

THE CENTER FOR NATIONAL POLICY

“PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: EGYPT AND BEYOND”

FEATURED SPEAKER:

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NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**

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MR. SCOTT BATES: Well, welcome to the Center for National Policy. There are a few folks missing as of this moment, including one of our panelists, because in this age of digital communication, you've probably seen, but it seems that President Mubarak might be leaving office today. Still unclear, but this is a breaking and evolving story, so Les Campbell will be with us in a few minutes, but at this moment he's otherwise detained.

So welcome. My name is Scott Bates. I'm vice president here at the Center for National Policy. And on behalf of Steve Flynn, our president, and Peter Kovler, our chairman, we're glad that you're all here on what could in fact be an historic occasion.

I remember in 1989 watching the fall of the Berlin Wall. I know you're all too young to remember that, but I remember this. And I was with my father, who is a veteran of the Cold War, and looking at the scenes of people tearing down the wall with their hands and the joyful celebrations. He just said, "I never thought I'd see the day." And I think that that might be something that all of us have thought in the last couple of weeks looking at the crowds in Cairo.

Did you ever believe that you would see the day? You may have hoped for it, but maybe a little skeptical that it would happen, yet still with the people power that's been unleashed in the streets of Tunis and Cairo and Amman and Sana, there has yet to be substantial systemic change outside of Tunisia, maybe in Egypt, but that – we really don't know where that's headed right now. Are the concessions from the leaders in the region tactical or is this part of a real change? What are the prospects for democratic revolution in the Middle East, and is this something that we should welcome?

Well to discuss these events, we're very fortunate to have the people that I believe are the foremost experts on this topic. Greg Aftandilian, to my right here, has worked for 13 years in the U.S. State Department as a Middle East analyst and in particular on Egypt. He was a recipient of the Department's Superior Honor Award for his analysis on Egypt. Mr. Aftandilian is also well-respected on Capitol Hill for his foreign policy expertise. He served as an advisor to Congressman Chris Van Hollen, to former senators Sarbanes and Kennedy as well.

Greg has been a research fellow at the Kennedy School of Government and an international affairs fellow at the Center for – sorry – the Council on Foreign Relations. Yes, that's a small shop down the road. (Laughter.)

He's also author of *Egypt's Bid for Arab Leadership: Implications for U.S. Policy* and last year wrote a book called *Looking Forward: An Integrated Strategy for Supporting Democracy and Human Rights in Egypt*. So maybe those sales will go up now, Greg. I think so.

Greg is currently an adjunct professor at Boston University and Northeastern University in Boston.

Lara Friedman, to my left, is a former U.S. Foreign Service Officer who served in Jerusalem, Tunis, Beirut, and Khartoum. As current director of policy and government relations of Americans for Peace Now, Ms. Friedman meets frequently with members of Congress and their staff and foreign diplomats as well. She's participated in Track II peace negotiations in the Middle East. And I personally believe that there is no one that knows more about the Middle East peace process than her.

And also, he's not here yet, but Les Campbell will be here in a few minutes. And Les is currently the director for the Middle East and North Africa for the National Democratic Institute. NDI has nine permanent offices in the region for the Middle East and North Africa and those offices promote – how can I say this diplomatically because I've worked for NDI – I don't want to say they promote democracy, but let's say civic engagement, fairness in electoral processes, and also strengthening political parties and democratic institutions all across the world. NDI is in 60 countries, but in particular Les' field is from Morocco all the way over to Iraq and down to Sudan. I believe NDI does what I like to call the most important work in the world and it's been doing it for about 25 years.

So without further ado, I'd like to turn to Greg first and say what can we expect in the next 24 hours and then after that, what can we expect in the next few weeks. So get your crystal ball out, Greg.

MR. GREGORY AFTANDILIAN: Okay. Well, thank you very much, Scott, for inviting me to speak here today and also Steve Flynn, as well. And I'm very happy to be on such a distinguished panel with Lara and Les Campbell.

I sort of prepared my remarks before this latest breaking news about Mubarak possibly stepping aside. So let me sort of just talk about what I see as the current conflicts in Egypt, but then we'll discuss about the latest breaking news today, what that means.

Prior to today's news, I think what we are witnessing has been a sort of a great standoff. You have the regime under Mubarak/Omar Suleiman, his new vice president, longstanding intelligence chief, wanting to maintain the authoritarian structure of the Egyptian regime and only making a few minimal concessions, I think, to the opposition. They talk about some things, amendments to the constitution on the elections, for example, but there really was no talk really of getting rid of the emergency laws.

In fact, just yesterday, one of the high ranking Egyptian officials said "we can't even do that because of all of these prisoners that are out – who've been released," neglecting to say that the regime itself actually released these prisoners.

And one of these amendments they were talking about is bringing back judicial supervision of the elections. But I was in Egypt actually in 2005, with NDI, on a study mission to look at these elections, and there were judicial supervision of the elections, but of course there're all these shenanigans at the same time. So even if you have judicial supervision of the elections, what's to prevent the other abuses from taking place? So in other words, there seemed to have been a tendency by the regime to throw out these crumbs to the opposition, hoping some people would bite.

The young demonstrators on the street, however, they want a complete revamping of the authoritarian system. They believe the whole system is both undemocratic and corrupt to its core. Once Mubarak is gone, they believe only then can this revamping take place, and this is why they have repeatedly called for Mubarak to go, quote, unquote "now," not six months down the road.

Now, Omar Suleiman, in his new role as vice president, has been reaching out to the opposition parties, including the leftist Tagammu Party, the liberal Wafd Party, the Muslim Brotherhood, and also a committee of so-called wise men, Egyptian intellectuals, who have been engaged in some type of dialogue with Suleiman. I think from Suleiman's perspective, the strategy is to get them to agree to certain concessions to show that the regime is sincere and then if those opposition forces would then glom on to those concessions, that would then take the steam out of the demonstrations. I think that was sort of in their thinking.

And there's also a segment of the Egyptian population, which wants a return to sort of normalcy. So they want these demonstrations to end. They want so the economic system to get back on its feet.

But what has happened, I think the opposition parties are now backing away from those type of negotiations. We've even seen the Brotherhood and the Wafd Party now saying that even though they had these initial discussions with Suleiman, they're going to hold back right now. One it's because the regime concessions, they see are substantial, and two, the demonstrations, the ongoing demonstrations in Tahrir Square and in other places have been reinvigorated by, of course, the young Google executive who came there, gave a very emotional speech the other day. And now, we're seeing these other demonstrations breaking out in other parts of Egypt as well. Hence, the opposition parties and the wise men might believe that they may get more concessions down the road by weighing things out a bit. So we've had this sort of great standstill over the past couple of days.

Just as an aside, the regime's officials have made the point, "we have to treat Mubarak with respect. He was a national war hero. But one has to also look at this generational perspective. The last war, the major war was in '73, when Mubarak was the war hero. For the people on the streets that were born after 1973, they don't remember sort of the nationalist uprisings led by Gama Abdel Nasser and things like that. For them, it's been Mubarak authoritarian regime predicated on preserving the status quo.

And I was telling my colleagues just before we started here, in the first few days of this sort of uprising, there was a young man in central Cairo holding up his diploma and basically saying, “this is really worth nothing these days.” This is very telling. So you have these young people on the street, really wanting fundamental change, not change on the margins.

Now, how will this standoff end? Well, right now, let me get to this point that Scott was raising that right now it’s a very good chance now Mubarak is going to cede power to his vice president. Under the Egyptian constitution, if Mubarak formally steps down, power has to be transferred to the speaker of parliament for 60 days. That’s not what’s going to take place, in my opinion. When Mubarak had his medical emergencies and he went off to Germany, I think he transferred power to his prime minister for a week or two. So in other words, there’s going to be some type of formal handover, but not a formal resignation.

The question is will this satisfy, of course –

MR. BATES: Wait a second. That’d be a formal handover, but not a resignation. So you don’t expect that Mubarak will actually resign the office of president?

MR. AFTANDILIAN: – well, if he does resign, then that would kick in the constitutional mechanisms, where the speaker of parliament takes over.

MR. BATES: Right. And – yes, okay.

MR. AFTANDILIAN: So I think what’s going to happen is a sort of a handover of temporary authority because that’s how the current constitution works.

MR. BATES: And so he could technically keep to saying I’m president till September.

MR. AFTANDILIAN: Well, but if he does sort of handover temporary power to Suleiman, it would be – he would then have to sort of go by the wayside, in other words, just quietly, sort of not be a figure, even though technically he would still remain president.

But then the question arises, will that satisfy the young people on the streets? You’re hearing different voices right now in Egypt on this. Some people say that Suleiman is basically another incarnation of Mubarak. He’s from that same authoritarian system. And so they’re very dissatisfied with Omar Suleiman at the helm. Other people said, “well, at least you have a situation where Mubarak is no longer sort of the guy in charge and maybe that would then lead to a true democratic transition.”

In my mind, the military is the key right now. We don’t really know what’s going on behind the scenes, between the Egyptian military and the Mubarak regime. Of course, the military has been closely tied to the regime for decades, but the military, of course,

has straddled defense during this crisis. On the one hand, they haven't abandoned Mubarak. On the other hand, they haven't fired on the people. The military, I think – there's couple – there're several things going on in terms of the military role right now. I think the military look long-term. They want to preserve their autonomous status in Egypt. The military basically has its own factories, its own farms. Their military budget is kind of off limits. They're an institution amongst themselves. And they want to preserve that.

Two, they don't want to be seem going against the Egyptian people because if Egypt does progress towards a democratic transition, they don't want to have blood on their hands because whoever then takes power would then blame the military.

Three, they don't want to prolong chaos, though, either. And one has to throw oneself back to '78-'79 period. I don't sort of believe there's a lot of comparisons between Egypt and Iran because the countries are very different, but if you look back at the '78-'79 period in Iran, the Iranian military did split. And that allowed the radical Khomeini forces to come to power. So I think Egypt is a conscript army. The military officers probably believe that if they actually do use force against the people, there's no telling what could happen in their own military because the conscripts cadets turn on their officers. So there's a lot of big unknowns there. So I think that's one of the reasons why the military isn't playing this role.

But – to sort of look down the road a bit here – if Suleiman just sort of stays as the authoritarian figure in this situation and doesn't really make concessions, I think you're still going to – major concessions – I think there's going to be continued street agitation. The military might go to Suleiman – and of course, he is a military man, even though he's general intelligence chief, he came from the military – they might say for the sake of Egypt, we really have to make substantial concessions at this point, otherwise, things could really unravel, and we'll all lose out.

So it really depends right now on Suleiman's attitude and the military's attitude at this particular point. I think if Mubarak does go ahead and give temporary powers to Suleiman tonight, I think Mubarak is really kind of a spent force and is no longer going to be a factor.

So that's how sort of I see things at this particular point.

Just some other points on how I see this playing out in the region. There was some talk early on, say a few weeks ago, that people were talking about a democratic tsunami taking over the region. I think that was quite premature. What we see now is that regimes, through a combination of either concessions, largely economic concessions, a few political concessions, and some brute force are trying to sort of deal with agitation on their own societies in the wake of this Egyptian uprising.

I think many of these leaders, luckily for them, are actually much more popular at home than President Mubarak has been in Egypt and I think that is an important factor.

In other words, in a country like Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is seen as the reformer in a very conservative society. So for a young reformer, they want King Abdullah to live longer – a long life and he's now in his – I guess 86 years old or something like that. They want to live till he maybe is 90s to actually make significant reforms because there're other members of the Saudi royal family who are not in favor of reforms. So in other words, King Abdullah, that has some legitimacy where Mubarak didn't, and reformers look to a person like that to continue the reforms.

Similarly in Morocco, King Mohammed, I think is also considered much better than his father in terms of a person who reformed the country. He still is head of an authoritarian country, but nonetheless, he's seen as more popular than any other type of leader. And one even can say that, to some degree, even with Bashar Assad in Syria and King Abdullah of Jordan, maybe not to the same extent, but they still retain a certain amount of popularity.

So in that respect, the situation in those countries are very different from Egypt. So what does it all mean then?

I think this means that we're going to have continued agitation and possibly demonstrations in various Arab countries. But I don't see regimes toppling or falling one by one over the next few months or the next few years.

There's going to be growing agitation by the people for a more accountable government, for more economic opportunities for youth, and of course, one has to remember that it wasn't just the desire for a political change in Egypt. It was the desire for jobs for young people because there's high youth unemployment throughout this region, and that's spurring a lot of these activities.

So with that, I'll leave it. I'll be happy to answer questions. Thank you.

MR. BATES: Thank you very much. And now, we go to Lara Friedman, who was checking just minutes ago –

MS. LARA FRIEDMAN: I'm still right now.

MR. BATES: – you still are, good. She is following the tweets of people in the square, and so it'll be very interesting to hear updates, but also your perspectives, as well.

MS. FRIEDMAN: Thanks. There's nothing to update on Twitter. It's all just gossip right now about what we're going to hear later.

Thank you so much, Scott. Thank you. It's good to be here. You have noticed me scribbling because for me this is moving so quickly I actually didn't prepare a lot of remarks. I figured I'd wing it. So bear with me.

I actually want to pick up from where Greg just left off, what this means to the region in terms of is it a tsunami. I used the term tectonic political shift about a week and a half ago.

From the perspective of – looking at this from the lens of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, whether this is a tectonic shift, whether it is a tsunami, the reality is this changes things. So sort of starting from the Israeli perspective, and people that read the Israeli press and look at statements, including out of the Jewish community, the response to what's happening in Egypt has been, I think somewhat predictable. It's been interesting. The changes in Egypt, the developments in Egypt, on a general level, have been greeted with a great deal of unease, to say the least. The sense that the Israeli sort of status quo leadership would like to see a return to the status quo. We want to roll things back to pre-January 25th because that's where people are comfortable.

I've heard a lot of people say that what's happening now proves that the regime in Egypt was inherently unstable. I wonder about a regime that's been unstable for longer than I've been alive. That seems to be pretty – not to say it was stable in perpetuity, this proves that it wasn't, but from an Israeli security perspective and pulling together a foreign policy and a security doctrine, this has been pretty stable, certainly since the Camp David Accords and before that still predictable. So there's a lot of unease in Israel and we saw that with statements mostly not official, but from officials, wishing that Mubarak would stay in power.

There's been a lot of noise out of Israel, bashing Obama for giving up on the great ally Mubarak, which for those of us who watched Egypt issues day in and day out, for the past decade or so, find somewhat ironic, since it is the same voices that have been bashing Mubarak for years as not being a real friend of Israel and – there's a real shift in tone here.

But taking a step back, Israeli concerns about what's happening in Egypt, I think you have to start from recognition that they are reasonable. This is – stopping – forgetting the regional implications for a second; you have the peace treaty at stake. You've got the gas at stake. You have an incredibly long border at stake, an important border, a problematic border. And you've got Gaza at stake. Those are just off the top of anybody's head. It is not unreasonable for Israelis to be sitting back, saying, whether we like the idea of democracy taking (over ?) or not, we're really concerned about what this means to us.

The question is from there, where does Israel go, is the next step to say, “we're going to put ourselves on the side of history which says we have to have authoritarian governments in power in our neighborhood.” That's a problematic place for Israel to be. It's a problematic place for, I would say, the Jewish community to be. That's why I've been writing against it.

But it's problematic mainly – forgetting any moral or ethical implications. There is an irony for those of us who, as American Jews, are proud of Israel as the only

democracy in the Middle East. That is not supposed to be an aspirational statement. That is supposed to be an observational statement. And the idea that Israel must remain in perpetuity the only democracy is very hard, I think, for anyone to defend, but as, certainly all the folks at NDI know, I was an observer for the elections – both of the Palestinian elections, including the PLC elections, which brought – which Hamas won. Israel has, I think a lot of concerns about what democracy looks like, just like the U.S. does. There's a certain sense of, "well, democracy is good in principle, but only if it elects people that we are comfortable with." And until you're mature enough to elect people you're comfortable with, you don't get democracy. That is, I think, getting harder and harder to defend.

In terms of what's happening now, as I said, I think the Israeli – I think anyone would say Israeli concerns about what's happening in Egypt are eminently reasonable. But sort of looking at what really is going to happen, there are worst case scenarios, and I don't think it is, again, unreasonable for Israelis and people who care about Israel in the U.S. or anywhere else to be looking at worst case scenarios. I think that's how strategic military planners work. You have a whole range of scenarios, from the worst to the best. You don't bet on any of them. And a worst case scenario is certainly the Muslim Brotherhood takes over. They abrogate the treaty. We have regional war.

I think most serious analysts consider that not a likely scenario, any piece of it, I think, and someone else, who probably is more of an expert on this can talk if people are interested on the Muslim Brotherhood. I think if you look at the people who do polling – actually, the Washington Institute released a poll today. They're doing direct telephone polling during this crisis and found very low support for the Muslim Brotherhood. But that is still a concern. There is – the question of whether Egypt would abrogate the treaty is a concern. Realistically, I think most analysts, myself included, believe that the next regime in Egypt, whatever it looks like, it's going to be dealing with a lot of domestic stuff. Its first stuff is not going to be to open a front of war with Israel. But that said – and this goes more to the regional implications, not just the Egyptian ones – whether it's a tsunami, whether it's a tectonic shift, I think you just said, Greg, regimes in the region are now going to be more accountable to their people. I keep using the word "populist." And I don't mean that in a negative way, but I mean this is – even if there is not a shift towards a real democracy in a lot of these countries, the populist, the need to appeal to populist sentiment is going to be there. And the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a big piece of that.

Egypt and Jordan have peace treaties in Israel. They are not popular peace treaties. Anybody who spends any time in the region – I say this as an American Jew who travels and speaks pretty good Arabic – people like me that don't have a problem with Jews, they're not happy about Israel and they're not happy about a peace treaty which seems to give protection to an occupation, which has been going on, again, certainly longer than I've been alive.

So I do think this is – and I think people in Israel are aware this is going to be more of an issue. What does that mean, though? It doesn't mean that we see more of a

recognition of a linkage, which says, “my God, we better move quickly while we’ve got a partner in the Palestinians and try to make peace.” It doesn’t sound that way so far, although we’re hearing more voices, not just from the left saying that. Livni – Tzipi Livni, yesterday, at the Herzliya conference in Israel, a big conference that’s going on, actually made that linkage quite directly. But the tendency, certainly from the current leadership of Israel has been to say, either Israel can’t make peace because we’re threatened, or we can’t make peace because we certainly don’t need to. Or we can’t make peace because the Palestinian leadership is too weak. Or we can’t make peace because the Palestinian leadership isn’t a partner, which tends to mean they’re too strong. So we’re all waiting to see if there’s going to be a shift and I think there’ll be pressure for there to be a shift. But there is no question – I think Israel is sort of waking up to this realization, whatever happens in Egypt next, they are going to be living next door to a regime, which even if it does not abrogate the treaty, and I don’t believe it will, they’ll be living next to what was prior January 25th a cold peace. There was no love lust, no warmth. But even then, Israel could count on the regime to be its main partner in the region, whether it was for pressuring Hamas or pressuring Abu Mazen or for working with the U.S. in tandem on Iran stuff, as we see from WikiLeaks – pick your issue. Egypt has been this partner for Israel for a very long time.

That is going to change, I think, inevitably, regardless of whether the army takes over or whether or Omar Suleiman takes over, or whether you have some sort of real democracy in the next stage. Israel is not going to have the luxury and it seems, I think – well, to me it seems that the main – Israel has very little control about what’s happening in Egypt. This is not – I keep saying this to my Israeli friends. What’s happening in Egypt is not about Israel. And I keep urging them, “for the love of God, don’t make it about Israel.” The same way that it’s not about the U.S., and for the love of God, don’t make it about the U.S. by injecting it into it. But Israel does have some control over how it will deal with this next regime. And the main point it can control is how it’s dealing with the Palestinians and how it is perceived, which then fits into – you ask me to talk about the Palestinian side – it fits into how the Palestinians and their leadership are perceived.

It’s very interesting watching what’s happening on the ground in the West Bank and Gaza to some extent. This Egypt crisis comes right on the heels of the Palestine Papers crisis, if anybody followed that. But this huge leakage of documents, internal Palestinian negotiating documents to Al Jazeera – and Al Jazeera worked very hard in their framing of these documents because they didn’t just leak them like WikiLeaks did, they actually framed them. They did four alone TV specials and they did headlines, many of which were not entirely consistent with the content of the documents. But clearly that entire moment, that entire news cycle was aimed at discrediting the Palestinian leadership. And in terms of the Diaspora, in terms of people standing up and demonstrating in London, it had that effect.

It had very little effect in the West Bank and Gaza. And different people will give you different opinions why. Some people will tell you it’s just the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are so cynical and fatigued nothing surprises them. I would suggest

that there's nothing surprising in that. President Abbas was one of the drafters of the Geneva Accords. So anyone who says it's a surprise that the PLO was negotiating to let Israel keep some settlements in Jerusalem, that's a surprise, they haven't read the Geneva Accords because that's the Geneva Accords. Palestinians knew about the Geneva Accords when they voted in the presidential elections. So I think that the reason that it's a giant sort of thud in the West Bank is because people knew it and it's – they're not maybe thrilled about it, but not surprised.

What's happening with Egypt is different. You do see rumblings. They're not rumblings like you see in many other Arab countries, and I would suggest that's because the options for what to do with these rumblings are much more limited.

Someone said to me at the beginning of this, "well, now we're going to see people coming into the streets in Ramallah and maybe even in Gaza demanding free and fair elections in the government." And I said, "that's great, but they live under occupation. I don't quite understand how you imagine, you here, sitting in Washington, how you imagine them taking to the streets in the same way that they're doing even in Sana and demanding change." They've had free and fair elections, absolutely – NDI certified it. There were so few problems in those elections that the monitors, the veteran monitors, unlike me, were complaining about how boring it was. So they've had that and the results were not what people wanted and they're essentially erased. So you can get on the streets in the areas that are under PA control and demand change for how things work within the cage that you're allowed to control, but the cage is still there. So the impacts of this on the internal Palestinian political process I think is very, very different than the rest of the Arab world.

Nonetheless, as the rest of the region is now more sensitive to the concerns of the Arab world because Palestinians are not the only people who are aware of what's happening in the occupation. This is a joy of Al Jazeera. People see. They see what's happening in the West Bank every day. They see what's happening in Gaza. It is going to be harder for the PA to maintain credibility as a partner for peace if they're not achieving anything and at the point when Israel is trying, one hopes, to develop some credibility in the region by having a real peace process, they need a partner. So these things are really inextricably linked.

At the end of the day, for me, this comes back – and I hate to say it – very much to this city and Barack Obama. His credibility is still very much invested in the peace process. With Egypt, U.S. – and Les can talk about, I'm sure he will – U.S. democracy efforts have been sort of fitful. And I think it's – I think I'm someone who'd say it's much better that the U.S. is not trying to claim credit and can't, shouldn't claim credit for what's happening in Egypt right now. But the U.S. cannot be extricated from the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, whether or not people believe there's even a peace process now is a question that lies in Washington, or the responsibility for it lies largely in Washington. So what happens next? Which will impact what happens between Israel and Egypt, it's going to impact on the health of Israeli-Jordanian relations, which are right now at all time low. And these are not things – I always make the case. You can't

manage the Israeli-Palestinian conflict under the best of circumstances. And these are not the best of circumstances.

I will point to Jerusalem as just a simple example of why you can't manage it. Last week, in the middle of all the stuff happening in Egypt, there was a cornerstone laying ceremony for a new settlement on Mount Scopus, so we're talking the Mount of Olives. This is going to be the first Israeli construction on Mount of Olives, settlement construction, since 1967. I saw that happening and thought, "my God, you're going to make it about Israel." Fortunately, people were so busy they hadn't really noticed. So I did not see people with signs in Tahrir Square saying the Dome of the Rock is being threatened. But a few days later, the Israel Antiquities Authority announced the opening of a new tunnel, which goes right by, right by the Haram al-Sharif. So there was some reporting in the Arab world.

Again, right now, people still are too busy to notice. As things start to level off, these things resonate in the Arab world. Israel's relations are going to be – and Israel security are going to be impacted by how they deal with the Palestinians. Jerusalem is one example of what that looks like. And the Obama administration can't manage it. The next time there is a major demolition in Jerusalem, when the news – if it's a slower news day, if Tahrir Square is not the top item, then this will be the top item in the Arab news across the region. And in a moment where Arab regimes, who already care about Jerusalem and are concerned about what's happening, in a moment when they're under more pressure, this is going to be an even bigger problem and it's going to be an even bigger problem for Washington.

I'll leave it at that.

MR. BATES: Thank you very much, Lara. And now, for the most traumatic entrance in CNP history, we have Les Campbell – (laughter) – coming in. Thank you, Les. I know you're a little bit busy today, as we all are.

MR. LES CAMPBELL: Good to see you.

MR. BATES: And I would like to be able to say that Les is a friend. However, he has personally sent me to Iraq on nine separate occasions. So I don't know if that's a nice thing or not. It was a great experience. Anyway, thank you, Les. And I – this is evolving by the minute.

MR. CAMPBELL: Yes.

MR. BATES: So your thoughts.

MR. CAMPBELL: Yes, I apologize for being late. We have staff in Cairo and just when I was probably should have beginning in the cab, I got a call from a fellow named Joe Hall, who's our director in Beirut, but he went into Cairo about eight days ago. And they were just heading to the square for a meeting, and of course the

excitement's building and he was excitingly giving me an update on his lunch meeting and then what he was hearing as they walked toward the square. But the atmosphere was festive. He was saying he was very, very happy.

So people are obviously waiting for what they perceive as a positive announcement. I'm slightly more skeptical. I guess it remains to be seen. I think if the announcement that is to be made includes Suleiman in any way, I think it's probably just another tactical move. I would be watching for another tactical move that kind of keeps the structures of the regime intact as they kind of try to get all the more breathing room. But the rumors are pretty strong, given the meeting of the military heads that this may be the military taking over and perhaps sponsoring or guaranteeing a transition or a caretaker government. And if that's the case, I think that probably bodes well. That's been one of the main demands from the very beginning. And probably there's no way of moving forward unless there is some kind of caretaker government. It could include senior NDP figures, but it has to be negotiated with the opposition and has to be – if there is a caretaker government, something that all sides can live with. So I think it could be this. So anyway, I think we'll all be watching our BlackBerries or whatever we have and see what happens later today.

I did get here in time to hear most of what Greg said and all of what Lara said and maybe I'll just react quickly and leave lots of time for discussion.

Of course, every time people predict tsunamis, they never occur. But I would say if Hosni Mubarak who is today and we've seen in a three-week period or four-week period Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak leave power as a result of bottom up pressure, that would be – I don't know, it's maybe not a tsunami, but it's pretty amazing. I don't think anyone, even those of us that have worked in this region for a long time, ever would have anticipated that. And I think the analysis has yet to be written. The analysis – it'll take many months if not years to sort of sort all of it out. But it's – I think the conventional wisdom in the democracy community generally and I think maybe in the Middle East sort of analysis community was probably that the Middle East rulers that had allowed limited liberalization were perhaps in a more tentative position that they were in a weaker position. It was – I think it was common to look at a country like Yemen, for example, or even places like Morocco and Jordan – I know that NDI has done election observation – we do a lot of programs, political party building, and advice to civil society and domestic election monitoring, but we also do election observation, as Lara has said. And we observed elections in Morocco, in 2007, and in Jordan, last year. And when we, as election observers, said relatively nice things about these elections, said that – we weren't calling Jordan or Morocco democracies, but we said within the context that the elections were held, they were well done. The process was good. People were able to express their view.

We kind of got some flak. We actually got flak about the Palestinian one as well, but what could you say, it was well done. But we got flak because kind of the – sort of the Middle East punditry class or something kind of said, "well, how dare you give credence to these limited democratic openings. You really – you're kind of apologizing

for this. This is not true democracy.” They had tremendous limits on these things and in the end the king in Jordan or Morocco, or in the case of Palestine, Abbas, they’re still in power. It hasn’t really kind of gotten at that structure. And the criticism always stung, but I think that our point of view was that these incremental changes, at some stage, add up. If you keep – we kind of – the analogy we always use, it’s a bit like a wedge. You get kind of an opening and you stick the wedge in and then use the wedge to keep kind of levering that open more and more.

And so we would encourage parties to participate and encourage civil society organizations to monitor, and encourage people in the Middle East to take whatever openings they could and try to open them further.

I suspect that when we look back on this period that it will turn out that limited liberalization, I think, will end up being a good strategy for Middle Eastern rulers. I suspect that when all the dust settles, the ruler of Morocco and Jordan and Yemen – and you’re mentioning the remarkably little kind of reaction against Abbas in Palestine – I wouldn’t be surprised if they had an upstanding. Not necessarily, I’m not arguing that they are great or they should, but I’m just saying that the fact that they have allowed the political opposition to operate and in fact thrive in some of these countries, the fact that Yemen – I often point out in Yemen, there have been protests, but the people organizing the protests in Yemen are opposition parties, legal opposition parties, big powerful opposition parties. The protests in Yemen are legal. They’re not illegal. They’re not inherently, in and of themselves challenges to the government. They’re perfectly legal. They have protests. They organize them. They say things and they go home.

And so in Yemen the fact that there are political protests is not in and of itself the sign that the government is about to fall or the government’s weak. In fact, it’s a little bit the opposite.

And again, in a country like Morocco, there are many, many legal parties. They hold lots of seats in parliament. They actually have even more seats in the local councils. They operate. They’re in the newspapers and so on. So I don’t want to kind of stretch the analogy, but one thing to think – I think one thing to watch – and I wouldn’t have guessed this a few weeks ago, but it may be that the countries that maintain the most rigidity, the countries that used emergency law, the countries that did not allow political parties to develop really at all, the countries that had – if they did hold elections, had massive cheating, like Tunisia, supposed 99 percent turnout rates. Ben Ali was getting 98 percent of the vote.

Egypt, up until 2005, also always claimed these hugely inflated turnout rates and Greg probably knows the figures, but they were always claiming 90 some odd percent would vote and 88 percent voted for Mubarak, or it was like a referendum on Mubarak. One of the most significant things in my opinion, and I actually think this was the precursor of what happened in Egypt, is that in 2005, for the first time the U.S. government carved out a few million dollars that went to nonregistered Egyptian organization. They’ve also went to NDI, IRI, IFES, Freedom House, some money. And

with that money, one of the big things that was organized was what we called domestic election monitoring. So the Egyptian groups, there were about 37 of them altogether. They were in six different consortia or coalitions. They went out to the polls on election day; turns out they weren't allowed in, basically. They were shut out. But the fact that thousands of Egyptians were there and watching and they kept track of what was going on; they were able to force the government to revise the voting turnout figure down to 25 percent.

The domestic monitors actually claimed that the turnout figure in Egypt was more like 12 percent. And this was publicized and the authorities were forced to admit that the turnout figure was dramatically lower than they'd ever claimed. And we argued at the time and I've wrote it in the paper that I've written that that was the moment that sort of thrust the curtain aside, so the Wizard of Oz idea that all the – with all the power of the Egyptian regime and all of its kind of noise and its **bravado** and so on, all of a sudden, in that election, the curtain was thrown aside, and it turns out hardly anyone voted and there was no particular evidence that Mubarak and his regime had popular support. That was always the claim, was, well, whatever you say about Mubarak, as far as we can tell, he has a lot of support. People come out and vote. And there's just sort of no sign of genuine dissatisfaction. Sure the Muslim Brotherhood is there, but the people – kind of the majority of the people support him.

And so in 2005, it was no longer possible to say that because there was absolutely no evidence. There was no evidence, either, that they're asking for his ouster, I don't think, but there was certainly no evidence that there were some huge kind of groundswell support.

And I think what happened in 2005, is that – and it wasn't just the election monitoring, there's other things – but the regime started to look creaky. It started to look vulnerable. It started to look like it was beyond its expiry date. And maybe now, with hindsight, you sort of see, five years later, that with the explosion of social networking and these satellite stations – a lot of people were predicting that the satellite stations would have an impact, and they obviously have had an impact – but with the internet penetration and so on that five years later, this regime that all of a sudden looked very, very mortal could be rattled by this kind of citizens organizing.

I'll just conclude by saying that we always end up in these Washington discussions – discussing – the reason I'm conscious of this is I also just got off the phone from talking to the *Wall Street Journal* before I came and I kind of – (inaudible) – as well, but the *Wall Street Journal* kind of take was, “okay, what mistakes were made by the U.S. administration. What could the Obama administration have done differently? Or what could the Bush administration have done differently? So I reminded the reporter that the – and I think Lara basically said this, too, but U.S. policy toward Egypt has been remarkably consistent. I don't see it as particularly a political issue and I don't see big differences one way or the other. And I mentioned the reporter that from my perspective the way that U.S. aid, development aid has been handled in Egypt has been exactly the same. There was a very short window – 2004-2005 – where the Bush administration –

and it wasn't even a – it was a couple of people pushed for this kind of exemption for some funding. But up until 2004, NDI was unable to get funding to work on democracy in Egypt. And after the beginning of 2006, we were again unable to get for a while funding to work in Egypt.

So what I was saying to him is that I don't – I think the policy in Egypt has been consistent through administrations. I can't think of any – at any time that U.S. policy was to sort of push democracy in Egypt as number one priority. It just has never been that way. It's always been a low priority. But what I said to him is, "you know, honestly, I don't think that even is that big a deal. I don't spend a lot of time thinking about what the White House spokes person says or what the assistant secretary of Near Eastern affairs says." I'm not sure it's all that important. I think in the democracy realm what's important is sort of allowing – sort of facilitating and allowing this grassroots stuff to happen. There should be funding available for democracy programs and it has to come from the government because the private sector is not going to – there's no big kind of well that you dip in for private sector support for democracy promotion.

So it has to come from the government, but it should be funneled through kind of the NGO channels. And it should be kind of a grassroots thing. And the NGOs should do what they do. And I think if you let that happen, then eventually change will come. It may be slow, or as we saw in Egypt, it may be dramatic, or as we saw in Tunisia, where there actually was for all intents and purposes no U.S. aid. It may just be something that people do themselves.

So I'll just end with that, that I'm not sure that the debate about democracy in the Middle East should be some big debate about what kind of levers the great powers keep trying to pull because I'm not sure that's really what's going. I think what's going on is a combination of the changes in technology, in networking, in communication, but also a whole variety of inputs into more of the grassroots part of this whole thing.

MR. BATES: Thanks so much. We have some time for a couple of questions or observations from all of you. You're here today and I think it'd be hard to be quiet on a day like this. Any questions? Yes.

Q: Can I jump in? To what extent was the administration, though, really taken by surprise at the speed of this event? And is that – as I wrote, the scenarios – was this a scenario that anybody was really working as a even – (inaudible) – relatively low probability or is it just really bad – scrapped up in a hurry and there was a scramble by the activists, any sense of that?

MR. AFTANDILIAN: Well, I'll venture an opinion. I think the administration was well aware of the socioeconomic problems in Egypt and the political repression. I think they may have been slow in just connecting the dots between Tunisia and Egypt. In other words, when Tunisia happened, then you had demonstrations beginning in Egypt. The administration, I think was kind of slow off the mark kind of recognizing the importance of that and the possibility of that sort of mushrooming. And as you probably

know, of course, the initial comments that Egypt was stable and all that stuff look kind of – somewhat silly today, considering the momentous events that we’re witnessing today. But then they tried to play catch up. And now, there’s also a debate about what the United States should say or should not say. And sometimes it’s better not to say anything and let the Egyptians sort of move ahead with this, because whatever the United States sometimes says, gets dissected to the point where people then read into various conspiracies.

MR. CAMPBELL: Well, I would just add and I won’t use a name, but a very senior State Department person in Cairo, in a little email exchange I had a couple of days after this started said – very short email that said, “of all the succession scenarios that we discussed, this wasn’t one of them.” (Laughter.) So I think that kind of sums it up. So I – who knows in the intelligence community or – but I think at the diplomatic level, senior diplomatic level, I don’t think this was ever on the radar.

MS. FRIEDMAN: I just want to second that. The focus, certainly of the people I’ve talked to has been on succession scenarios. It seems like things moved so quickly from Tunisia to Egypt. I don’t think anyone anticipated things moving this way. You hear a lot of analyses these days in Washington about they should have, it was so clear. And I already made my comments. This regime was clearly unstable for 40 some odd years. I started – for me, it’s sort of like people predicting the fall of the House of Saud. Eventually, they’re going to be right. Eventually – and there were people saying someday Arafat is going to die. Well, yes, a broken clock is right twice a day. Some day, this regime was going to – Mubarak was going to leave, either by dying or some other succession scenario. But the speed with which events went from Tunis to Cairo and the speed with which people had to really change the whole paradigm for understanding what’s happening because initially you see people in the streets in Cairo – this has happened before. Why is this – as we say in Passover, why is this night different from all other nights? Why is this moment in the streets different? And there are great analysts, who can give you – like Greg, who can give you really good reasons.

I was at a briefing yesterday with Shibley Telhami and Dalia Mogahed. She’s from Gallup and Shibley has been doing polling for years. And they can give you a whole different set of really good indicators that in retrospect were good predictors of what happened, but nobody actually predicted it.

MR. BATES: Yes, sir.

Q: My name is Tarek Ben Youssef. I’m from the Embassy of Tunisia. And I would like to ask you and to seek your perspective on the Tunisian experiment, which as you know, has captured the interest of the world and beyond Tunis and then the Arab world. It has been the instigator and the galvanizer of this change in the political landscape in the region. What role the international community has to play today to support the Tunisian democratic transition? I think Tunisia’s success is key and vital for all – for Tunisians, first, but also for all the region and for the international community. You, here in Washington think that – what role you see the United States and the

International community has to play to safeguard, to make the Tunisian revolution a success story?

MR. BATES: And let's take that question, which I think is a great one and also let's assume that there is some kind of transition in Egypt and what should the American role be in that as well. Not a fair question to ask, but – because it requires a lot of thought, but I'll ask it anyway.

MR. CAMPBELL: I can jump in on Tunisia. First of all, I think it needs to be said that what's happening in Tunisia is amazing. I think Tunisia had a reputation as being a well run county, authoritarian, but well run, with an educated middle class, and so on. And think that post-Ben Ali that those strengths are showing through. And so what's happening in Tunisia – we have staff in Tunisia as well – is that very quickly the debate turned to the rules of the game. Now, I think it's far from over. Obviously, you know there're still tremendous arguments and debate to be had. But they're debating the right things, which is let's get this right. Let's devise rules that we can agree to. Let's have our disagreements. Let's have our discussions. Let's air it all publicly. Let's kind of expose corruption to the light of day and so on. But I think that all the signs in Tunisia are good. Now, it may take a long time, maybe a long time to sort all this through.

Also in the very early days in Tunisia, there was a lot of kind of nationalist feeling. This is our revolution and we don't want foreign interference, but it's amazing how quickly that has changed and what we're hearing now. And we are very low profile in Tunisia and met with people that we've known for a long time. But now, the tenure of the debate has changed. Tunisians are saying, "we'd actually like to look at some of the experiences of other transitions. We want to look at comparative election laws. We want to talk about how constitutions were devised in other countries." And so one of things – and it will sound maybe obvious coming from me – but one of the things that the U.S. – and not just the U.S., but European countries and others can do is they can – I don't even mean the Western democracies. I mean Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asian. They can provide expertise from other transitions. And there's no reason that Tunisia has to repeat the mistakes of others.

It has the benefit now, I think, of many, many years of experience, whether it's Indonesia or Chile or Poland. There're all sorts of examples out there, successful examples that Tunisia can draw from.

And I think it still has to be done with a lot of subtlety. I don't think Tunisia is inviting interference. There's a big difference between interference and welcome advice, but I think from what we can tell today, the advice is welcome, I think, as long as it's offered in a humble way and as long as it's standing behind the Tunisians, rather than trying to hector them or advice from the top. So.

MR. AFTANDILIAN: I'd like to say one thing to that. I want us to raise the economic issue because you can create sort of freedom and democracy, but what about the jobs for young people? This is a huge, huge problem in the Middle East. The youth

unemployment rate has doubled that of the rest of the world. And I think the international community has to think very creatively how are you going to help a country like Tunisia? How are you going to help a country like Egypt deal with its youth unemployment problem? There has to be some type of some creative economic ways to do that. I don't have all the answers. I don't think anybody does. But you just have to sort of say this has been a sort of a – one of the major reasons why the youth has erupted and how do you help them out. We don't want to return to the days of kind of crony capitalism that Egypt had under Gamal Mubarak, the president's son. There were certain people like Ahmed Ezz, who had the monopoly on steel in the country and all these other things. You want to create a better economic playing field so the private sector can really develop without monopolistic tendencies. So I just think that the international community should think creatively about that.

MS. FRIEDMAN: So I want to pick up on something that Les said. When you asked your question, I wrote down the words "humility" and "modesty." I'm thinking about Congress, not just about the administration. I think there is –

MR. BATES: Good luck with them. (Laughter.)

MS. FRIEDMAN: – I think we – as we're looking ahead, whether it's Tunis or it's Egypt or somewhere else, the desire, either from pundits to say, "Obama, you must do this," or from Congress to say, "we must do this," to really impose, to impose conditions on what happens next. I've heard people expressing concerns about the return of Mr. Ganushi to Tunis, which I understand people might have their concerns. I think this is not a smart way to be moving forward.

The U.S. and the international community in general, to the extent that they are seen to be trying to engineer outcomes in any of these places, they are going to find themselves on the wrong side of history. I sometimes wonder if you could roll things back two weeks if the U.S. and Israel had not been seen rallying behind Omar Suleiman, would he be more viable for a transition? I don't know. I think he's not particularly viable in general, but I do wonder if he isn't seen as our guy. The U.S. has decided this is going to be the transition. It's the transition we're comfortable with.

Engineering outcomes I think is really, really problematic. So humility and modesty are my words.

MR. BATES: I think that is a perfect place to bring this to a conclusion. I can say from my experience in some Arab countries, working on these issues. The only time that we would have any kind of success was – humility was a prerequisite – working with a lot of international partners. And I say "we" meaning the United States or any American entity. So I think as you phrased it, the international community, that absolutely has to be the way to forward and the United States should definitely take that advice to heart.

And do you hear that over there in Congress? Down at the White House, same thing. Thank you very much for being here on what is truly an historic day. And thank you all of you and let's get back to work and help the process forward. Thank you.
(Applause.)

(END)