Democratizing the Middle East?

LIGHTING THE PATH TO UNDERSTANDING

Occasional Paper No. 2

The Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies

Tufts UNIVERSITY

Second occasional paper of the Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies, Tufts University, as part of the FCEMS Series on Lighting the Path to Understanding

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A report on the conference *Democratizing the Middle East?*
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The Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies

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Preface

The past year was a very difficult one in the Middle East. The tragic events of 2006 demonstrate the need for dialogue on the key issues affecting the region today. Here at the Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies (FCEMS), we aim to provide an academic forum for such exchanges through our lecture series, seminars, round-table discussions, conferences—and publications such as this one.

Occasional Paper No. 2 of the FCEMS Series on Lighting the Path to Understanding addresses democratization in the Middle East, and is based on the January 2006 conference *Democratizing the Middle East?* The publication summarizes the presenters' remarks from the conference. It also includes an introduction that provides context, highlights the conference's conclusions, and lists major themes.

The conference featured many notable themes, but I single out one in particular: the prevalence of misperceptions about the Middle East and democracy. We heard at the conference that many wrongly assume there is no democratic tradition in the Middle East; we were told that there are misunderstandings about the status of the region's women; and we were informed that domestic politics in the Middle East are often misread by those in Washington. Our mission at the center is to generate a greater understanding of the Eastern Mediterranean region, an area comprising modern-day Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Israel, and Turkey. By bringing these misperceptions to the attention of our readers in government, policymaking, academia, journalism, and the general public, we hope we are contributing to this mission.

Thanks are in order to a special group of individuals whose generous support, advice, and assistance made both last January's conference and this paper possible: Mr. Fares I. Fares, trustee and member of the Fares Center executive committee; Provost Jamshed Bharucha and the Office of the Provost at Tufts; Dean Stephen W. Bosworth and The Fletcher School at Tufts; Dean Robert Hollister and the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts; Dr. Jamil al-Dandany; Ms. Peri Bearman; Dr. Farhad Kazemi; Dr. Vali R. Nasr; Dr. Augustus Richard Norton; and Ambassador William A. Rugh.

Dr. Leila Fawaz
Founding Director, Fares Center
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Introduction

Given the tumultuous state of affairs in much of today's Middle East, it is often tempting to regard democratization as a backburner issue. Iraq is riven by sectarian strife that many now believe has exploded into civil war. Iran is embroiled in a diplomatic crisis with the West about its nuclear program. And Lebanese and Israelis are recovering from a brief but vicious war.

However, through it all, the George W. Bush administration appears intent on continuing to promote democracy. For several years, we have heard the refrain: we must nurture Iraq's fledgling democracy and help it develop into a model for the region. While the 2006 U.S. midterm election results and the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group may have sparked a reappraisal of democratization policy in Iraq, the administration pushes on with its efforts elsewhere in the region. For example, by the end of 2007, the U.S. government plans to spend more than $80 million to support democracy-promotion programming in Iran. And U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice celebrated UN Security Council Resolution 1701—passed last August to end the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah—as "a victory for all who are committed to moderation and democracy in the Middle East." Some commentators have argued that the latest round of Mideast violence only amplifies the importance of democratization, because more democracy in the region would have helped prevent recent bloodshed involving Israel, Hamas, and Hezbollah.

CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRATIZATION

All the same, efforts to democratize the Middle East are clearly fraught with challenges. *Democratizing the Middle East?,* a Tufts University conference held in January 2006, sought to put into perspective U.S. democracy-promotion policies in the Middle East. And in doing so, the conference proceedings underscored some of the difficulties faced by democracy activists—both locally and U.S.-based. For example, even as democratic reform spreads across the region, the power of governing regimes remains formidable. They highly regulate the activities of pro-democracy groups in civil

society, and they rarely hesitate to use violence. As one presenter argued, Hosni Mubarak's monopoly on "coercive resources" neutralized Egyptian pro-democracy movements during the 2005 elections in Egypt. And, as another panelist stated, while leaders do increase societal freedoms, their motivations are often strategic, and these same freedoms can just as quickly be curtailed.

Democratizing the Middle East also creates challenges for U.S. foreign policy in the region. One participant argued that democratization amounts to a paradox for the United States, as it catapults Islamists into power who reject long-held U.S. strategic interests in the region—particularly a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and a continued American military presence. Actually, contended other participants, popular opposition to U.S. policies in the Mideast—including democratization—is already widespread. According to public opinion data gathered across the Arab World and presented at the conference, strong Arab majorities perceive the United States as one of the world's greatest threats, and U.S. pledges to spread democracy are regarded with skepticism and suspicion.

A broader challenge lies in recalibrating democracy-promotion strategies so that they help recapture what several presenters described as the "dignity" of the Middle East's people. Conference recommendations to hasten such an outcome included a more patient, engaged, and multilateral approach to democratization that emphasizes broader, sustained development and even self-determination—so that people may at last have the freedom to decide their own affairs, including the delineation of their national borders.

COMMON THEMES

The conference was not simply about highlighting challenges. *Democratizing the Middle East?* also sought to make a significant contribution to an American understanding of the Middle East. In this vein, conference participants—drawn from the ranks of academics, journalists, and democracy activists in both the Middle East and the United States—employed historical, legal, social, religious, and political lenses to provide context for the debate on democratizing the Middle East. The opening keynote address traced the region's experience with democracy over the last few centuries. The five conference sessions examined constitutions and the law, elections and civil society, religion and democracy, women and democracy, and American interests and Middle East democracy. The concluding remarks considered the state of the Middle East today and how democratization may best serve it in the future.

Several prime themes emerged from the two-day conference:

- *The strength of religion.* Islam is a bona fide force in Middle East democracy. Religious political parties are highly adept at mobilizing supporters and obtaining financial support; their secular counterparts lag far behind. As for their electoral prospects? Success in open political systems is "incontrovertible." Islam also functions as an enabler of democracy by enhancing political participation; Turkish religious parties, for example, have mobilized previously nonpolitical conservative Muslim women. A major conference implication was that democracy-promotion efforts must engage Islam—as one speaker noted, political reform will be hard-pressed to succeed if Islamists are left "out in the garage."
- *The perils of promoting democracy by external means.* The legacy of foreign interventions in the region is powerful, and they have rarely benefited democracy. Efforts to democratize from afar are by no means doomed to failure, yet they must be mindful of local realities—including the presence of local reformers seeking to promote democracy. And when overseeing democratization from overseas, it is easy to misunderstand the machinations of local Mideast politics—which often determine the extent of democratic reform.
- *The need for patience.* Though the Middle East faces a slew of urgent dilemmas, it is important to adopt democratization policies with a more long-term and measured framework. Democratic change in nations has historically taken decades to fully materialize, so support for it must be steadfast. Additionally, views on democracy—particularly among Islamic thinkers—are still in a state of evolution and not fully developed.

- *Convergence with the West*. The notion of a "clash of civilizations" is unrealistic, particularly given the similar beliefs held by the West and the Middle East about democracy. For several centuries, people from both sides have embraced liberalism and constitutionalism. Women's rights and status have followed similar trajectories in the Middle East and the West. And religion's increasing presence in the public sphere is observed in both the Middle East and the United States today.

RELEVANCE FOR TODAY

The conference's conclusions, though made some months ago, are highly relevant when applied to the situation on the ground today. Regime-led opposition toward civil society groups and pro-democracy reformers is still considerable. The *Journal of Democracy* has chronicled how governments are increasingly using campaigns of meddling, threats, crackdowns, and foreign funds restrictions against locally based democracy assistance programs. These campaigns are occurring around the globe, and especially in "hybrid" states—such as Egypt—that combine elements of both authoritarianism and democracy. Additionally, Mideast reformers contend that when given opportunities to dialogue with the region's leaders, regimes are not receptive. According to the *Washington Post*, democracy activists attending a late 2006 forum on civic participation in the Middle East complained that government ministers in attendance were unwilling to engage in meaningful discussion.

The challenge of designing democratization programs that improve the plight of the citizenry also resonates in today's Middle East, where citizens (particularly in Iraq) plead for security and basic services such as electricity. Last fall, U.S. federal auditors faulted major U.S. reconstruction contractors for a series of construction failures in Iraq—including health clinics with structural deficiencies and a police college in Baghdad with plumbing so poor that human waste dripped from ceilings. Such inglorious conditions presumably do not provide fertile ground for a reclaiming of dignity.

The conference also underscored the powerful role of Islam in Middle East democracy. Today, some of the most popular and politically successful groups in the region—Hamas, Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Justice and Development Party in Turkey and Morocco—are Islamic. Egypt's distinguished democracy activist, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, writing last August, noted that "mainstream Islamists with broad support, developed civic dispositions and services to provide"—many of whom fill out the ranks of these popular religious parties, he pointed out—"are the most likely actors in building a new Middle East . . . whether we like it or not, these are the facts."

One also discerns from the blunt statements of locally based democracy activists a continued uneasiness with democracy-promotion efforts waged from abroad. Last March, Morocco's Driss Benzekri, pointing to democratic reform led by his country's monarchy, insisted that "this work has to be done from the inside. We do not follow the Bush model." Iran's Emad Baghi, speaking last August, contended that "the best thing the Americans can do for democracy in Iran is not to support it," while his compatriot Shadi Vatanparast insisted that finding a "homegrown solution" is a matter of pride for Iranians. These reformers all perceive U.S.-led democratization as tainted by unpopular American policies in the Middle East. Yet at the other end of the spectrum, some reformers criticize Washington's democracy-promotion policies for being insufficient. On the eve of Bahraini elections late last November, some democracy activists in that nation lamented how decreased U.S. pressure emboldens the Gulf state's leaders to resist implementing political reforms.

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Conference participants, though often critical of U.S. democratization policies, expressed general support for the idea of democratic reform in the Middle East. They also highlighted the successes so far, including women's grass roots efforts on legal reform and the work of activists such as Ibrahim. How, then, might the United States move forward on democratization? Based on the judgments of presenters, one might propose a course of action along the lines of the following: proceed slowly,

being mindful of the sensitive nature of its status as an outsider; be cognizant of local desires and realities; and be willing to engage Islamic figures—all while recalling the shared views the people of the United States and the Middle East have held on issues of democracy over the years.

Michael Kugelman
MALD 2005
The Fletcher School
Tufts University

Note: All conference presenters were given opportunities to approve the following summaries for publication.

Keynote Address: "Historical Precedents for Middle East Democracy"

Speaker: **Rashid Khalidi**, Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies, and Director, Middle East Institute, Columbia University

Chair: The Honorable **Stephen W. Bosworth**, Dean, The Fletcher School, Tufts University

Dr. Khalidi chronicled the trajectory of democracy in the Middle East over the last few centuries, arguing that it has made a major imprint on the region's recent past—a reality often overshadowed by the powerful myth of a Middle East historically inhospitable toward democracy.

Why the tendency to think of the Middle East's past as largely devoid of democracy? One answer is that over the years the region's governments have indeed been highly undemocratic. Historically, the Middle East has been home to some of the world's most authoritarian regimes, whether military dictatorships (as in Algeria, Iraq, and Syria) or absolute monarchies (as in Saudi Arabia). The region has also seen "hybrid systems" (such as in Iran, Morocco, Iran, and Yemen) that combine elements of democracy and authoritarianism. Even the democratic state of Israel, Dr. Khalidi noted, has ruled over Palestinians for much of its history.

Further, certain Islamist political movements have harbored an "illiberal strand" that has grown particularly pronounced in recent years. Dr. Khalidi rejected the notion that this highly unusual manifestation of political Islam is representative of Islam "as a whole and for all time." Nonetheless, the persistence of this anomalous brand of political Islam, combined with the history of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, contributes to the fallacious view that democracy has no past in the region.

Democracy is messy. To truly understand it, one must avoid the temptation "to idealize" norms (as theorists do) or to succumb to the "mindless empiricism" of historians (who, as Dr. Khalidi put it,

are often too focused on analyzing the trees to describe the forest). He defined two key indicators of a healthy democracy. One is the existence of limitations on executive power. In "highly evolved systems," such limitations include constitutions, the rule of law, and a system of checks and balances. The challenges of maintaining these limits, however, are considerable. War, for example, often reinforces the powers of the executive. Dr. Khalidi quoted from a letter James Madison penned to Thomas Jefferson in 1795: "War is in fact the true nurse of executive aggrandizement." These words, the professor reflected, are highly relevant for the Middle East, a region often buffeted by war, and for the United States, which is currently waging the War on Terror, which may last indefinitely.

A second feature of a robust democracy is an active public sphere—one that includes mass and party politics and a "vigorous" press. These components are not without their drawbacks. A free press can be a "gutter" press, while party politics are "not always edifying."

These two elements of democracy, according to Dr. Khalidi, have figured prominently in the Middle East's recent history. During a period spanning the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, Arab, Iranian, and Turkish elites were deeply affected by European liberalism, a set of ideas embracing limits on rulers' power; the consent of the governed; and mass political participation. It is misguided, he maintained, to conclude that liberal ideas influenced only a few Middle East elites at this time; on the contrary, the appeal of liberalism was widespread. Both education and the press grew across the region, hastening the spread of liberal ideas.

Liberalism was not welcomed by all, however. Middle East autocrats regarded it as a threat to their absolute rule. Western democracies valued their relations with these leaders, so European governments opposed the adoption of liberal ideas in the Middle East. As a result, Dr. Khalidi explained, the United Kingdom intervened in Egypt in the late nineteenth century in response to a political crisis rooted in constitutional issues. And later, in Iran, the ruling shah—supported by European nations—would manage to avoid the imposition of limitations on his rule.

What must be understood amid these apparent setbacks to liberalism, argued Dr. Khalidi, is that pressure for constitutional limits on arbitrary executive power persevered despite the resistance of Middle East autocrats and European governments. During the period of 1908-1918—one marked by local, regional, and world war—the desire for constitutional rule continued to grow. Following World War I, parliamentary systems were established in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria.

Unfortunately, noted Dr. Khalidi, these new systems faced constant Western intervention. Indeed, the interwar period represented the apogee of not only liberalism in the Middle East, but also of European colonial influence. Two centuries of interventions in the region have done little for democracy, he said. Military interventions are in fundamental opposition to self-rule, and the imposition of democracy is "a contradiction in terms." Over these years, foreign military operations (which Dr. Khalidi distinguished from the mostly beneficial nonmilitary encounters between the region and the West) largely snuffed out liberal reform in the Middle East—an outcome attributable to foreign powers' preference for weak, illiberal, and highly dependent client regimes that best served the intervening powers' interests.

Political conflict also undermined Mideast democratic institutions in the middle of the twentieth century. Reinforcing his argument that war strengthens executive power and imperils democracy, Dr. Khalidi pointed out that between the 1920s and 1950s—a time of rampant war—the tenuous liberal order in the Middle East collapsed. Fledgling and weak parliamentary systems broke down; for example, the 1948 Arab-Israeli War helped end the constitutional states in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria.

Dr. Khalidi next turned to the interplay between Islam and democracy in Middle East history. A secularizing element marked Middle East politics during a period stretching from the second half of the nineteenth century through the last quarter of the twentieth century. This dynamic, what he labels an "Islamic modernist synthesis," was characterized by a belief that though most aspects of law, politics, and governance should be influenced by Islam, they should nonetheless be largely secular. In Dr. Khalidi's view, most of the historic exceptions to this "synthesis" have been isolated, local-

ized cases: political Islam's role in Algeria's nationalist movement; the involvement of Sunni Muslims in resisting Italian actions in Libya; the political role of Shiite Muslims in 1920s Iraq; and individual figures such as the mufti of Jerusalem.

However, there are several more longstanding exceptions to this secularizing trend in politics. One has been the highly political nature of Iran's religious establishment. Indeed, judged Dr. Khalidi, even today the Islamic Republic of Iran poses a "serious challenge" to the Islamic modernist synthesis and to secularism as a whole.

A second exception to the relative secularism in Mideast politics has been Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. Initially a minor political party, it would eventually pose a formidable threat to Gamel Nasser's secular dictatorship. It has now grown into a political juggernaut, with its candidates winning more than 80 seats in recent Egyptian parliamentary elections. Its branches in Iraq and Palestine (the Iraqi Islamic Party and Hamas, respectively) have also had major electoral successes of late.

The third exception is the sect of Sunni Islam known as Wahhabism. Originally a modest movement based on the eastern Arabian peninsula, it has since benefited from an alliance with Saudi Arabia's ruling Al-Saud family (and from the family's financial generosity), and from support from various nations (including the United States, which has regarded Wahhabism as a counterweight to communists, socialists, and nationalist forces in the Middle East and Islamic World).

"Radical offshoots" of the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabism, combined with the fundamentalist strains of Islam that developed in Afghanistan during that nation's war against Soviet occupation, have today morphed into what Dr. Khalidi likens to a "witch's brew" very much at odds with the democratic trends prevailing in the Middle East into the late twentieth century. This amalgamation of hard-line religious elements reflects a rejection of the Islamic modernist synthesis. Yet even as these radical derivatives of the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabism espouse violence and illiberalism, "mainstream Islamists" (including the Brotherhood itself) are moving—albeit slowly—toward accepting democracy. The ruling moderate Islamic party in Turkey, for example, accepts secularism.

For Dr. Khalidi, this all represents "an irony to savor"—a small group of Islamist radical fringe groups has obscured the emergence of the Islamic modernist synthesis, in the same way that the Middle East's autocratic regimes have masked the evolution of a liberal democratic ethos in the region's politics.

In sum, Dr. Khalidi concluded, democracy has had "a rich but troubled" history in the Middle East. Though various factors—particularly the threat of foreign interventions—do not bode well for Mideast democracy, he contended that democrats in the Middle East today stand ready to promote indigenous democratic traditions of rule of law and constitutionalism, even in the face of antidemocratic forces.

Session I: "Constitutions and the Law"

Speakers: **Said Amir Arjomand**, Distinguished Service Professor, Department of Sociology, State University of New York at Stony Brook
David Kretzmer, Visiting Professor of International Law, The Fletcher School, and Visiting Scholar, The Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies, Tufts University (Spring 2006)
Bruce Rutherford, Visiting Researcher, Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School (Spring 2006)

Chair: **Frank E. Vogel**, Director, Islamic Legal Studies Program, and The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Adjunct Professor of Islamic Legal Studies, Harvard Law School

This opening session examined constitutionalism in the Middle East. **Dr. Arjomand**, underscoring the importance of historical context, provided an overview of four different aspects of constitution-making in the past few hundred years.

He first described the period of the late nineteenth century, when written constitutions first appeared in the Middle East. These early documents—such as those established in Tunisia in 1861 and in the Ottoman Empire in 1876—enshrined in Mideast legal discourse new ideas of the rule of law as well as constraints on government and power. Dr. Arjomand pointed out that legal thinkers at this time regarded this brake on power as an Islamic norm.

He cited the 1918 Soviet constitution as a "prototype" for a second historical aspect of constitutionalism in the Middle East, one that marked the emergence of ideology as a central facet of constitutions. The two major features of this Soviet constitution were also applicable to the Middle East constitutions (and to many of those in the Third World) that arose in the post-World War II era: (1) the constitution served as an instrument of social transformation, as opposed to a foundation of political order; and (2) the constitution nullified civil and human rights when these were found inconsistent with the constitution's ideological elements.

A third aspect of constitutionalism places religion in the forefront. Broadening his analysis to South Asia, Dr. Arjomand used Pakistan as a case study. Pakistan's 1956 constitution referred to the nation as an "Islamic state," and the document affirmed the sovereignty of God in its preamble. Such a notion of God, Dr. Arjomand explained, was a radical departure from earlier Islamic legal interpretations, which had conceived of a dual system of jurisprudence—one featuring both public law and Shari'a—that facilitated the transfer of sovereignty from the ruler to the people.

A fourth aspect of constitution-making has involved the use of constitutions as a means of reconstructing political order following wars and revolution—a strategy that holds particular relevance for Iraq and Afghanistan today. Such uses of constitutions are not limited to the Middle East; the experiences of the former Axis powers following World War II are instructive. Additionally, examples abound of constitutions being established to prevent the return of past regimes—particularly with the help of a constitutional court. Such courts were successful in Western and Southern Europe and in South Africa, where they hastened the demise of apartheid.

Ultimately, Dr. Arjomand concluded, lessons about the success of such constitutional courts elsewhere are often forgotten today, particularly in Iran and Afghanistan. Worse, existing courts in the Middle East have often failed. Iran's Council of Guardians, for example, has "paralyzed" Iran's parliament, while Turkey's court has rejected more than 170 laws and shut down political parties. Dr. Arjomand attributes these problems to the ideological aspect of constitution-making in the Middle East—in both Iran and Turkey, the courts have become "guardians of ideological functions of the regime," instead of protectors of people's rights.

Dr. Kretzmer assessed the place of religious law in Israel's legal order. As in many other countries of the Middle East that once formed the Ottoman Empire, religious law in Israel is rooted in the Ottoman *millet* system. Under this system, matters of personal status—such as marriage and divorce—are in the hands of religious authorities. The *millet* system is a firmly entrenched component of

Israel's legal identity. When Great Britain conquered Palestine in 1917, it left the *millet* system intact. Similarly, at its independence, although Israel adopted a legal system secular in nature, it retained the *millet* arrangement. Over the years, Israel's legal system has undergone considerable change, though the *millet* system has persevered. However, Dr. Kretzmer argued, Israeli religious parties' determination to retain this Ottoman legal heritage has triggered clashes with the country's activist and secular Supreme Court. These clashes have in turn compromised efforts to draft a formal constitution—a goal that remains elusive in Israel today.

From its earliest days, Israel has faced resistance to the establishment of a formal constitution. Soon after Israel's declaration of independence was issued, stipulating that an elected constituent assembly would draw up a constitution, Zionist religious parties articulated an ideological opposition to a constitution, rooted in the fear that a constitution would allow secular majorities in Israel to jeopardize the religious courts' long-established monopoly over marriage and divorce. Non-Zionist religious parties asserted that Jews already had a constitution—the Torah. Finally, Israel's political heavyweight at the time—the Labor movement—feared that a new constitution would constrain the power of government, which was firmly in the hands of Labor at the time.

In the early 1950s, the elected constituent assembly (the Knesset) passed a resolution stating that Israel's constitution would be established through a series of basic laws, instead of through a formal, single document. Part of the gap formed by the absence of a formal constitution, according to Dr. Kretzmer, has been filled by an activist Supreme Court. Many of the court's actions have alienated Israel's religious communities: the court has recognized basic rights such as freedom of conscience and religion; curbed executive action (particularly when used to reinforce religious practices); and sought to limit religious courts' authority on personal status matters.

Additionally, the Israeli Supreme Court has undermined some of the political deals that the religious parties have been able to strike. For example, in a concession to the religious parties, the 1992 Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty does not protect rights of freedom of religion or equality (religious law is wary of equality rights because both Jewish and Muslim law discriminate against men and women, according to Dr. Kretzmer). The court, however, decided to give wide interpretation to the rights included in the Basic Law, especially that of human dignity—and in fact the court declared that the right to human dignity includes the right to freedom of religion and equality. Consequently, religious parties have since vowed to resist any further basic laws. No basic laws have passed in the Knesset since 1992.

Still, in Israel today there is growing pressure for a formal constitution, and public opinion recognizes the need to accommodate religious law in a constitutional framework. A nongovernmental body, the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI), recently published a "constitution by consent" after consultations with broad sectors of Israeli society. This hypothetical constitution contained an "express provision" that "certain types of legislation" be immune from judicial review.

This "constitution by consent," Dr. Kretzmer concluded, crystallizes the dilemma faced by those who want Israel to adopt a full, formal constitution with a modern bill of rights: does the need for a wide consensus on the contents of a constitution justify legitimizing the place of religious law in the legal system, thereby weakening the chance of changing this place in the future? Or would such legitimization pose too heavy a price to justify adopting a bill of rights? The recent emergence of a new dynamic in Israeli domestic politics might help resolve this conundrum. Israel's religious parties, once vital to cobbling together governing coalitions, have recently lost much of their political clout. For this reason, Dr. Kretzmer reported, they are becoming more willing to compromise on the features of an eventual constitution.

Dr. Rutherford, drawing from his recent field research, described Islamic conceptions of constitutionalism in Egypt, with particular focus on the scholarship of Egypt's Islamic reformers. He asserted that while Islamic reformers and Westerners both support the same institutional underpinnings of constitutionalism, their views differ greatly on these institutions' intended purposes.

To provide context, Dr. Rutherford first reviewed how the opinions of today's Islamic reformers in Egypt dovetail with four major components of (Western) constitutionalism:

(1) *Emphasis on the centrality of law*. From its earliest days, Islam has been based on the revelation and enforcement of Shari'a law. Islamic tradition dictates that the state be defined by the law—and a state grounded in the rule of law embodies the idea of constitutionalism espoused by the West.
(2) *Constraints on state power*. Islamic reformers in Egypt underscore how state power is checked through the contractual relationship between the ruler and the ruled. According to Islamic reformers, the ruled—not the ruler—define the meaning of the law, and if the ruled judge that the ruler has deviated from Islamic law, then the ruled are obliged to remove their ruler.
(3) *Mechanism for public participation and formation of policy*. One of Islamic law's central concepts is the notion of *shura*, or consultation. According to modern interpretations of *shura*, the ruler and the ruled must "consult" with each other, because the ruler is fallible. Islamic reformers count political parties, parliaments, and elections as present-day manifestations of *shura*.
(4) *Protection of basic civil rights*. Islam emphasizes justice, and attaining justice requires the implementation of basic rights—such as freedom of speech and the right to assembly. According to one Islamic reformer cited by Dr. Rutherford, preserving the right of freedom of choice is a *sine qua non* for maintaining the integrity of the Islamic faith. The essence of Islam is to voluntarily choose to submit to the will of God—and for this choice to have meaning, the believer must have the choice not to submit to the will of God.

Dr. Rutherford conceded that many of these areas of interpretation of constitutional law are still relatively undeveloped: it is unclear to the reformers which areas of the law can be interpreted; how a ruler deviating from Shari'a should be dismissed, and by whom; who exactly can participate in *shura*; and who is protected by which rights.

A question arises here: have Egypt's Islamic legal activists used the country's recent parliamentary elections to address this ambiguity by clarifying and specifying the envisioned form of an Islamic constitutional order? For the answer, Dr. Rutherford reported the findings of a literature review he conducted of the Muslim Brotherhood's campaign documents—its campaign platform, a policy document entitled "The Initiative for Reform," and interviews—leading up to the December 2005 elections. His conclusions were twofold: (1) The Brotherhood appears to support the four traditional features of constitutionalism. On the issue of rights, the party's statements are particularly "sweeping," with calls for freedom of speech and expression. (2) The Brotherhood champions a highly activist state, one that provides the mechanism through which the moral character of Egyptian society can be transformed—starting with the individual Muslim, and continuing with the family, mosque, and society as a whole.

Such a vision of societal transformation, Dr. Rutherford explained, is grounded in the Islamic concept of *hesba*, for which every individual Muslim is obliged to intervene when he or she witnesses another Muslim doing something wrong. From its earliest days, *hesba* has been vested in the state, which has the obligation to shape the moral character of its citizens. This responsibility has historically entailed state involvement in individual behavior, selection of judges, and educational design, all in an effort to improve piety.

The implication is clear, Dr. Rutherford concluded. Both the West and the Muslim Brotherhood support the same institutions in the constitutional order—respect for freedoms, independent courts, and the rule of law. Where they diverge, however, is on the purpose of these institutions. The West entrusts the institutions to limit state power; the Muslim Brotherhood perceives them as tools for a more enhanced state power. For the West, constitutionalism "builds a wall" around the state to constrain its power. For the Brotherhood, by contrast, constitutionalism is meant to create "a carefully maintained path" to facilitate the state's role in transforming society.

What implications does this all hold for democratization? Dr. Rutherford asserted that the establishment of an Islamic constitution would generate the types of institutions familiar to the West—an independent judiciary, a parliament with power and autonomy, and an accountable executive. The "net product," however, would be a state much more invasive than in the West: the law and its enforcement mechanisms (such as police and courts) would not simply maintain order, but would also effect transformations through the shaping of education, the arts, and the media. The result would be a distinct type of democracy demonstrating institutional features common to the West, and a state purpose more representative of Islamic traditions.

Session II: "Elections and Civil Society"

Speakers: **Augustus Richard Norton**, Professor of International Relations and Anthropology, Boston University
Eva Bellin, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Hunter College
Mustapha El-Sayed, Professor of Political Science, Cairo University

Chair: **Malik Mufti**, Associate Professor of Political Science, and Director, International Relations Program, Tufts University

This session gauged the state of elections and civil society across the Middle East and North Africa, as well as their impact on democratization. **Dr. Norton** provided an overview of civil society and elections, emphasizing the role of Islamist forces in both. He asserted at the outset that civil society is one of the preconditions for democracy: pluralism cannot flourish without an "intervening informal network of associations." For this reason, he argued, prospects for democracy in Iraq are tenuous at best, because Iraq has historically had no semblance of civil society space between the individual and the state.

Across Middle East civil society, Dr. Norton asserted, the political clout of Islamist groups is growing, while secular groups are weak. In terms of voter mobilization, the religious parties are simply more politically savvy than secular ones—as evidenced by recent campaign successes in Palestine, Egypt, and Iraq. Empowering civil society's secular forces, Dr. Norton contended, is a questionable policy. Non-Islamists are mere "boutiques," kept in check by wary regimes; if anything, they are "inchoate" forces that have largely been depoliticized.

Still, the alternative—engaging the Islamists—is often criticized. Why, Dr. Norton asked, are Islamist elements of civil society considered less palatable than secular ones? The answer lies in the contemporary perception that Islamists are inflexible, and that they

evince a firm commitment to religion that eliminates the possibility of compromise on issues such as the acceptance of the state of Israel.

Dr. Norton argued that Islamists' political strength is not something to be feared—because once in a position of governance, Islamists are bound to moderate politically questionable behavior. Describing what he identified as the "inclusion argument," he maintained that once an entity becomes entrenched in a political system, its political behavior changes. The reason for this is simple: the need to satisfy constituencies. For example, Lebanon's Hezbollah boasts a significant presence in the Lebanese parliament, and therefore must respond to the preferences of its Shiite constituency—which is largely uninterested in ideologically driven "millenarian missions."

Additionally, political involvement has a way of toning down ideological fervor. Dr. Norton recounted a story from the mid-1990s in which the license for a Lebanese casino—which brought high levels of revenue to the state—was up for renewal. Presumably, Hezbollah would have opposed an enterprise that condoned gambling and "scantily clad women." However, on the day of the vote for the casino license renewal, Hezbollah's parliamentarians were suspiciously absent and therefore did not vote. This anecdote demonstrates that "prosaic politics imposes pragmatism," and that "power and privilege generate their own inertia."

Dr. Norton concluded that "the train of political reform has left the station." What remains to be seen is the path the train takes. There are indications that instead of experiencing large transformations of political systems, the region may witness internal processes of bargaining and exchange. Such a scenario would owe much to the Middle East's professionalized and institutionalized military forces, which are vested in existing political systems because of the privileges that accrue to them. For example, in Palestine, Norton envisions Fatah's armed elements participating in negotiations on the emerging political system. Yet at any rate, one thing is clear: political reform cannot be successful if democratization policies keep the Islamists "out in the garage."

Dr. Bellin chronicled civil society's effect on democratization in the Middle East since the early 1990s. In the immediate post-Cold War period, she recalled, "civil society euphoria" reigned. Academics extolled the ability of civil society to promote human rights and good governance and to consolidate democratic institutions. This enthusiasm was rooted in the belief—dating to the days of Alexis de Tocqueville—that civil society, through its various associations, implants in its citizens the norms and habits requisite for democracy. This "associational life," the argument went, serves as a countervailing force to state power and obliges the state to be responsive to the popular will.

During the 1990s, associations proliferated in the Middle East and North Africa—the result of growing middle classes, urbanization, more education, limited political liberalization, and Western support for local nongovernmental organizations. However, civil society did not succeed in removing the region's authoritarian regimes. And by the late 1990s, the zeal for civil society had morphed into skepticism.

What happened? Dr. Bellin offered four explanations for why civil society did not bring more democracy to the Middle East. First, many of the region's associations were not "robust." That is, civil society organizations—other than Islamist ones—failed to draw mass bases and mobilize populations, in part because they were tainted by the perception that they "lived off the rents" of Western foreign aid. Ruling regimes also kept a tight leash on these associations, requiring licenses and highly regulating their activities. For these reasons, the associations failed to fulfill the Tocquevillian criteria for democracy-enabling civil society: they did not educate citizens about democracy and they did not serve as a countervailing force to state power. Second, given their domination by the state, many associations could not challenge the ruling regimes. Instead, they often became "tools of state control." This spelled a major paradox: when civil society is not granted autonomy, it fuels the persistence of authoritarianism. Instead of providing a means to collective empowerment, associations become "tools of state domination." Third, civil society did not promote broader democratization, because many of its associations

had single-issue, limited agendas. And fourth, many associations in the Middle East and North Africa were not interested in the mass mobilizations essential for democracy promotion.

Despite these obstacles, Dr. Bellin argued that civil society is still vitally important for democratization. She offered three reasons why support for civil society must not be abandoned:

1. *Civil society development takes time to bear fruit.* It is "absurd," she said, to believe recently established organizations can overthrow entrenched regimes. Much-vaunted civil society movements in Poland, Argentina, and Kenya took many years to produce full-scale democratization. Progress is in fact being made, Dr. Bellin declared, citing the work of Egypt's pro-democracy reformer Saad Eddin Ibrahim, as well as the efforts of women's groups in Morocco to push for reform of the country's personal status law.

2. *Civil society guides political transitions toward democracy.* The actual removal of entrenched regimes is "too high a bar" to be employed as a measure of civil society's effectiveness. In all cases in which civil society has facilitated democratic transitions, it did not trigger the transition alone. On the contrary, "external shocks" have also helped precipitate the ouster of authoritarian governments. In this context, civil society has often played a crucial role in seizing this opportunity of regime collapse and steering it toward democratic transition. Such was the case with civil societies in Argentina (following the external shock of the country's Falklands War defeat), Kenya (in the aftermath of its fiscal crisis), and Poland (after the collapse of communist states on Poland's periphery). Dr. Bellin conceded that such external triggers may not be in the immediate offing in the Middle East. Yet she insisted that support for civil society must remain strong, so that it will be primed "to swoop in" when the shock finally arrives.

3. *Civil society provides a mechanism for intergroup conflict resolution.* In the absence of a flourishing civil society, sectarian strife can be repressed, but not eliminated. Dr. Bellin drew here from scholar Joshua Landis's comments on Syria. In this country, citizens resign themselves to authoritarianism, because they fear that the political openings engendered by democratization will exacerbate Syria's ethnic fragmentation. Yet these very ethnic tensions result from the lack of a strong civil society capable of creating the space for sectarian reconciliation. The result, Bellin lamented, is a tragic cycle: the security state snuffs out civil society; citizens cannot negotiate their differences; and people turn to the security state to maintain "minimal social peace."

Dr. El-Sayed contributed a case study of civil society in Egypt, focusing on its role during the country's 2005 elections. He began by listing three myths about civil society: (1) the state and civil society have a dichotomous relationship—one is always opposed to the other; (2) civil society is homogenous; and (3) civil society, so long as it remains "civil," can bring down the state. Dr. El-Sayed demonstrated how the case of Egypt explodes each myth. The Egyptian case reveals that some elements of civil society, rather than distancing themselves from the regime, instead regard the state as a source of support. The case also reinforces how civil society is not monolithic—major differences exist among civil society groups in terms of social background, political attitudes, and approaches toward the state. Finally, Dr. El-Sayed argued, the fate of certain Egyptian civil society groups in the elections illustrates how civil society—no matter how "civil"—is "completely incompetent" vis-à-vis a state that uses "uncivil methods."

Dr. El-Sayed sketched out the array of civil society actors that played a role in the elections. There were new political movements, most notably Kefiyah (Enough). This group mobilized broad sectors of Egyptian society to oppose President Hosni Mubarak. There were also professional associations of lawyers, journalists, and the like, who mediated meetings of opposition groups and took stands against government; the Judges Club, judicial authorities who called for government fairness in the elections and for a new judiciary fairness law; human rights organizations, which served as election monitors; business organizations, many of which supported the government; and independent media, which facilitated communication between civil society groups and Egypt's people. Broadly speaking, these diverse players—far from being homogenous—can be grouped into three categories: secular movements, Islamic groups, and businessmen.

The effectiveness of Egyptian civil society groups during the 2005 elections can be measured by each one's type and amount of political resources. These resources can be normative (values), utilitarian (numbers, money, and access to the media), and coercive (ability to use violence). The secular movements boasted normative resources but had few utilitarian ones. The Islamic groups had comfortable levels of normative and utilitarian resources; they were highly adept at mobilizing both people and money. However, neither secular nor religious movements boasted coercive resources, thereby ensuring continued state monopoly over instruments of violence—a disparity that spawned unprecedented levels of state-sponsored violence during the election campaign, as well as the use of heavy-handed election day tactics such as barring access to voting stations. The powerlessness of these groups shatters the myth of a "civil" civil society overthrowing authoritarianism.

Dr. El-Sayed was not sanguine about these groups' immediate prospects for overcoming state violence. He judged that this violence can be neutralized only via mass mobilization—in the realm of half a million people. Faced with such crowds, he argued, state security forces would hesitate before using violence. Currently, Islamists can mobilize tens of thousands. Kefiyah can muster no more than 15,000—while the numbers for other secular movements are even lower.

Meanwhile, Egypt's civil society business groups were flush with money, and because they supported government candidates, benefited from the state's protection and had no need for coercive tools. The cozy relationship enjoyed by business and the Egyptian government gives the lie to the myth that the state and civil society are always at odds. Dr. El-Sayed pointed out that five of Egypt's richest businessmen were actually appointed as ministers in the new cabinet.

The professor concluded that Egypt's civil society is divided—a development that bodes poorly for civil society's role in Egyptian democratization. While journalists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and judges seek to democratize Egypt, businesses maintain a strong following for Egypt's authoritarian regime and provide the government's sole base of popular support. In effect, one of the most significant components of Egyptian civil society is "a pillar of support" for the country's authoritarian regime.

Session III: "Religion and Democracy"

Speakers: **Vali R. Nasr**, Professor of Middle East and South Asia Politics, Department of National Security Affairs, Naval Postgraduate School
Ayman Abdel Nour, Editor-in-chief, *All4Syria*, Damascus, Syria
Mark Tessler, Samuel J. Eldersveld Collegiate Professor of Political Science, Vice Provost for International Affairs, and Director, International Institute, University of Michigan

Discussant: The Honorable **Barbara Bodine**, Visiting Scholar, Persian Gulf Initiative, Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Chair: **Farhad Kazemi**, Professor of Politics and Middle Eastern Studies, and Director, Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies, New York University

This session weighed in on the relationship between religion and democracy in the Middle East. **Dr. Nasr** introduced four recent developments that may affect the debate on religion's role in democratization. For quite some time, he stated, a belief has existed that democracy emerges from religious and ideological reform—that reform, or moderation, within Islam begets political reform and democracy. Democracy, he noted, has long been regarded not as an instrument of moderation, but instead as its outcome.

Yet there are now indications that democracy and Islam are functioning in a collaborative dynamic, with democracy increasingly seen as intertwined with religion, instead of as a mere product of religious reform. The first of the four recent developments illustrating this new dynamic is the growing prominence of sectarianism in politics. Today, Dr. Nasr argued, Middle Eastern societies—particularly in Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia—are "mobilizing around identities," and in such a way that transcends national boundaries. Following Iraq's January 2006 elections, a prominent Shiite figure in Saudi Arabia lauded the view of Iraq's

revered Shiite cleric ʻAli al-Sistani that the notion of "one man, one vote" can empower the Shiites. Soon after this praising of al-Sistani, Saudi Arabia held municipal elections. In some areas, the Shiite vote was double that of the Sunni. Sectarianism, Dr. Nasr concluded, can serve as a "participatory drive" and hence contribute to democratization.

Sectarian identity can also determine the extent to which different religious figures may benefit from democracy. According to Dr. Nasr, Shiite clerics are better positioned to take advantage of the shrinkage of the state that comes with democracy—because these clerics already enjoy independent bases of power and the ability to mobilize resources. Conversely, Sunni religious establishments have traditionally been controlled by the state and boast fewer of the resources requisite for profiting from political liberalization.

A second emerging trend is that Islam is increasingly being debated not in terms of laws and values, but of governance. With elections proliferating across the region, Islamist political parties are casting themselves as corruption-free and accountable to the people, particularly in comparison to their political opponents. Hamas and Turkish religious parties, for example, have underscored the importance of clean government. Meanwhile, "social Islamists" often form a "shadow state" that provides the types of social services typically furnished by the government.

A third development that illustrates democracy and Islam interacting together is Islamism's experiencing of a period of "ideological ferment," manifesting itself in varying guises of nationalism and populism, among others. Democracy provides an arena for these "hybrid" ideas to play out.

The fourth trend relates to how democracy amplifies the long-existing question of who speaks for Islamism. Democracy, Dr. Nasr explained, affords a forum for both clerical and lay spokespersons of Islam to seek power. The case of Iran is instructive: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's 2005 presidential election campaign emphasized how a non-cleric can be a spokesperson for Islamic revolution. And as president-elect, Ahmadinejad asked his cabinet to dedicate itself to bringing back Shiite Islam's hidden imam—an attempt, according to Dr. Nasr, to transfer the authority of the hidden imam from the clerical establishment to the executive branch.

Additionally, there have been cases in Southeast and South Asia of secular political parties claiming to speak for Islam. Yet Professor Nasr cautioned that the prospect of a secular voice representing Islam can only become a lasting reality if certain conditions are met. These include the presence of political parties capable of competing for the religious vote; economic reform; and the existence of outside mediating forces to help foster goodwill between secular and Islamic forces in the long term.

Mr. Nour painted a complex picture of relations between mosque and state in the Middle East. He argued that governing regimes appropriate religion for their strategic advantage. They cannot allow political Islam to flourish, he explained, because of the threat it would pose to government power. Therefore, leaders give Islamists a limited space in which to act freely—in order to demonstrate some semblance of democracy. However, once the Islamists approach a predetermined "red line," regimes crack down with a vengeance, in an effort to garner support from the West—especially from the United States. Such tactics may explain the actions of Egypt in its recent elections: Islamists were given opportunities to participate in the electoral process, but when they gained seats, Gamal Mubarak (the president's son and a rising figure in Egyptian politics), seeking support from the United States, lashed out at them.

Mr. Nour described exactly how regimes accommodate Islamists. The latter are accorded freedom to operate both in homes and mosques, and their media outlets are rarely censored. When an Islamist is imprisoned, his or her family is rarely harassed and is in fact given opportunities to obtain the Islamist's release. Islamists have the right to establish Islamic universities without licenses, and to confer doctorates without government accreditation. Finally, Islamists can obtain funding from abroad with few hindrances. Crucially, Mr. Nour underscored, secularists enjoy very few of these privileges, and can in fact be punished or fined for attempting to secure them. For example, during Egypt's most recent elections, state-owned television stations and

newspapers accorded ample media time to the Muslim Brotherhood. They did not extend this privilege to the secular Waf'd party.

However, this freedom for Islamists is measured and controlled. Governments manipulate relationships between different clerics to prevent the formation of large blocs. They also exploit the sectarian character of political Islam, often separating the Islamists by sect. And regimes arrest and even kill clerics who go too far. In short, both secularists and Islamists have limited space in which to operate, yet Islamists have a much higher ceiling. Amid this oppressive government control, Mr. Nour argued, fanaticism breeds. Previously secular groups, out of frustration, are now evincing a fiery brand of Islam—because, as he stated, "God is always ready to listen."

Compounding the complex nature of relations between religious groups and ruling regimes in the Middle East is the Byzantine web of coalitions that often forms between the business class, the military establishment, and the mullahs. The military benefits from the networks and resources of business groups, while the mullahs need the business class's money. Meanwhile, businessmen look to clerics for help in mobilizing voters in elections (an important tool in nations that often lack strong political parties). Additionally, businessmen covet weight in the "street," and they seek to convey the impression that they have the clerics behind them—so that regimes do not think of businessmen as vulnerable. Finally, the military relishes partnerships with clerics, according to Mr. Nour, because one single cleric is capable of controlling scores of supporters. He lamented how these coalitions undermine Middle Eastern civil society.

Mr. Nour concluded with a warning: given the complex reality of the situation on the ground, efforts to tackle religious extremism in the Middle East must be mindful of local conditions, and they must break free from the broad framework of democratization by external means. Time is short, as extremism is being exported—most notably to Europe— via new and modern channels.

Dr. Tessler highlighted recent public opinion data he has collected (in collaboration with locally based scholars) on religion and democracy in the Middle East. His major conclusion was that while there is "broad popular support" for democracy—around 80 to 85 percent—there is not yet a consensus among Middle East publics on how this democracy should be characterized, and specifically on the relationship between religion and politics.

For example, do the region's citizens have a secular conception of democracy, with support for a separation of religion and state and a limited role for Islamic law? The data do not provide a definitive answer. There is also no general agreement on the dynamic between religion and politics—there is no clear pattern underlying responses to questions about the extent to which Shari'a should be the law of the land; to which religious figures should influence politics; and to which those with "strong religious views" should be represented in public office. Similarly, he cited data from Israel indicating that people tend to be more secular on some matters of religion—such as the role of religious law—than on others, such as rights for non-Jews in Israel. Further, in examining responses to the question of whether non-Muslims should have the same political rights as Muslims, Dr. Tessler found that people who support democracy do not always differ in their views from those who do not support democracy. The implication, he argued, is that those who support democracy do not necessarily possess democratic values.

The data, however, are clear on the predictive power of personal religious orientation: it is in fact not predictive at all. How religious a person is (that is, how pious one is, and how strict one is in interpreting Islamic law) has no bearing on the person's views of democracy and the relationship between Islam and politics. As an independent variable, Dr. Tessler reported, a person's religious orientation "doesn't tell us very much."

One factor that does boast explanatory power is a person's view of government. For example, Dr. Tessler's data reveal that the level of public support for an Islamist platform depends not upon a person's religiosity, but upon how he or she feels about the government. In fact, in surveying public attitudes toward an array of issues, including Islam and the Arab-Israeli peace process, Tessler found that "discontent with or lack of confidence in your government" is a major explanatory factor.

Dr. Tessler acknowledged the lack of a direct and immediate causal connection between public attitudes and prospects for democratization; support for democracy "doesn't mean we'll have it." Responding to a question about why secular democrats fared poorly in Iraqi elections, even though more than 40 percent of Iraqis say they prefer secular democracy, Dr. Tessler observed that there is sometimes a "disconnect" between what people believe and how they actually vote. As occurs in the United States as well, communal solidarity and other considerations are sometimes more important than policy preferences in determining how a person votes. All the same, he asserted, gauging public attitudes is important because political culture and the civic orientations of ordinary citizens are important ingredients in any transition to democracy.

Ambassador Bodine's commentary highlighted current interpretations in both the United States and Middle East about the relationship between religion and state. In the United States, recent events—such as the U.S. Senate confirmation hearings for new Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito—demonstrate that there is still disagreement about where "personal religiosity" ends and where the public sphere begins.

As for the Middle East, Ambassador Bodine cited Bruce Rutherford's presentation, which had noted the Muslim Brotherhood's emphasis on the Islamic tenet of *hesba*, or the state's obligation "to transform" people. She argued that the Brotherhood's view crystallizes the difficulties in identifying the line between personal religiosity and the role of the state.

Therefore, both societies are grappling with questions about religion's role in politics. Americans, who Ambassador Bodine believes have recently developed their own brand of "transformational philosophy," understand what is afoot with the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, those on the "transformational wings" in both the United States and the Middle East can even see eye-to-eye. Those occupying the "secular center," however, may have more trouble understanding the Muslim Brotherhood's views on religion and the state. And Ambassador Bodine warned that disagreements about religion's role in politics may spawn not a clash of civilizations, but instead a "clash of transformational philosophies."

Session IV: "Women and Democracy"

Speakers: **Andrea Rugh**, Adjunct Scholar, Public Policy Center, Middle East Institute
Jenny White, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Boston University
Mahnaz Afkhami, President, Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace, Bethesda, Maryland

Discussant: **Diane Singerman**, Associate Professor, Department of Government, School of Public Affairs, American University

Chair: **Jeswald W. Salacuse**, Henry J. Braker Professor of Commercial Law, The Fletcher School, Tufts University

The fourth session examined women and democracy in the Arab and Muslim Worlds, underscoring both the encouraging signs and challenges facing women's status in the context of democratization. **Dr. Rugh** sought to answer the following question: why are current models of democratic reform not doing a better job of resolving women's issues? Her response was twofold: (1) seeking advancement for Arab women through democratization raises sensitive social "dilemmas," and (2) Western misperceptions about Arab women continue to proliferate.

Governments, for their part, have either set women's issues aside; sought to "please everyone" with vague statutes; or applied highly controlled reforms. None of these policies, according to Dr. Rugh, is effective. Politicians are simply unwilling to tackle directly the delicate questions about society posed by women's status.

What are these controversial questions? One is whether individuals or groups should be the "irreducible" units of society. While adherents to liberal democracy emphasize the former, many in the Arab world underscore the latter. Arab society tends to provide protections for women in their group roles as wives and mothers—more so than as "independent individuals."

A second dilemma is whether legal systems should be anchored in religious or secular-inspired principles. While liberal democracy stresses secular law, most Arab nations apply Shari'a law—especially toward the personal status laws that greatly affect women. Dr. Rugh has heard from Iraqi women who long for the country's 1959 personal status law, which was derived from Shari'a.

A third dilemma is resolving the question of whether entitlements (rights) or responsibilities (duties) should form the basis of social relations in the Arab world. Liberal democracy identifies civil rights as a foundation of democratic systems. Conversely, many in the Arab world insist that religious doctrine enshrines the sanctity of responsibility, while rights are merely human-made rules to provide citizen protections. According to this view, equal rights for women are eclipsed by the exigencies of female duties and responsibilities to family and society.

A fourth dilemma involves wrestling with issues of fairness. Liberal democracy stipulates that individuals be treated equally under the law. Conversely, even as Arab constitutions pledge this same equality, in practice Shari'a codes are not meant to provide it. Instead, Shari'a tenets aim to treat people *equitably* based on fairness principles that protect the integrity of groups. For example, women do not receive the same inheritances as men—because women as a group should not be held to the same support obligations as men. In fact, many women fear that any gains accruing to them through equal inheritance could be lost in the obligation men would have to support them.

Dr. Rugh reasoned that democratization models for women's rights that emphasize themes of individualism, secularism, rights, and equality may be insufficient. What might be better, she concluded, is to employ a model incorporating societal principles that actually predominate in the Arab world—namely, emphases on groups, religious law, responsibility, and equity.

Turning to Western misperceptions, Dr. Rugh invoked the notion of Arab women as "oppressed victims." This characterization is inaccurate, she argued, and failing to recognize the canard as such invites "the wrong kind of help." She referenced recent comments made in Egypt by Laura Bush, in which the U.S. first lady implored Arab governments to provide girls with the same educational opportunities as boys—even though there is already equality of access to education throughout much of the region. Dr. Rugh suggested three reasons for the persistence of these misperceptions: (1) Westerners reach erroneous conclusions from their limited knowledge of the Arab world; (2) global indicators used to assess women's progress focus on Western values of individual achievement and participation in public life instead of on family life—thereby implying that Arab women are not truly free until they partake in "extra-familial" activities; and (3) these indicators are used selectively, masking the fact that Arab women fare quite well by these measures' standards. Adult literacy, for example, is often cited to prove the low educational attainment of Arab women. However, female enrollment in the region relative to men is actually comparable to rates elsewhere. Further, gender equality measures are often skewed to amplify the status of women in previous generations—without trumpeting the progress of more recent generations.

In closing, Dr. Rugh reviewed this progress. In much of the Arab world, more girls than boys attend school—including at the university level. In the United Arab Emirates, a striking 75 percent of college students are women. Additionally, Arab women are often portrayed as disenfranchised. However, women vote and stand for office in nearly all Arab nations with elections, while several of these countries use quotas to ensure adequate rates of women's parliamentary representation. Clearly, Dr. Rugh stated, there is no intent to deny political roles to women.

Ultimately, she argued, Arab women's status can stand to improve; for example, their labor force participation rates are low relative to the rest of the world. Yet what is important is ensuring that the true condition of women—which in many ways continues to improve—not be clouded by misperception.

Dr. White described the evolution of women's rights in Turkey, focusing on the contributions of three different groups: Turkey's government, civic women's movements, and Islamic political parties. Each of these groups has helped boost women's status in

Turkey, she asserted, though each one's efforts have suffered from significant limitations.

When the Turkish state was founded in 1923, women were immediately blessed with civil rights and suffrage. Starting in the 1930s, they were appointed to judgeships and elected to Turkey's parliament. The impetus behind these developments, Dr. White explained, was the desire of Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and his Republican People's Party to build a modern, Western society out of a predominantly rural, conservative populace. The idea was to model institutions and the physical environment after Europe; hence the emphasis on women's visibility in the public arena.

There were problems, however. First, these government-led efforts amounted to what Dr. White referred to as "male-dominated state feminism." In effect, government projects appropriated women's activism and employed it as an instrument of state modernization. For this reason, women's efforts to organize were severely compromised and their grass roots initiatives effectively marginalized. Second, state reforms focused on women's public roles, not on women's rights within the family. As a result, domestic abuse was dismissed as a "family affair." And third, Ataturk's model woman was an "ideal type"—secular, educated, and active in public life. The problem, White pointed out, is that this "citizen women" model excluded the conservative, devoutly Muslim women who comprised the majority of Turkey's female population at the time.

The 1980s witnessed the rise of women's civic organizations. Spearheaded by elite and middle class women, these movements focused on literacy and violence against women. Unlike the Kemalists, who focused on women as a group, these citizens' movements regarded women as individuals; hence their initiatives to revise laws on discrimination and to create battered women's shelters. Unfortunately, Dr. White noted, the demographic benefiting from these movements was limited to the urban poor. The women's movements helped conservative women to an extent, but not enough to integrate them into the movements.

Other than exercising their voting privileges, conservative Muslim women in Turkey participated very little in political life for decades following independence. But the emergence of Islamist movements in the 1980s ignited mass mobilizations of conservative women. During the 1995 election campaign, the Welfare Party's women's branch worked with 18,000 women. And it was conservative women's activism that catapulted the Justice and Development Party into power in the 2002 elections. Unfortunately, however, few women were represented in the Islamic parties' administrations, and the women's branches were not formally recognized within the party. Meanwhile, male party members have worried that public life will interfere with women's roles as homemakers.

What is the status of Turkish women today? Dr. White argued that on the one hand, cultural obstacles have complicated the implementation of laws. Such obstacles are preventing women from truly benefiting from the political and legal rights granted to them since the 1920s. For instance, while laws have evolved to the point that women can obtain restraining orders against their husbands, law enforcement often will not act on these orders.

On the other hand, Dr. White contended, Ataturk's state feminism laid the foundation for future progress on women's status. The three major problems from the era of state feminism have been addressed: grass roots activism is now resurgent, women's individual rights are now recognized, and conservative women have transcended the originally narrow (secular) "citizen women" ideal type and are now a part of the political process. Today's Turkish government—which has Islamic roots—has expanded women's rights to full equality in both the private and public arenas, in efforts to burnish its credentials for European Union accession. Cultural and ideological barriers remain, however, hindering the full realization of women's rights.

Ms. Afkhami, noting the utility of studying how "people on the ground" tackle women's issues, related the perspectives and experiences of 18 women's grass roots organizations in Muslim-majority countries, brought together by her Women's Learning Partnership to work on issues of democracy and human rights. How do these women's organizations treat gender rights? Ms. Afkhami enumerated

several "foundational aspects" of their shared vision, cultivated after years of collaboration:

1. *Uniformity across cultures.* Historically, women's rights and the general status of women worldwide have shared a similar narrative, regardless of cultural type. Throughout history, women in many countries have shared a profound "uniformity of experience." Over the years, the structure underlying individual-family-society relationships—and the laws that accompany them—is remarkably similar across cultures. Until recently, Ms. Afkhami pointed out, laws governing women's position in the family were no different in the West than those in the developing world.

2. *Variations in the practice of Islam.* Islam is observed and interpreted in vastly different ways worldwide. For this reason, even while Islam provides a source of values and intellectual growth for large numbers of Muslims, and may be used as a broad foundation for pursuing egalitarianism, justice, or rights, we must resist the idea of accepting Islam as a given and attempting "to fit" rights into Islam—a conclusion that rings true for any religion. Instead, Islam should be regarded as serving two separate purposes: an epistemological one that provides a rich intellectual repository from which to learn, and a practical one that provides the backdrop for the ordinary lives of Muslim women.

3. *Collaboration with men.* Unlike its counterpart in the West, feminism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) emphasizes efforts with men. Feminism in the MENA region argues that it is societal structures, and not men, that cause women's exclusion and repression. For this reason, making societies more egalitarian requires the involvement of broad sectors of society.

In describing the work of the 18 women's organizations, Ms. Afkhami stressed their emphasis on networks, negotiations, and consensus-building. For example, the women have focused their attention on reforming family laws, whose stipulations on marriage and divorce have often been unfriendly toward women. The 18 women's groups mobilized dozens of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and presented a wide array of material to the NGOs—national family law legislation, international legal documents, the Hadith and the Koran, constitutions, social science data—instructing them to employ whatever resource they felt most comfortable using as their justificatory evidence for reforming the family laws. The women's groups have also worked with other civic organizations, men, students, and academics.

This activism, explained Ms. Afkhami, represents "democracy in action"—the practical experience of consensus-building, negotiation, and sharing of arguments and experiences. This model, she concluded, can be used as a way of bringing change in the Middle East.

Dr. Singerman offered three impressions. First, when studying women and democracy in the Middle East, it is important to avoid excess dependence on broad classificatory frameworks, such as the "universalistic measures" and indicators that gauge women's status. These are often overly simplistic and not mindful of local conditions. Singerman recommended a more nuanced, historically grounded approach to women's issues in the Middle East.

Second, Dr. Singerman described the efforts of women's rights activists today as a type of *realpolitik*; they seek pragmatic results and insist that their campaigns and initiatives must be legitimate, legal, and "doable." For example, she described the inclusivity of women's reform efforts in Morocco, which involve women of varying socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds. These "norms of inclusion and participation" are exploited, "because that's what works" in systems where democratic openings have grown yet are still constrained by top-heavy executives. Meanwhile, realizing the impracticality of forming a women's party and using extralegal methods to achieve their sometimes-unpopular goals, activists in Egypt have modified their objectives, choosing instead to build coalitions with historians, scholars, religious authorities, politicians, and elite insiders in an effort to craft support for legal reform.

Third, Dr. Singerman echoed Eva Bellin's call to remember the time frame necessary for political change and for popularizing new activist "frames." Ten years ago, the Hadith and the Koran were rarely consulted by those in the women's rights movement. Today, however, the texts are valuable normative tools and women have used them in diverse, pragmatic, and imaginative ways to further their goals.

Session V: "American Interests and Middle East Democracy"

Speakers: **F. Gregory Gause III**, Associate Professor of Political Science, and Director, Middle East Studies Program, University of Vermont
Shibley Telhami, Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, College Park
The Honorable **William A. Rugh**, Associate, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Georgetown University

Discussant: **Stephen W. Van Evera**, Professor of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Chair: **Ali Banuazizi**, Professor of Psychology and Codirector, Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Program, Boston College

The final session examined how democratization in the Middle East fits in with U.S. foreign policy goals. **Dr. Gause** argued that promoting democracy in the Middle East presents a troubling paradox for the United States, because more political freedom would threaten long-standing U.S. interests in the region.

The George W. Bush administration, according to Dr. Gause, is "sincerely" interested in democracy promotion because of its belief that bad governance—not individual personalities or U.S. policies—causes terrorism. In conditions of good governance, the administration contends, terrorism would abate, and so would threats to the United States. Yet this argument, Dr. Gause declared, is fallacious: there is "no evidence" that democratic governments produce fewer terrorists, and no relationship has been established between regime type and terrorism. Besides, he added, American enemies in the Middle East detest democracy; there is therefore no reason to believe terrorists will welcome it by ceasing their attacks.

What then are the possible consequences of U.S. democracy-promotion policy in the Middle East? In Dr. Gause's view, they are stark. More democracy, he explained, means success for Islamists; the fact that they fare well in open political systems is "incontrovertible." And while he is confident that Islamists, if they gain power, would moderate their politics, he is also confident that they would undermine the two major pillars of U.S. Mideast policy. The first of these is support for a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan already oppose their countries' peace treaties with Israel, he noted, and he predicted that the Hamas-led Palestinian government will maintain its view that the Israeli state is an "unacceptable imposition" on Arab territory. The second fundamental U.S. interest in the Middle East is to maintain its strategic position in the Persian Gulf. Dr. Gause contended that Islamists would reject all manifestations of this position—U.S. military bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar; access agreements in Oman and Saudi Arabia; and military cooperation with Egypt and Jordan that grants both American warships access through the Suez Canal and U.S. aircraft permission to use these countries' airspace.

Herein lies Dr. Gause's paradox: democracy promotion endangers long-held U.S. interests—interests that the Bush administration has not abandoned even as it has focused on its new, post-September 11 War on Terror agenda. One way the administration can try "to square this circle," he concluded, is if it emulates Ronald Reagan's human rights promotion strategy of the 1980s, one that targeted the poor human rights records of U.S. foes—but not U.S. allies. Indeed, Gause noted, that seems to be the way the Bush administration is now moving: it is focusing the regime change/democratization agenda on Iran and Syria, but "treading lightly" with Mideast allies such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Dr. Telhami provided some broader context on U.S. democracy promotion, highlighting some of the recent data he has accumulated on Arab public opinion toward the United States. He argued that Arab perceptions of the United States are increasingly filtered through the "prism" of the Iraq War. Just as Americans have their own "prism of pain"—the September 11 attacks—that will shape the outlook of an entire generation, Arab views of the United States

have been cemented by their reaction to the Iraq War. In other words, noted Dr. Telhami, Arab public opinion is now anchored to a single seminal event—it does not fluctuate with the "ups and downs" of U.S. foreign policy.

What are the manifestations of this Iraq War prism? One is the tremendous degree of regional opposition to the war itself: the "vast majority" of Arabs (excluding Iraqis) contend that Iraqis are worse off now than they were prior to the U.S. invasion. Another manifestation is Arab attitudes toward nations that opposed the war—when asked to identify from a small list the nation that would make the best superpower, France was "by far" the top choice. And its president, Jacques Chirac, consistently materialized as the choice for best leader (George W. Bush narrowly trailed Israel's Ariel Sharon as the most reviled head of state). The reason for these choices is clear, noted Dr. Telhami: France and its leaders were vocal critics of the Iraq War.

Arab threat perceptions constitute an additional indication of the Iraq War's profound impact on Arab sentiments vis-à-vis the United States. When asked to identify the world's two most threatening countries, 70 percent of Arabs cite the United States as one of the top two. Significantly, Arabs perceive the United States as more of a threat than they do Iran. The latter appears a distant fourth on the list of most threatening nations. And when asked what they fear most about the Iraq War, the top two responses are a divided Iraq and American dominance—an indication that concern about the United States trumps fears of a strengthened Iran. Views on Iran's nuclear program do not betray any sense of alarm, either: most Arabs polled believe Iran has a right to nuclear weapons.

Arab public opinion toward U.S. democracy promotion is nuanced. On the one hand, it is complementary toward Western democracy and to the West in general. Surveys reveal that Arabs would prefer to reside in Western powers than in nations like China or Pakistan. And when asked to identify two countries in which citizens enjoy freedom and democracy, the top choices are European nations—and the United States. On the other hand, when asked to state the United States' true intentions in the Middle East, very few identify the desire to spread democracy. On the contrary, survey subjects most often cite a U.S. desire to protect oil and to assist Israel; respondents rarely believe the spread of democracy is even a U.S. objective.

How, then, can the United States go about promoting democracy in a region that regards Washington as one of its biggest threats and that is highly skeptical of American pledges to spread democracy? Dr. Telhami advised Washington to accept the fact that there is no "third way" beyond governing regimes and Islamist forces. It is the religious parties, not the secular ones, that control power on the grass roots levels, and in the foreseeable future these religious parties will always triumph in free elections. What are Washington's options? He argued that the United States can "apply the brake" and promote results short of regime change (such as economic reforms and human rights). Or, it can push ahead with democratization and either reject or engage the Islamists. Telhami warned, however, that rejection may trigger a "clash of civilizations," while the United States lacks a plan for the engagement option.

Ambassador Rugh addressed the operational elements of democracy promotion. He argued that while President George W. Bush officially regards it as a high priority—since 2003, the president has spoken publicly of a "forward strategy of freedom," and of the need to defend the freedom of others in order to strengthen American freedom—U.S. diplomats, the Bush administration, and even Bush himself do not demonstrate a full-fledged commitment to carrying out a policy of democracy promotion.

Ambassador Rugh argued that in the context of U.S.-Mideast diplomacy, democracy is simply not as high-priority as other U.S. interests. U.S. officials inform him that democracy is often "absent" from the classified talking points conveyed by the U.S. State Department in Washington to foreign service officers (FSOs) overseas. And even when present, it is accorded lower priority than items such as the Arab-Israeli peace process and the war in Iraq. President Bush probably does not "berate" heads of state in the Middle East over democracy; more likely, leaders such as Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah "preempt" any diplomatic debate

on democracy, stating simply that their nations are moving toward freedom. Public support for democracy pledged from the "bully pulpit" is important, Ambassador Rugh noted, but ultimately it is "diminished" if democracy promotion is not reinforced in private diplomatic exchanges.

He contended that FSOs' rather limited efforts to promote democracy are mirrored by the contributions of their colleagues back in Washington. Policymakers and officials do use economic pressure to promote democracy, but only selectively. In the case of crucial allies such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia—where much is at stake for American political and strategic interests—Ambassador Rugh imagines there is much less pressure. Further, new democratization tools such as the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative are modeled after those developed earlier by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the old U.S. Information Agency, which were rarely advertised to their intended recipients as meant to promote democracy.

Nonetheless, while Washington-based policymakers and U.S. diplomats abroad both appear to minimize democracy promotion on an operational level, the different environments in which they function trigger a divergence in their perceptions about democratic conditions in the Middle East. For example, while Washington Beltway insiders may simply conclude that the United Arab Emirates' political system is undemocratic, Abu Dhabi-based U.S. diplomats would recognize that the country's benevolent dictatorship has produced enough stability and prosperity to dampen citizens' enthusiasm for democratic reform. Similarly, Ambassador Rugh noted, regimes circumvent democratic protections (like constitutions) by employing "counterweights" such as emergency laws—another tactic those removed from the region may not appreciate.

Finally, U.S. diplomats in the field understand how local considerations defy external democratization pressures—an understanding those in Washington (including the president) may not have. Ambassador Rugh recounted how, as U.S. ambassador to Yemen in the 1980s, he attempted to persuade President Ali Abdullah Saleh to establish a multiparty system. The president declined. Several years later, Saleh permitted multiparty elections, explaining to Ambassador Rugh that he did so in order to neutralize the opposition groups that were flourishing—and causing trouble for the government—as underground movements in a single-party system. Domestic Yemeni politics, not the ambassador's urgings, precipitated this policy change. Therefore, Ambassador Rugh concluded that the impetus for democratic reform originates in local circumstances, not external ones—and for this reason, President Bush cannot take full credit for democratization successes in the Middle East.

Dr. Van Evera challenged some of the session's conclusions. Responding to the contention that democracy jeopardizes U.S. interests in the Mideast, Van Evera countered with the example of Turkey. In that country, a democratically elected ruling Islamic party has found points of common ground with the United States. Can the Turkish model be replicated elsewhere in the region, he asked? Additionally, he questioned whether the Bush administration's democracy promotion is truly "sincere." Dr. Van Evera noted that the world is fraught with authoritarian regimes, yet U.S. democratization campaigns target very few of them. In Iraq, democracy projects are "heavily underresourced." And the architects of U.S. democracy-promotion policy, he pointed out, have no historic affection for democracy. In fact, a favorite academic inspiration of the neoconservatives is the late Jeanne Kirkpatrick's seminal *Commentary* article from 1979, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," which advocates support for undemocratic regimes.

Asserting that talk about the use of force is "once again in the air," Dr. Van Evera also underscored the importance of including the prospect of another U.S. military action in debates about democracy promotion in the Middle East. He mentioned possible scenarios involving air assaults or "contra wars" in Iran and Syria, pointing out that neoconservatives engineered many such interventions around the world back in the 1980s.

Finally, Dr. Van Evera advocated a wider debate on U.S. policies in the Mideast. Democratization, he averred, marginalizes the important broader discussion about how best to counter the "terms of the debate" advanced by militant Islamists, including

al-Qaeda. Given that the latter feeds on war and violence, emphasizing the crimes and destruction the West wreaks across the world, should not the United States consider adopting a "pro-peace" policy in the Mideast? Dr. Van Evera also suggested that Washington reassess its trade policies. The existing practice of levying quotas on agricultural goods and textiles is a "slap in the face" to the Middle East's destitute.

Concluding Remarks

Speakers: **Larry Diamond**, Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University
Rami G. Khouri, Editor-at-large, *The Daily Star*, Beirut, Lebanon

Chair: The Honorable **Stephen W. Bosworth**, Dean, The Fletcher School, Tufts University

The conference's concluding remarks assessed the balance sheet on democratization policies in the Middle East, and considered what these policies may portend for the region's people in the future.

Dr. Diamond lamented the utter mess U.S. policies have made in the Middle East. Iraq has succumbed to "chaos." Democracy cannot grow, he argued, in a nation rife with "death squads" and withering levels of violence. Meanwhile, the George W. Bush administration has not ruled out military action in Iran—which would be an "act of genius," Dr. Diamond quipped, as Iran is in fact the Mideast nation most prepared for democratization. He voiced a fervent hope: that the Iraq War is the last time the United States uses preemptive military force to deal with a security threat that is only potential. Military action in Iran, by his reckoning, would not only be ineffective, but would destroy, or at least render extremely remote, the prospects for democratic change in Iran.

A better Iran policy, he argued, would involve dividing the nation's people from its unpopular government. Yet such efforts are handicapped by the American credibility gap: the United States, through its military actions, prison scandals, and general hypocrisy, has squandered its soft power faster than at any time since World War II. Through it all, however, President Bush has exhibited unflinching resolve as he pushes forward with democratization. Indeed, Dr. Diamond argued, not recognizing the sense of religious faith driving the president's democracy-promotion policy means "you're missing something huge."

Crucial to making sense of the challenges facing democratization in the Middle East is appreciating the perceived lack of dignity

experienced by the region's people. The sense of humiliation, indignity, and failure experienced by many in the region is a "fundamental problem." When people are deprived of their dignity and offered access to a violent response, "you're asking for trouble." Only with broad-based development and better governance can this dignity be recovered. The problem, however, is that democracy conceivably brings better governance yet may also propel into power those who sympathize with terrorism.

What can be done? Dr. Diamond had stated at the outset that "we're in trouble," but he emphasized his commitment to democracy promotion and offered his vision of a better, revamped U.S. democratization policy in the Middle East: a two-pronged approach that emphasizes patience and engagement. A long-term approach to democratization would involve adopting a distinct policy for every target country, with each policy tailored to unique local conditions. Such an approach would also necessitate reinvigorating U.S. public diplomacy capacities, which Diamond deems to have declined ever since the U.S. Information Agency merged with the State Department.

A better democratization policy would emphasize engagement at several different levels. First, there would be collaboration with European allies. The justification is simple: the United States is "radioactive in the world" and lacks the credibility to pursue democracy promotion on its own. Americans should therefore promote better governance, development, and democracy in the Middle East from within the framework of a transatlantic partnership.

Second, the United States would engage Middle East citizens in earnest. Dr. Diamond implored U.S. officials to convince the region's young elites that it is in their interest to promote democracy, and that they should be convinced that otherwise they may go the way of Iran's shahs. In fact, democratization models and power-sharing arrangements can accommodate the region's monarchies: for example, a constitutional monarchy can preside over an environment of political openness and competition while maintaining control over a few key centers of power, especially in the security realm. Americans should also engage the region's moderate Islamic thinkers. Many of these people support the application of religious law in a way consistent with democracy. While he is personally opposed to such an illiberal system, Dr. Diamond said there is nothing intrinsically undemocratic with a government that comes to power via democratic means and that applies Shari'a, so long as it respects the rule of law and minority rights, and is willing to be voted out of office if the people turn against it.

The third type of engagement is society-to-society, or international exchange. Dr. Diamond cited the example of the Asia Foundation, a nongovernmental organization that operates small offices around Asia and initiates cultural exchanges between Asians and Americans. A final path of engagement lies with pursuing Arab-Israeli peace—an issue that "hangs like a cloud" over the Middle East.

Mr. Khouri argued that democratization constitutes a very small part of the complex universe that is today's Middle East. He asserted that three major themes—all of them new—thread together the region's multifaceted realities.

One of these themes is a demographic one: citizens are increasingly young, urban, and well-educated, with their basic needs met. They are also frustrated and fearful about the future. The second major theme is the ascendancy of the group—ethnic, social, and tribal—to the detriment of the nation state. One thinks of Middle East nations not as a single entity, but as Sunnis, Shiites, Maronites, Druze, and the like. In effect, Mr. Khouri noted, the political order of the modern Arab world is "fragmenting." The third major theme characterizing the region is an "intensive, extensive, and intrusive" Western—particularly American—intervention in the Middle East. For the last decade, the United States has sought to transform the area's culture. It has targeted the educational system, the balance between religiosity and secularism, the economic system, and trade partnerships—"every value and identity component." This translates to "nearly predatory intervention" in almost every country of the region.

How does the Arab citizen react to these developments? According to Mr. Khouri, the response is one of anger, humiliation,

fear, and discontent. Dignity and justice—and not freedom and democracy—are the "rallying cries" of Arab society. Many Arabs express a sentiment that Mr. Khouri referred to as "dehumanization"—mistreated by their own societies and others, they cease acting like humans and start acting like animals, which in some unfortunate cases result in violence against fellow citizens and other countries. This behavior is not irrational; rather, it is criminal, yet rational all the same. Mr. Khouri compared the actions of many of today's Arabs to those of African-Americans during the U.S. civil rights movement. Members of Egypt's Kefiyah Movement, Lebanon's "Independence Intifada" protestors, Palestinian intifada fighters—these are all people who have lost all sense of fear, and for whom the "dehumanizing process" has reached the point where they are willing to risk death for the sake of their children's future. They evince a "suicidal defiance," just as African-Americans did in the face of racism and police dogs several decades ago.

Arab citizens' burning desire for dignity and justice is actually a form of "rehumanization," argued Mr. Khouri. Across the Arab World, people are demanding better, normal lives, so that they can live and express themselves freely. Arabs yearn for the features of liberal democracy: good governance, transparency, pluralism, and the rule of law. However, they also seek five broader conditions: (1) stability and security; (2) sovereignty, or the freedom of citizens to run their own affairs; (3) a firm sense of identity—at personal, community, and group levels; (4) material development; and (5) legitimacy—extending to states, governments, and political/social movements.

Democracy alone cannot fulfill these goals, Mr. Khouri insisted. The "antidote"—in fact the "missing element" in the Middle East since the immediate post-World War I era, when European powers preyed on the territory of the former Ottoman Empire—is a citizenry that can define its own political culture and ideology. For democratization in the Middle East to be successful, it must create an environment of "self-determination" for the region's people. On this note, Mr. Khouri issued a challenge to the United States: the U.S. government should support democracy in the Middle East as a means of promoting a "third option" (other than theocracy or a police state): national self-determination, a condition in which the people of the Middle East can shape the political fabric of their countries. They would do so by emphasizing universal values (respected in the West and the Mideast alike) such as majority rule, minority rights, the rule of law, justice, dignity, and equality.

The spirit of self-determination includes not just the freedom to define conditions within a country's borders, but also the borders themselves. When the Soviet Union collapsed, populations across the former USSR were sufficiently "self-determinant" that they were able to choose to change their borders and form new states. Indeed, Mr. Khouri noted, while Arab democracy has many unintended consequences, such as the results of free elections, the rights of citizens to decide whether they reconfigure Arab state borders could prove to be another unexpected outcome of democratization in the Middle East.

If the U.S. government promotes self-determination in the Middle East, Mr. Khouri predicted, the Middle East will "take off" in a "colossal momentum" toward democracy, stability, and development.

Participants

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The Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies

The mission of the Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies at Tufts University is to create an academic environment for the promotion of greater understanding of the rich heritage of the Eastern Mediterranean, and of the significant challenges that this region faces at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The center acts as a major focus for cross-regional and cross-cultural analysis, providing a forum for the articulation of a broad diversity of viewpoints in the belief that this will serve as an effective means of conflict resolution.

The main countries concerned are Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, and the neighboring countries of Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Israel, and Turkey, together with any other country or region of the world whose history and politics affect them. The region's history and its pivotal role in world politics have attracted the interest of scholars concerned with fields as diverse as the origins of writing and the beginnings of modern science. In focusing on the Eastern Mediterranean, the center is a rich source of current information and data on the area, encouraging the consideration of policy issues from an international perspective.

In addition to constituting a valuable resource for Middle East majors and graduate students in other fields, the university-wide center's links to the existing curriculum include collaboration with a number of schools, departments, and programs at Tufts. Visiting fellowships are offered annually to prominent and promising scholars from abroad who can make significant contributions to the center's teaching and research and its analysis of public policy issues.

The center sponsors academic symposia, conferences, and seminars that enhance its commitment to cross-regional analysis and to the encouragement of a diversity of voices from within and outside the region. It publishes occasional papers and the proceedings of workshops and conferences on the history, culture, and international relations of the region.

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