hell can be paved with good intentions and I think unfortunately, democracy promotion tends toward a road to hell in the wrong circumstances because what you get is not democracy, but you may get a lot of conflict, you may get a lot of undesirable outcomes.

And finally, and this is probably the most problematic point, is that when we talk about trying to do something about democracy it's really not clear, in all cases, what the first step should do. In other words, it's very easy to say okay, let's go ahead; we have to do something about this problem of the democratic deficit, it is important to promote democracy and so on. And then comes the next question; it is for what we do in country A or in country B, and at that point I think the influence can become very murky indeed. In fact, one of the problems of democracy promotion that we have – of democracy promotion attempts that we have witnessed in the last six years is not – is the fact that there was really never any great deal of thinking that went into the equation and for what we do in different circumstances.

There was a blanket statement, a blanket assumption that elections are always really important and that they are not a bad place to start, and so on. The administration has been pulling back from that statement that somebody in the administration just stated that, in fact, the Palestinian elections at that point were not a terribly good idea. In this case, it's not that the U.S. had much choice on that issue. So although there is beginning to be recognition that mistakes were made on how democracy was promoted, I still don't see a great deal of analysis about what we should do in different circumstances.

Okay, that said, let me get to the Middle East and what we see. The first point is that after six years – I think it's six years because the democracy agenda was not launched at the beginning of democracy promotion in the Middle East. There is very little to show for.

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First of all, there has been very little serious political reform in the Arab world. This is not all the fault of the Bush administration; I don't mean to imply that. But if you look at the Middle East as it was six years ago and the Middle East as it is now, there is really no significant difference except here and there, in terms of how much – whether the region has become more democratic or less democratic. There is no country, as we have argued in the book that really is – a short time ago, called “Beyond the Façade: Political Reform in the Arab World,” there is really no country in the Middle East that has undergone a paradigm shift or has turned a corner, in terms of its political system.

So if you just look at the results, you know, clearly there is not much to show for. Granted, the United States could never have turned the Middle East around single-handedly; you cannot attribute this stagnation simply to what the U.S. has done or not done. I think it's important to keep that in mind, but the fact is that there is not much to show.

On the other hand, there is plenty of evidence that, in some cases, the attempts at democracy promotion have led to disaster and I think there are two examples that you keep in mind. One is Palestine and sort of the fallout from the Palestinian elections. The problem there was not the elections or the policies that were enacted subsequently, but the fact that is that what we now have is a situation in Palestine which was certainly much more problematic than the already problematic situation that existed before.

And the other example of a poor outcome, which can be attributed much more directly to the United States, is the example of Iraq where, in fact, really had a democracy promotion project; in fact, ended up by leaving a lot of very important political players outside the formal political process with the result that they have essentially tried to make a comeback by other means. The entire Ba'athist party was left out, and not just a few specific individuals but sort of the bulk of the people. And in fact, at an event here last week, some of you may have been here, we had two Iraqi parliamentarians discussing this and really pointing at sort of the fact that so many political forces were outside the formal political process as one of the main problems that the country is facing now. And that, of course, is related to the way in which democracy promotion was carried out, sort of without much thought about how it was being done.

So not much progress; some clear evidence of problems in some cases and finally, a lot of damage to what was the already scant credibility of the United States in the region. When I travel in the Middle East the – we all know that criticism of the United States is very high – but the criticism on the issue of democracy promotion is extremely high as well, and it's extremely high for two reasons. One is that the United States has promised too much. I mean, the Bush administration has used rhetoric that was completely out of control concerning democracy promotion. It made sort of – it depicted a picture of what it was going to achieve that – it pointed to goals that were simply unreachable and secondly, it did not pursue those goals with any degree of consistency.

In fact, the U.S. policy has been all over the place and in the last two years, talk about democracy promotion is renewed occasionally, but at a time where democracy promotion really plays very little role in the policy of the United States towards Arab countries so that the policies have gone pretty much back to let's try to deal with friendlier regimes as well as we can. And once in awhile, the rhetoric of democracy promotion reappears and that is

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something that really continues to undermine U.S. credibility, continues to create a negative reaction in the Arab world.

And yet, the problem remains. That said, having pointed out everything that has been wrong and the negative effects, the lack of success on one side and the very clear negative effects of democracy promotion as it was carried out, both in some parts of the region and on the United States, we are back to the fact that the problem is there. Arab regimes are not democratic. There is a lot of discontent in Arab countries. I would argue that there are some countries that are playing a very high-risk game, a country like Egypt that has practically shut down political activity and political participation almost completely at a time of growing social economic discontent.

And there are countries that are closing all the safety valves, essentially, because they cannot solve the socioeconomic problems easily because not only socioeconomic problems always take time to solve, but particularly in this case, increases in the price of fuel, the food crisis, and so on are problems that go well beyond the capacity of any one country to tackle. So that essentially, there are many countries that are facing virtually insolvable, at least in the short term, socioeconomic crisis and at the same are closing down the political safety valves.

Finally, also part of the problem is that there is no doubt that there is a real desire for change and for democracy in the Middle East. Here, all the surveys, all the public opinion polls, are absolutely clear: The desire for democracy is there. The argument to date that used to be very common way back about how democracy was not a political system that was suitable to Arab countries and Muslim countries and so on – it's an argument that one really does not hear very much. And in fact, one of the paradoxes is not only the same countries, not people in the same countries, but also the very same individuals that attack the U.S. for botching democracy promotion effort and point to everything that was done wrong in that democracy promotion effort, then turned around and said but you should do more. Unfortunately, usually the conversation stops there and it never gets to what would be the most important thing, which is what should the United States do. And the issue of what should the United States do is what I wanted to address now, to some extent.

I want to divide my answer in two parts, one which I consider the easy one and one which is the really difficult one. The first one – and the two issues are what should U.S. do to restore its own credibility and second, what it should do to really try to tackle this problem of the democratic deficits within the limits of what it can accomplish.

Let me start with credibility first because I would argue that the United States can do very little in this area of democracy promotion until it manages to regain some of its credibility. I mean, at this point, when the United States talks about promoting democracy in the Middle East it has almost zero credibility. It has almost no credibility with the government; I think Arab regimes that worried, you know, for awhile after 9/11 about the new sort of message that the Bush administration was sending about a need for reform, accusing specific countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Egypt, that supplied many of the terrorists of 9/11, of fomenting terrorism, essentially because of the lack of democracy in their own countries, and so on. Countries that worry about U.S. pressure have stopped worrying about U.S. pressure because have discovered that after all, it's all talk and there is

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no substance about it, that the United States has done – you know, may preach a democracy but in reality it does very little.

And I think one very clear example of that, of how far the administration has come in terms of putting pressures on these countries, was a statement that was made by Sean McCormick. A few weeks ago, when he was asked about the result of the Egyptian local elections – they were a total disaster, from the point of view of democracy; essentially, the government managed to ban almost all opposition candidates from running, not only the Muslim Brothers but even candidates from the secular political parties – he kind of shrugged it off and he says, well, they have to get to democracy in their own way. Well, that's a very different talk from what were hearing a few years before. So at this point, governments are not afraid of U.S. pressure because they have discovered that U.S. pressure is not there.

Political parties, organizations, civil society organization, and so on, that looked with some hope at the United States, hoping that in fact there would be enough pressure on their government to force them to open the political space, have given up. Yes, there are still organizations that take funding from the United States under the Middle East Partnership Initiative. There are NGOs in the Arab world that are taking maybe funding, but I don't talk to many people nowadays who really believe that pressure from the United States will make a huge difference.

So how does the United States regain some degree of credibility in the situation where neither the government nor any opposition really believes that the United States is going to do much? And the answer is, very simply, it needs to start very slowly, to set the very modest goals for democracy promotion; abandon the rhetoric and set very modest goals in each country and try to stick to those goals consistently.

Now, let me try to relate the idea of both the need to be consistent and also the need to set very modest goals. There is no way in which the United States can make democracy promotion be the only or even the major, guide, major concern of its policy in the Middle East. There are too many huge problems in that area. There is no way in which the United States – and I think this was the great mistake of the Bush administration – can put democracy promotion in the center when in fact, the urgent issues that the government had to tackle were of a different nature so that when it started touching some of the other issues, I will not go into whether they were tackled well or not well.

But when it had to deal very clearly with the issue of terrorism in the area, when it had to deal with the issue of the Iran attempting to develop nuclear weapons capability, if not outright nuclear weapons and so on, then it was accused of abandoning the goal of democracy promotion. So I think if we want to regain credibility, it is important that the goals that are set are goals that can be maintained in the different countries through thick and thin, essentially goals that we are not going to be forced to abandon at the first time that a crisis comes around. And I will give some examples of what I mean here.

Now, what about doing something? And let me try to rush through this a bit because I'm getting a message that I'm being too verbose. The first point is to keep in mind that we really need to tailor democracy promotion efforts to the conditions of different countries, and that in some cases the starting point may not be directly democracy as such.

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And let me give you two examples about – in order to illustrate that, and I will take Egypt on one side and I'll take the United Arab Emirates on the other. I could take any of the Gulf countries, but I think the United Arab Emirates is particularly convoluted, so let me take that one.

Now, Egypt is, in a sense, conceptually an easy country. If you just look at its institutions, it has a political system that could become democratic and in fact, there have been times in which that political system, designed as it is now, has functioned in a much more democratic way than it does now. Yes, we can quibble on the constitution, that it was a site of very dangerous amendments to the constitution that were enacted recently, but by and large the bones of a democratic system are in place in Egypt. So the question is to figure out what can the United States do to make it function.

The usual answer which is given in a case like this is to ensure that elections are free and fair, to try to put more pressure on the government, to put more pressure, to send in observers, to push the government to, for example, reinstate the judicial supervision of elections. That worked for a while in the case of Egypt, and so on. I don't think that that is the right starting point right now because what has happened in the recent past is that the opposition organizations that could participate in election essentially have collapsed. So that even if the elections became freer tomorrow, the weakness of the political parties, the weakness of all organizations other than the NDP, other than the government party, is such that I don't think elections would make a lot of difference.

So I would argue that, in the case of Egypt, if the U.S. was willing to put some pressure, the pressure should be on the government to reopen the process of party registration and to make the process of party registration more open, to remove the monopoly, essentially, of government officials from the process of the registration of new political parties and, at the same time, to put pressure on some of the restrictions that make it impossible for political parties to organize to be lifted. If there is a place where to put on pressure on Egypt, I think that's it because elections now, as long as the parties are half-dead, are really not going to make any difference.

Now, is what I'm proposing for Egypt an all-purpose recipe? Absolutely not, because that is not a problem in many countries. For example, if you look at Morocco, to say well, you should reopen the process of party registration, it makes no sense. Political parties in Morocco are alive. There are problems in Morocco I will not discuss, but that is not the problem.

So let me go now to another example which is totally different and one, I would argue, that what needs to be done is really of a totally different nature. Think of the United Arab Emirates, and that is – a lot of what I said about Egypt does not apply there. It's not really a coherent state. It does have even the beginning of an institutional structure that would make democracy possible. The bones are not there, essentially; you have to start building the bones of a state that could become democratic.

It's easy to say, as we did in the case of Bahrain, push the government to hold elections, and probably the government is going to hold elections before long. It's at least to have a party-elected Shura council and so on, but that is not the real issue. That really begs

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the problem of what is the main political crisis, I would argue, that a country like the United Arab Emirates. But I think most of the Gulf countries, really, except perhaps Kuwait, which has a different kind of problem, have political systems, essentially, that are derived from a time when those countries had essentially no money. They had a very simple societies, very undeveloped economies, and that these political systems are now trying to – are now trying sort of to govern this rather unwieldy coalition of what, in the case of the United Arab Emirates, is two city-states with very different structures, very different economies themselves, plus the rest of the country, which is very difficult to define very quickly.

So it seems to me that if we want to make a positive contribution to what eventually could become democracy in the United Arab Emirates, or in that part of the world, it seems to me that our first concern would be how does one help these countries. Devise a political system that makes sense for the countries not that existed in the past, but that exist now. And this is not an easy proposition; I mean, Dubai has been governed not democratically, but certainly on the economic level extremely efficiently, using what is not a political model but is a corporate model. Essentially, it has – and if it has – if we have to – before we talk about democracy, we have to start asking how do we get that country away from a corporate model of management back into a political model of management.

The difficulty in countries like the Gulf countries, in particular, but not exclusively the Gulf countries, is that we really don't know that the changes that have to take place, that the process of political change that might eventually lead to a democratic system, is not something with which the United States has any experience. I mean, the United States has never experienced itself a change of that kind and even – so that in order to try and be useful in that process, the United States needs to learn to work with countries of the region, with groups in the region, support to try and understand that to begin with. What is the next step that needs to be taken in those countries.

And I will stop here because clearly, I'm –

MR. CAROTHERS: Good. Thanks, Marina. Well, you put out a lot of ideas on the table. Let's turn next to Jackson, Jackson Diehl.

JACKSON DIEHL: Thank you very much.

I would first of all recommend that everyone read carefully Marina's analysis here that she's presented in her paper because I think it's a very clear-headed, very sensible analysis, characteristically so. And I agree with most of it. I think she has a very diagnosis of what went wrong with the Bush administration's policy, the freedom agenda. I think, unfortunately, she's right that most of the – it had almost no impact and most of the regimes in the region remain almost entirely autocratic. And I think she's also right in her basic thrust of what should come next, that we need to have a more focused, a more pragmatic and above all, more consistent policies aimed at governments where we can think we can really make a difference.

I think my concern is that, on the one hand, she may not be ambitious enough in what she thinks the next administration may be able to do and in a way, she may also be too optimistic. I think there's a – what I get from her paper is a sense that we can work with

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regimes in the region to do reforms that will be almost entirely from the top down, and that we should focus on that and that we should do it quietly. And I guess what I would say is that, while that is the beginning of an approach, I accept and understand that, number one, we can't be quiet because otherwise we won't be effective, and that's been part of our problem in the past, oddly enough, with the Bush administration.

Number two, some change is going to have to come from the bottom up, as it has everywhere else in the world where there's been a democratic transformation. And we need to work on that end of the equation as well as on the top end; you can't exclude either one. And number three, I think most importantly, we have to accept the fact that in pursuing this very important, very strategic aim in the Middle East, we are going to come in conflict with some of our traditional allies. And we can't avoid that conflict, we can't try and back away from it; we have to work our way through it and accept that it's going to happen if we're going to get the kind of change that we have to have and that those countries have to have.

I think one of the most important points that I think we would all here agree on, and that Marina makes in her paper and that I think ought to be the summary point that the next administration comes in with, is that this process cannot be dropped. The status quo in the Middle East remains untenable. The systems, both political and economic, that they have there will not last the way they are now.

And oddly, I think what we've seen in the last six years is while the Bush administration has been ineffectively pushing this freedom agenda, many of the regimes have been trying another strategy, different strategies to solve the same problems, which is the fact of their backward economic systems and their backward political systems. They've been trying to modernize them for the globalized era without introducing democracy, and what we've seen is that they've failed, that it's not working.

And so when in the next few years, as those efforts crumble, we're going to have another crisis in the region that's going to have to be resolved one way or the other. Oil has bought some time for some of the countries in the region, but in the case of Egypt, for example, you're seeing very clearly now that they've been trying very hard to modernize their political system – modernize their economic system without changing the political system, and now they're running up against a wall because they find they do not have the political legitimacy to carry out the measures necessary, or to live through a crisis like they're having now with the rising food prices, because they simply lack political legitimacy and they lack, really, the means to impose themselves by force. So that is going to come to a crunch and so change is going to be inevitable. The next president is going to absolutely have to focus on this.

When he does focus on it I think we will need to take many of the measures Marina is saying, but let me start by talking about the overall goal. Marina sets up a test here between Western liberal democracy, as she calls it, on the one hand and what she describes as helping regimes adjust their stagnant political systems to new economic realities, and I think that's something of a false choice. I mean, first of all, Western liberal democracy is no longer so Western. It exists in Asia; it's emerging in Turkey and Indonesia. We have to be clear that our goal for the region is liberal democracy, even if we don't think it can be achieved right away, we have to be clear that is where we want this to go and that is where

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we want this to end, and there is not a median way – a way to solve the problem that doesn't involve liberal democracy. That's exactly what the Egyptian regime is trying to do right now, is create some kind of third way, and we're seeing that it doesn't work.

Secondly, I think we have to speak very openly and clearly about that being the goal and about calling regimes to task when they do not take steps in that direction. And Marina, one of the most important points and, I think, sad points she makes in her paper is that many people in the Middle East don't know what the freedom agenda stands for. They really don't know what the United States means when it says it's for freedom in the Middle East. They think we mean regime change; some people think we mean an attack on Islam. That's because the Bush administration has never clearly articulated what the goals are and it's never spoken up consistently about what change should be taking place.

So when newspapers are closed, we need to speak up; when dissidents are put in jail who favor a liberal democracy, we have to speak up loudly on their behalf. And as Marina points out, when we do that consistently often we have an effect. And we have to be clear that, in the end, our goal is liberal democracy, even if we don't think it can be achieved in the short term.

Secondly, yes we do have to work with the regimes on top-down change. I agree with her absolutely that the most important thing we could do in Egypt is to change the political parties' registration law so that centrists, liberals, secular parties will be able to register and compete with the ruling party there. And that would defeat what has been the strategy of the regime for the past number of years, which is to create only two alternatives in Egypt, and one is the regime and the other is the Muslim Brotherhood. We need to break that strategy.

At the same time, I think we have to understand that we will need to help foster the civil society that has to grow up in places such as Egypt in order to create real democratic alternatives, especially real democratic alternatives to Islamic parties. Funding for grassroots organizations, opening up room for grassroots – supporting freedom of the press; we have to work hard on those things. And we have to understand that the governments won't always want us to do that. They will try and stop us from doing that, and we have to find ways to do it anyway and to open up that space.

And that brings me to, I think, the most important point I would make is that if we are going to pursue this seriously, we are going to come in – we cannot avoid conflicts between our interests and conflicts with regimes that have been our friends. And I think we just have to honestly accept that those conflicts are going to take place and let them take place. And as part of that, I think we have to readjust and rethink what our interests really are in countries such as Egypt. Is it really true that everything in Egypt must be subordinated to the desire to have friendly relations with the regime because we are afraid that otherwise there will be Mid-East peace and the Suez Canal will close.

I don't think that's right. I think we have to rethink our military relationship with Egypt, and we have to raise these concerns higher and be willing to push harder to do such things as to open up the political parties' law because otherwise it simply won't happen. Thank you.

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MR. CAROTHERS: All right. Thank you very much, Jackson. Next we are going to turn to Hisham Melhem.

HISHAM MELHEM: Jackson, that was short.

MR. DIEHL: (Chuckles.)

MR. MELHEM: Okay, there is very little that I disagree with Marina, although I probably put myself a little bit on her left, literally and physically, I guess, as I am here. I think we should be more forceful – or at least, the new president of the United States should be more forceful in promoting democracy, but learning from the pitfalls and blunders of the Bush administration. And since I am going to be very critical of the Bush administration's approach to democracy promotion in the region, let me start by trying to be a little bit magnanimous to George Bush and be charitable and say, at least, in his second inaugural speech, he tried – or at least he said – I underline said – the right things.

This is the first time where you have an American president who would admit publicly that for the last 60 years, through both Republican and Democratic administrations, this great country, this great democracy looked the other way when our friends in the Arab and the Muslim world were engaged in massive violations of the basic rights of their own people, and we did it in the name of stability – security and stability in Middle East and the name of free oil – securing the free flow of oil from the Gulf, and in the name of setting up alliances against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. That was a breathtakingly honest statement made by a president of the United States. Not even Jimmy Carter dared to make that kind of a sweeping statement. The problem is everything he has said and done afterwards was calamitous.

And the practical approach was truly, literally disastrous. For the Bush administration to think for one moment that it could radically transform the Arab world in the shadow of its breathtakingly ambitious, not to say imperial enterprise in Iraq, was the height of folly. The United States does have an image problem in the Arab world. And the more the United States, as Marina correctly said and as Jackson would agree, has a credibility problem – not only when it comes to Iraq and Palestine, but specifically when it comes to the democracy promotion agenda. I mean, there are really serious doubts there in the minds of Arabs. Very few people in the Arab world believe that the United States is truly, truly interested in democratizing the Arab world, particularly those states that are close to the United States, that have been close to the United States traditionally, from Iraq on the west, to the Arabian Peninsula in the east.

The Bush administration's grandiose vision of Iraq as a beacon of democracy, as a model of democracy for the rest of the Middle East were quickly buried in Iraq's political – arid political landscape. I mean, how outlandish was it for the president of the United States to tell us in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, somewhat 2007 – luckily, he stopped saying it – to compare Iraq after the invasion with Germany and Japan following the Second World War. I mean, I can give you a list of how wrong he was. I mean, when you engage in historical analogy, buddy, you had better know some history. And nothing that was correct in the case

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of Japan and Germany after the American occupation of those two states following the Second World War can be said to be applicable to Iraq today – none of it.

The fact that Japan and Germany were homogeneous; Iraq is heterogeneous. Japan, you know, industrial state; Iraq was not. Japan and Germany had a clear-cut national ethos, national well-defined identity; you cannot say that about Iraq. My friends, the Iraqis, I hope they will forgive me – I mean, Iraq is like the Lebanese. You scratch them a little bit, even the most sophisticated (zinnia ?) – you know, wearing expensive ties – like mine – (laughter) – gift from my wife – you know, you scratch them a little bit beyond that veneer of modernity, if you will, and sophistication, you know, there lurks a tribal figure, a clannish figure, a Turcoman, a Kurd, a Shi'a, a Sunni. I mean, Iraq is in the process of becoming a nation. This was not the case of Germany and Japan. And we can go on and on. The neighborhood around Germany and Japan wanted the Americans to succeed after the Second World War. The neighborhood around Iraq, some of them want the Americans to bleed, to put it bluntly.

So anyway, in fact, Iraq's descent to hell, if you will, served the autocrats of the region – I mean, particularly Assad Jr. in Damascus, who tried to discredit the reform movement in Syria, especially those Syrian reformers who want to deal with the United States, by just pointing to Iraq and say, look, this is how America is experimenting with democracy in the Arab world. Is that what you need? Do you need the chaos, the so-called creative chaos that the Americans have brought to Iraq? And that is how Iraq was used by people like Assad.

Now, clearly, as Marina said, there were many flaws in the American approach to democracy promotion. But one of them is the easiest one, the lack of consistency. The United States was never consistent in criticizing human-rights violations, in oppressing reformers in the Arab world when these violations occur in those friendly countries to the United States, or when they occur only in the bad places from Sudan, to Syria, to other states. And in fact, we have seen at how the United States recoiled into a cocoon-like situation after the Islamists made, much to their chagrin – my personal chagrin – made major successes in the elections that occurred in Iraq, in Palestine, in Lebanon, in Egypt, and in Jordan, and other places.

One of the biggest flaws was the naïve belief that elections are a panacea, that elections are somehow synonymous with democracy. Anybody who knows anything about democracy will tell you that it is a more complex system than just elections. You can have elections – and for crying out loud, I mean, Hitler and Mussolini reached power by elections. Elections are only one aspect of democracy. Rule of law, checks and balances, decentralization – all of these things that you associate with democracy. And elections are only one aspect of it.

And it was, again, breathtakingly naïve for this administration not to learn any lessons from Eastern Europe, where – and I think Marina somewhat alluded to that – you had a more vibrant civil society in those states. Czechoslovakia was not a dead society. And then, the democracy movement with solidarity and others, labor union, you know. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, the land was not as arid in Eastern Europe as it is in the Arab world. Now, notwithstanding, the experimentation with

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democratic forms of governance in the so-called liberal era in the Arab world – and I will give you two examples – Iraq and Egypt between the First and the Second World War.

When we had more or less a political life, we had political parties; we had monarchies that were not rampant. I mean, Iraq did not see the kind of massive killing during the monarchical regime. And you know, believe me, for an old leftist, like myself, saying these things about the monarchical regime is shocking to me. But we have seen that after the emergence of the one-party rule in Syria, the one-party rule in Egypt, and one-party rule in Iraq – in those days, there was a semblance of political life, a freer press, not free press, not real full-fledged genuine political life, but there was political life in those societies.

To talk about democracy in Iraq, when the country was physically and literally pulverized by one of the most horrendous autocratic – I mean, autocratic – almost totalitarian regime. I mean, the closest regime in the Arab world that could be called totalitarian at that time was Saddam Hussein, where every facet of life in Iraq was controlled by that regime in Baghdad in a way that not even the British colonists could manage to control Iraq between the two World Wars. To naively think that you are going to a place like that not understanding the pulse of these people, not understanding what was in the hearts and mind of those 20-something Iraqis who were born under Saddam Hussein. And to believe the lies of Ahmed Chalabi that this is a “secular,” quote, unquote, society. Even some nuts who roamed the hallways of some American think tanks keep telling us, even till this moment, Iraq is a secular state. Get over it. Get over it.

What secular state are we talking about? I mean, I remember the Americans in Baghdad, as well as in Washington being horrified. Two weeks after the fall of Baghdad, the first Ashura, when it occurred – when they so literally – tens of thousands of young men, 20-something marching from Baghdad in the center to Najaf in the south, a hundred miles away, beating themselves senseless. What is the deal? Secular society that Ahmed Chalabi told us about? Nonsense. And anyway – so – but again, they did not learn the lessons of Eastern Europe. They did not learn the lessons of the caucuses in Central Asia.

Now, what had happened briefly, I'll say – what had happened following the collapse of the Soviet Union in those places? Snap elections in Central Asia. And who won? Not the reformers, not the democrats with small D. Who won? Members of the ancien régime. You know? Those who are hungry for power, those who know how to organize, how to mobilize, how to intimidate, and how to twist arms, and they won. They changed their coat. All of a sudden, they discovered the virtues of democracy – I mean, liberalism and some of them become nationalist. And in the past, they were communist apparatchik.

And again, in Iraq, who drove the American agenda on elections? It was a man who lives in incredible isolation in the middle of Najaf and his name is Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. He was the man who imposed on the United States his agenda of having quick elections. And Ayatollah Sistani understood democracy, essentially, to mean demography. We are the Shi'a of Iraq. We represent a simple majority, whatever. We are the inheritors of the new order in Iraq, period. And he was correct, again, in a primitive way – again, in a primitive way. But we allowed Sistani to drive the agenda, not the United States.

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Now, a few words about the new president – well, hopefully, Barack Obama will have a new beginning because I don't think people will give John McCain the kind of honeymoon that they are going to give Barack Obama if he wins. I believe with Marina that the gradual approach is the right approach. And it should be based on understanding the peculiarities of each Arab society – each Arab society. I mean, she is absolutely right. What works or what might work in an ancient civilization, a very complex old society like Egypt – 70, 80 million people – cannot, will not work in Dubai, and in Qatar, and in Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia, and other places. So understanding the peculiarities of each Arab state is important.

At the same time, the new president should be very clear, and very forceful, and very consistent – yeah, I agree with Jackson – about certain principles, certain principles to say we are not interested in revolutionary or transformational change imposed from the outside on these societies. We are not going to recreate in our own images. We are not going to engage in breathtaking political engineering. But we are interested in helping you reform your economies and your polities. We are willing to do that in collaboration with the states – with the existing states when it is possible, when it is not embarrassing for us, and when we can do it in a transparent, open, above-board way.

But if you are going to not allow us to do that or if you are not interested in our support, we will reserve the right to deal in – again, Marina makes one of the few points in the end very clear that the United States should reserve the right to deal, to negotiate, to help those reformers in the Arab world, including the so-called moderate Islamists. And for a radical secularist, like myself, you know, I think the Islamists or some Islamists should be given at least the chance, should be given the benefit of the doubt, if they are willing to engage in elections, provided the elections will not be one man, one vote, one time – and if they are willing to accept the transfer of authority from one election to another.

So far, the experiences under Islamist rule – whether you call the crazy Taliban Islamist or the theocracy in Iran as an example, or Ahmad al Bashir in the Sudan. I mean, much to my chagrin, that is not the kind of Islamist rule that I am looking for – or that is not the kind of Islamist rule that should be tolerated by those people or by the United States. That may be radical, I don't know. But that – there should be a clear rejection, explicit, loud of any kind of massive violations of basic rights in the Arab world. Torture is intolerable under any circumstances. The United States should be loud and quiet in its pressure, if it is possible, when countries, especially friends, who are depending on us and we give them money from your good tax money and my tax money, when they engage in imprisoning, incarcerating human rights activists and political prisoners, be it Egypt, or Syria, or Morocco, or Yemen.

And I think pressure should be applied. The United States should insist on working with civil society, and it should encourage American NGOs and international NGOs to work with the (formers ?), should help train people in organizing. Sometimes, even the basic skills of organizing people – people are not born with and you have to acquire them. And that is wrong for the United States and for NGOs to provide that kind of – these kinds of skills. Any new strategy should take into consideration the fact that most Arabs today, unfortunately, like most Americans, get their news from television.

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And although I am involved in television – but like Jackson, I'm an old print guy, and I'd like to see people read more newspaper and watch less television – the United States should keep in mind that there is a fluid situation, that the Arab world is going through an incredible transformation in which there is a wider blogosphere that exists there, that the bloggers are playing a very important role, that there is a greater – with each passing day, a greater, greater Internet penetration in the Arab world. Everybody uses cell phones. Everybody watches Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, LBC, Nye (ph), you name it.

And I keep reminding people that immediately after the assassination of Rafik Hariri in Beirut, thousands upon thousands of young men and women gathered in Beirut in public squares in the heart of downtown Beirut, and their deliberations and their cries for transparency, for the evacuation of Syrian forces, for accountability, for this and that were covered live by all of these Arab networks. And you had an incredibly interesting electronic town hall meeting, in which thousands of people were participating, in which millions of people were watching them from Morocco to Yemen.

One should take into consideration the fact that this new phenomenon in the Arab world, the proliferation of satellite technology should be used, should be kept in mind. These groups – I'm not saying that this new technology is necessarily going to create new politics. But definitely, this new technology should be creatively used in democracy promotion. And I think that is the last word

MR. CAROTHERS: Okay. Thank you very much. Marina, you may have a few things you would like to respond, but why don't we take a few comments or questions, and then you can incorporate it into then. Yes, in the back there?

Q: Yeah. Ted Kattouf. I found as I listened to the panel – I found myself frankly agreeing quite a bit with Hisham Melhem and his comments. And one of the reasons I agree – and I would like to direct this to Jackson Diehl because I had the impression you were pushing for a very interventionist, very activist, very determined U.S. role in democracy promotion. But in Palestine – I mean, it is well-known that the Palestinians – 68 percent of the Palestinians voted for Mahmoud Abbas, who ran on a peace platform, two states, negotiations. And two-thirds of the Palestinians voted for him. He was in power for one year before there were any parliamentary elections. He got very little support from either the United States – and virtually none from Sharon, who had it in mind to pull unilaterally out of Gaza and not involve Abbas whatsoever in that.

Then we had parliamentary elections. Fatah, which was corrupt and undisciplined, totally mismanaged the elections. I don't think they had to lose the elections. I think they could have probably eeked out a bare majority if they had any discipline, but they were running five candidates in a one-candidate district against Hamas, for instance. So Hamas wins those elections, which the United States absolutely insisted be held, even when the Palestinians and even the Israelis had a lot of doubts that this was the time to go ahead.

MR. CAROTHERS: If you can –

Q: Okay, I'm going to, but I need – I want him to comment on this. So the question is – and then, of course, we were determined to make Hamas fail, so NGOs,

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government officials, nobody could deal with even teachers in Palestine who were employed by the government, or healthcare workers or the like. And now Gaza is, like, the world's biggest prison camp, so we have mass punishment as a result of all this. I mean, is that really the approach the U.S. should take? Is that the kind of interventionist approach to get democracy? I think we have just done a lot to discredit it.

MR. CAROTHERS: Okay, we are going to take a couple more. We have a woman here. Right behind you, there is a microphone.

Q: Mervat Hatem. Marina, I'm wondering if your suggestion that in the case of Egypt, for instance, small measures like allowing the government to get out of the political registration of political parties might actually redefine the political map, which raises the bigger question, which I think has not been touched on in the panel is the unacceptability of the Muslim Brotherhood – and for that matter, Hamas in Palestine – the unacceptability of any Islamist victory, electoral victory that also poses a very primary obstacle to democracy promotion. I mean, if you look at the map of different countries in the region, the opposition groups tend to be Islamist. And therefore, if you are going to push democracy promotion, you have to tolerate also the possibility that they may win elections, and that they can come to power through the ballot box. That does not seem to be an acceptable alternative. And therefore – I mean, is the only other solution to redefine the political map by allowing other forces to appear in the political arena, and which may be more acceptable to the United States?

That, to me, is hugely problematic. You either want to do democracy promotion irregardless of who comes to power. And in this way, you can gain credibility or you can basically continue to resist the reality, the political reality in many of these countries, which is that the Islamists tend to be one of the most important political forces. And therefore, you have to tolerate the possibility that they may come into power. And I can only say that the case of Turkey is very interesting. They came to power through the political process. And it was not one time, one vote, and sort of the end of the political process. And therefore, I mean I just want for us to also look at the fact that if we want democracy promotion, we cannot possibly also dictate who is an acceptable political partner in that.

MR. CAROTHERS: We are going to take one more. This woman in the black. Sorry, please be patient. We will try to get to as many people as we can. Thanks.

Q: Hi, I'm Helena Cobban. I'm a Friend in Washington with the Friends Committee on National Legislation. Just to pick up on what my predecessor said, I mean, I think democracy as a system, you have to have the rules and the institutions and the agreement that there will be differences, and that they will not be dealt with through violence. That is the basis – that is kind of the core understanding. That is why I was very disturbed by what you said, Jackson, when you said that, you know, we should – the government should protest robustly when our liberal Democrats, who are imprisoned or have their papers closed.

No! When anybody has it, we should. Otherwise, you know, we – it's an illiberal form of democracy, which kind of brings me onto another question that none of you really raised, which is that you saw – you seemed all to assume that the United States is a kind of

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unilateral command presence in the region. What about the possibilities of actually as part of this more modest approach, working much more in coalition with other democratic powers around the world, including with Turkey whose experience has been unique in terms of allowing moderate Islamist parties to arise. Or South Africa in terms of looking at the way they deal with a very pluralistic population or India. I mean, I think this idea – could you just speak to the possibilities of doing it not as, you know, made in Washington, but as a kind of – not even a league of democracies because that terrifies me. That is a very polarizing idea. But through the United Nations, for example, using a lot of the wonderful experience that they have.

MR. CAROTHERS: Okay. Thanks. Jackson, you seem to be attracting some attention. (Laughter.) Why don't you answer and then –

MR. DIEHL: Well, first, on the good question about the Palestinians. Actually, I heard Marina (ph) say earlier something that I very much agree with. And I was pleased to hear her say it because that means there are at least two people in Washington who believe this – (chuckles) – which is – maybe not many more, that the problem with the Palestinian elections was not the elections, but what happened afterwards.

I think you have to go back and remember exactly what was happening in 2005 when those elections were scheduled. After Yasser Arafat's death, there was a power struggle going on, an inevitable power struggle between Hamas and Fatah over who was going to control the Palestinian Authority. And Hamas wanted its share of power, what it considered to be its legitimate share of power. And the fact is, if you're ever going to have a stable Palestinian government, you're going to have to be able to provide a space for an Islamic current. You just cannot avoid that, and hopefully not one that's violent, that shouldn't be tolerated. But that current will have to exist.

So the Palestinians were having a power struggle at that time. It was turning violent. There were gun battles going on between Fatah and Hamas and the Palestinians themselves decided in 2005 – not us, they – decided that the way to resolve this problem was to have an election. Rather than have a civil war, they said, let's have a legislative election; that will give Hamas the share they say they want. And so I think, at the time, there were problems with it, yes, we had to – there were compromises that had to be made, in particular, allowing Hamas to participate in the elections without disarming. But the fact was that that was the best way out of the situation that existed then.

In retrospect, you still – you have to say, if we'd allowed – if we had said, no election, go ahead and resolve it in the street, the result would have been that today, Hamas would be in control not just of Gaza, but the West Bank as well. And moving on to what Helena said, I didn't mean to say that we should only support liberal democrats. Of course, we should protest when anyone who is peacefully seeking a democratic system is thrown into jail, including, for example, members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

But the fact is that the Egyptian government has focused its repression on liberal democrats precisely because they don't want that alternative to exist. And that's the one we need to work for.

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And just one other comment. This woman over here mentioned the small measure of opening up the political parties' registration. It's an enormously important measure; it's not a small one and it will be very, very difficult to do. I think that's what we have to recognize. The Egyptian government does not want to do that. We've been trying to get them to do it for years already; they refuse. And it's not something that can be accomplished easily and I think that's one of the things we have to recognize; it's going to involve a conflict.

MR. MELHEM: Can I say just one thing, quickly?

I mean, not all Islamists are alike. And there is a difference between armed Islamist groups and peaceful Islamist groups. The comparison between al Ikhwan and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Hamas or Hezbollah doesn't hold water. And while I can see why the United States would have problems dealing and negotiating with Hezbollah or with Hamas because of their past, because of their armed nature, because of what they've done, and because they ask them to do certain things before they open up negotiations with them – while I could see that – indicates that Egypt is different with the Islamists and other places when they are willing to play by the rules, let's say, and not use violence and coercion.

As a secularist myself, I mean, I am wary of them. I don't necessarily deal with them. I think you deal with them with very open eyes. Let's put it blankly. At least, that's my personal opinion. And now, Hamas, after the elections and after Hamas takeover of Gaza last year, presented a huge problem for the Palestinian leadership, for the American leadership, and for the Israeli leadership. And one can say, safely, that there was a scandalous lack of imagination in dealing with the problem named Hamas last year. And whatever the United States thinks of that group – and this is not a group that I like, I think allowing the siege to continue, allowing Gaza to fester, as my friend, Ted Kattouf said, "as a huge prisoner," preventing even at times American NGOs from providing basic help like education and others is unconscionable.

It has nothing to do with democracy promotion. And because we are – and because we have allowed the situation to fester like that, the view in the Arab world, as Mervat said, I think expressed it somewhat, is that, well, they don't want democracy because they don't want the Islamists to come to power. And I agree with you. In general, if the Islamists win in Egypt in fair elections, you know, I would have to take that, you know, I would get a huge gulp and say, okay, let's see what they will do, if they are going to respect these rules or not.

But what we've done in Gaza with the United States is allowed the situation to continue in Gaza. And it's not only the American responsibility, by the way. It's a Palestinian responsibility, Arab responsibility, and Israeli responsibility. It's not helping our credibility, American credibility in the Middle East.

MR. CAROTHERS: Marina, just a few remarks. Then I'd like to get back to the audience.

MS. OTTAWAY: Yes. Mervat, I did not mean the idea of allowing parties to register – it's not to try to create an alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, you know very well that the Muslim Brothers and al Walsat Party will be the first one to seek

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registration if it was possible. So what I am talking about is opening a process that is fair and that allows all sort of political parties to register. I have nothing against the issue of political participation of Islamist organization in the political process. I would go a little further than Hisham has gone because, yes, there is a difference between armed groups and those that are not armed, but it is not so easy to bend the groups that are armed from participating in the process. Lebanon has enough problems, but if you try to ban Hezbollah from participating in the elections, then we really would have very significant problems.

On the issue that Helena has raised about should U.S. try to act with other countries? Aside from the problem, the suggestion of Turkey, which right now may not work very well because it remains to be seen whether there is still going to be an AKP in Turkey, let alone an AKP that can be part of a broader coalition elsewhere. What it really goes to, my answer, is to the heart of what one tries to do in a paper like this. It would be a great idea, it would be a very nice thought that the United States might act not in this commanding presence that you are talking about, but in a more multilateral, more cooperative fashion with other countries. In the same way, it would be a very nice idea if the next U.S. government was willing to take risks in terms of in the Middle East applying this very clear-headed, very consistent policy that Jackson was suggesting.

I don't think there is any chance that neither of those two will happen. So that my attempt and then – and that is why I set such modest goals. And that is why essentially – I like what you are saying, but I disagree with you – is that I know that it is not going to happen. I mean, maybe I am unduly pessimistic, but that is my conclusion. And therefore, I think, what I am trying to do is to suggest us something that is in the realm of what perhaps could be implemented. That's all.

MR. CAROTHERS: Okay. Yeah, several more –

Q: I'm Mike Haltzel from Johns Hopkins SAIS. Three really first-rate presentations, thank you. It seems to me that a precondition for promoting democracy abroad in the Middle East or anywhere else – they should be practicing democracy and observing human rights at home. Now, I understand that U.S. policy in the Middle East is obviously, by far and away, the most important factor in people's opinion of what we are doing. But I am wondering whether or not domestic American events play any role at all. I mean, I'm thinking about Supreme Court decision that says that prisoners accused of terrorism should have the same rights – have to have the same legal rights as U.S. citizens. What would happen if – as I am sure will happen whoever wins the presidency now – torture is forbidden under any circumstances, or if we close Guantanamo, or if we hold free and fair elections with no more Floridas, or even Obama's candidacy.

Does any of this play even a minimal role in the Middle East in terms of the view of the United States?

MR. CAROTHERS: We have someone down here? I'll come back to you two in the middle.

Q: My name is George Hashimi (ph). And I am a practicing journalist writing for Middle East newspapers. I'm disappointed a little bit that the subject of journalism hasn't

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been discussed. I know Hisham at the end touched upon his new field nowadays. But print journalism is a very, very important factor in the promotion of democracy in the Middle East.

And I want to mention two points here. We need a lot of training for journalists in this country and in Europe. This is very, very important. The other thing is, I think, advertising Western advertising in Middle Eastern newspapers is essential. You hardly see American or British or European advertising in newspapers to make them independent and stop depending on government subsidies or – (inaudible) – organizations in the area. Thank you.

MR. CAROTHERS: Okay, we have two in the center, the gentleman in the yellow suit; then here, we'll come here and we'll finish up. We're going to try to finish by quarter to 2:00. Right behind you; right behind you, sorry.

Q: Yeah, Michael Hudson. These are three very stimulating presentations. But it seems to me, excuse me, that the comments that were made in general were probably being made, say, around the year 1919 in London and Paris and maybe the United States, when the big powers were contemplating how to deal with a Middle East that was going to come thoroughly under their control. That is to say, it seems to me there is a presumption of a kind of colonial project that can be and should be implemented.

Now, maybe that's true. Although I think when Zbigniew Brzezinski said some time ago that the United States was acting in Iraq as a colonial power in a post-colonial world, he was onto something quite important. And so I think Helena's comment about made in Washington is a good one. And I appreciate Marina's effort to propose something more modest. But I wonder if it's really modest enough? And I'm wondering if we shouldn't just put the whole democracy promotion project to bed for a while and let folks out there work it out for themselves. That's partly because as has been indicated, we have blotted our copybooks so badly in trying to promote it in the last eight years that our credibility and our political leverage is way, way down.

So one wonders, then, whether we shouldn't deliberately stay away from this. Now, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be totally ignoring all of the bad things that happen out there. But isn't there a difference between trying to do political engineering in these countries to tell them how to run themselves and organize themselves and so forth, and trying to exert leverage on the authoritarian governments with which we have important relationships? And it seems to me there, through conditionality programs, through arm-twisting and so forth, you can at least pressure governments not to behave so badly in terms of torture, human rights, et cetera, et cetera. So I would propose something even more modest than what Marina was suggesting.

MR. CAROTHERS: Okay, thank you. Briefly, we're short of time.

Q: Yeah, thank you. This is Martez Harannam. Let me just say very quickly that I'm impressed by the panelists and the presentations they've made. I've been here for a year and this is the first time that I think there's some rational constructive thinking on what to do on the issues you've raised.

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One point relates to essentially what Marina has put forward as a policy recommendation, I think, vis-à-vis Egypt when she spoke about the registration of parties, or opening up for the registration of parties in Egypt. In Egypt, there are over 20 parties – 23 parties currently – on the political scene in Egypt. And I'm just wondering what number would Marina think of, because the debate right now in Egypt is how to strengthen the current parties on the political scene in Egypt and to help them overcome their internal differences that have in fact weakened them.

And probably as Mr. Hisham would agree, the policy of pressuring is the policy that repels the country of the region as opposed to constructively engaging in the process. And also, the point that this pressuring is in fact the wrong way forward. So I'm glad to hear about the gradual approach, the peculiarities of each country, and the circumstances of each country in your work in recommending what you do. Thank you.

MR. CAROTHERS: Okay, a last comment here, just briefly. Yeah, Mohammed, right here.

Q: Thanks, Gary Mitchell. I'll do this quickly. It really is – it's an issue that's come up in a number of the questions, so I just want to add to it and say that on the question of democracy promotion, I was struck by three elements. One is timing. The second is scale and scope. And the third is delivery mechanism. And what I mean by that is, if it is important for the U.S. to get it's sort of house in order to have credibility in the Middle East. That's going to take some time.

And second, in terms of scale and scope, it seems to me that policy like democracy promotion sort of implies a sort of macro-approach, which I think you're arguing won't work. I mean, I think we have to sort of take the approach that they teach you when you're studying to be a psychoanalyst, which is you have to meet the client where they are.

And then, the third question is, let's assume we all agree that we ought to be doing it, which I'm not sure we do. My question is, we know where to turn if we want to fight a war. You ring the Defense Department and out come the Marines, and the Army, et cetera. Where does the real capacity in the country lie to do individually tailored, not-macro policy, democracy promotion? Who can do it? Who can deliver it?

MR. CAROTHERS: Okay, we have – as the hour grows later, the questions get bigger and bigger. That's okay. But we're going to just finish. I'm going to ask Hisham and then Jackson and Marina just to make a final. But just one minute or less, if you could, Hisham.

MR. MELHEM: Okay, quickly, domestic developments in the United States are extremely crucial. This is your question about what is happening in the region. Today, in the Arab world, if you want to discredit and demonize the United States, you don't have to come up with a coherent, logical argument. All you have to do is just mention some buzzwords, key concepts. Hadifa, Abu Ghirab, Guantanamo, Blackwater – and then you make your argument. Your argument is already made in terms of demonizing the United States.

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On the other hand, it's useful for us – and I'm usually a critic in American media – but also I'm also impressed with the American media. And I know this is a heresy for many people in the Middle East. That's what you should remind the Arabs too – the Supreme Court's decision today, third consecutive decision undermining the hollow argument of the Bush administration regarding the Guantanamo prisoners. Once you point out that the United States is not only the White House, the Supreme Court – unfortunately the Congress does not act as it should have.

Anyway, the American media – it was the American media that uncovered Abu Ghirab, not the Arab media. It was the American media that uncovered the system of prisons run by the CIA, his newspaper. It was the American media, Time Magazine to be specific that uncovered Hadifa. It was the American media, New York Times that did.

One final thing, on the issue of the colonial narrative – Michael did not use the word narrative. Look, the United States is in the Middle East. India is not in the Middle East the way the United States. Turkey, probably even the Turks don't want to be in the Middle East. They think that they are in Europe. If they want to play a role, welcome. And they should play a role. There is an American legacy in the Middle East.

And Michael, the United States cannot watch something like Darfur and not say anything, because if the Americans shut up their mouth as they did when Halabja was taking place – only few Arabs and few Americans who were raising hell, because we were supporting Saddam Hussein when he was involved in that massive barbaric campaign of genocide against the Kurds. We did nothing. And when the United States, when something like that happens in the Middle East, and the Americans do nothing, the Americans will be blamed.

The Americans were blamed because they were late intervening and stopping the killing in Europe because Europeans did nothing to stop the Kosovars and the Bosnians from being slaughtered en masse. And that's why, call it the burden of imperialism; call it the burden of leadership; call it the burden of recent history. The United States cannot escape but taking a position. Our problem is that the American position was never consistent. American values stopped at the water's edge. And that's the issue that should be discussed, not that the United States should raise voice.

If the Chinese are benefiting from the bloodletting in Darfur, want to change their policies? Welcome.

MR. CAROTHERS: Okay, Jackson.

MR. DIEHL: I just want to quickly address the question of is this colonialism and should we just drop it. The desire for democratic change in the Middle East does not originate with the United States. It is a powerful, powerful sentiment in the Middle East itself being pushed by people in the Middle East themselves. And anybody who wants to sign on to the Internet can see that, can see the literally tens of thousands of Egyptians who have signed up publicly and attached their names to groups calling for liberal democracy. This is a powerful desire for change coming from the Middle East itself.

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Secondly, the status quo there is untenable. The current economic and political systems are rotting and they are crumbling. Something is going to replace them. We have a vital stake in supporting those people who want liberal democracy to replace it.

MR. CAROTHERS: Thank you. Marina, last comments.

MS. OTTAWAY: Okay, yeah. I don't think changes domestically – I don't believe that if the United States addressed the sum of its own democratic deficits, it would make a big difference in terms of – because what I hear all the time, I mean, and it also worked at the opinion polls reflect – is that there is a general belief out there that United States is a democratic country. Yes, all this criticism Hisham was talking about are really real. We hear them all the time and so on. But by and large, there is not a perception out there that the United States itself is not democratic.

Going to what the problem that Michael Hudson raised, I disagree with you because I think there is what I hear all the time is the demand for the United States to do more. The question is what should we be doing? But I don't think that if the United States had just pulled out of the entire enterprise, that would be particularly welcomed. The problem still remains, since what we do is never going to be enough and it's never going to be exactly the right thing, we continue to be criticized. But I don't hear people – what I hear all the time is you need to do more; you need to be more proactive and not just pick up your marbles and go home.

Brief reply to the gentleman from the U.S. embassy –

MR. CAROTHERS: Egyptian.

MS. OTTAWAY: From the Egyptian embassy, sorry. (Chuckles.) Yes, there are 23 parties in the country. How many of them are alive? And I don't think that the government has played a fair game here. And it has allowed parties that had the potential for becoming real-life parties to register. It's not a question of number; it's a question of how the process is taking place. I know that you cannot possibly agree with me. But I wanted to put it together.

Do we have the capacity to do some of the things that I'm suggesting? I think there is plenty of analytical capacity in this country. The question is do we want to try to bring them to bear? And are there other people who could do it, not just with governments but with civil society groups in various country to try to think through some of these issues? Of course there are. The question is, do we decide to try and – I don't mean to say that we have all the answers. But nobody has all the answers. The question is, we are not using – I mean, we have tried to make the democracy promotion enterprise a very bureaucratic enterprise where people try to do the same things over and over again.

So that's – finally, journalists – yes, there is need. There is always need for more. But I don't think that's the main problem of the Arab world today. We are not in the days of Nasser. I think there is a lot of information out there. There is always need for more. I'm not saying that there is complete freedom of the press and so on. Newspapers get into

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serious trouble. But I would argue that that is lack of information, lack of access to information is not the central problem of the Arab world now.

MR. CAROTHERS: All right, thank you. Well, I think we've made some progress. These are difficult issues. And we've aired quite a few opinions. I want to thank Marina, Jackson, and Hisham for their contributions, and all of you. And we'll see you again another time.

(Applause.)

(END)