

Panel 3: Travails of Transition in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen

Amr el-Shobaki, William Lawrence, Charles Schmitz, Frederic Wehrey

Moderator: Paul Salem

Paul Salem: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Let's begin the first afternoon session. My name is Paul Salem. I'm with the Middle East Institute. Our panel this afternoon is about transition and countries that a few years ago seemed to be in transition, some have seemed to make good progress, others less so, and others possibly transitioning into failed states or something more troubling. We are looking at the four cases of Yemen, Libya, Tunisia and Egypt; obviously there are other cases such as Syria, Bahrain, and even political change in other countries, which are not part of this panel. So this panel will focus on these four cases that I mentioned, and we're very fortunate to have four experts on these countries and I'll introduce them briefly, their bios are in your booklets, from Egypt we have friend and colleague, Dr. Amr El Shobaki, immediately to my left. Dr. Shobaki is a former member of the Egyptian Parliament after the Revolution as an independent, he was also head of the Governance Committee in the committee that drafted the new constitution, so very much involved in that process. He's an academic, he's author of a number of books and reports, he runs a think tank in Egypt called The Arab Forum for Alternatives and he's also today Secretary General of one of the coalitions that are preparing for the parliamentary elections, the Wafd coalition, he might tell us more about that.

To his left is Bill Lawrence, Bill very kindly stepped in for our colleague, Dr. Larbi Sadiki, who wasn't able to make his flight and make it to Washington. Larbi is Tunisian and is an academic that's written a lot about it, Bill also is an expert on North Africa and Tunisia and he very kindly accepted to step in and fill us in on developments in Tunisia. Bill is a visiting professor at the George Washington University's Elliott School, he's also an adjunct scholar at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and for the past two years he was also the Director of the North Africa project at the International Crisis Group. He's lived in North Africa for many years, has written a number of books and reports on the issue, and we're very happy to have him.

To his left is Charles Schmitz, Charles is a fellow at the Middle East Institute, he's also a professor at Towson University in Baltimore. He's one the rare experts in and around town on the complex dynamics in Yemen, he's written a lot of the Yemeni situation for the Middle East Institute, for other institutions and we're very, very happy to have him with us today.

And to his left is my friend and former colleague, Fred Wehrey, who's currently with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, he's a senior associate there. Before joining Carnegie he was at the Rand Institute and he was a senior policy analyst there. Fred focuses on Gulf political and security affairs, but also focuses on

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Libya and has been there several times in the recent past. He is also, has a career, a 19 year veteran of the active and reserve components of the US Air Force and has served in tours in Iraq, Turkey, Libya, Uganda, Algeria, and Oman. He has many publications on Libya and other issues, but on Libya most recently, publications from the Carnegie Endowment, such as *Ending Libya's Civil War, Building Libya's Security Sector*. He's also the author of a very well received book on *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, and we're very happy to have Fred with us.

Let me start with a very open question, three years ago we were talking about transition, there was an assumption that the massive uprisings that overtook these four countries, and other countries as well, led to the downfall of rulers in most of these countries, that these were part of some historic process which we called loosely transitioned, we compared it to other events in Europe and Latin America, and obviously there was an expectation, certainly a hope, that this would lead to some kind of democratic transition. There's no doubt that the results so far are a mixed bag and that is without even mentioning the disastrous situation in Syria. Let me start, Charles with you if I may, and my question is since in Yemen the developments may be over this particular past year and the last few months of what happened in Yemen, have really changed what people perceive from the outside, from a transition that certainly had a lot of problems and wasn't necessarily a fantastic success, but was still inching forward with national dialogue and power sharing and things of that nature, to a situation that evolved in the last two, three months, which appears very, very different. How would you, what words, what narrative, what dynamic do you think is taking place in Yemen, do you still see it as a transition of sorts? What's left of the original hopes?

06:01

Charles Schmitz: I would say that transition is a good word, but of course it has many different meanings and that in Yemen we had a, we have still, a transitional government, which was to oversee the transition from Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime to a new, more supposedly democratic regime. But actually I would like to shift the focus a little bit in terms of what the meaning of the transition is because I think it's very important in the Yemeni context to understand that Yemen is going through a very rapid social change and that the social change is affecting the dynamics of politics in Yemen and I think it's something that's important to focus on. Yemen, Yemeni society is often characterized as very tribal and the understanding of tribes and the relationship to the state have been at the heart of lot of people's attempts to understanding Yemeni politics. And I think that Yemeni politics because of the very rapid demographic change, within the lifetime of a single Yemeni the population has gone from 6 million to 24 million, that the organization of society has changed and

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politics, the basics of politics have changed. So more specifically on that, what I see in this particular period, the transitional period, is that rather kind of military, high tribal networks of patronage organizing politics, I see now politics being organized by political parties. That the competitions between the different political parties, there has been the center of the contests in the transitional period and political parties themselves are reaching out into rural areas, so you'll find local tribes that are being patronized not by a particular person, but by a party. And I think the organization of society by political parties, rather than what had been before is an important aspect of Yemeni politics, but I think it's important to understand the changes that are happening in Yemeni society and that they play a big role in what the outcome of Yemen's transition will be.

Paul Salem: Well let me press you a bit on that, a lot of people are saying with what the Houthi movement has done recently is leading to a complete breakdown, breakup, perhaps the Heraq in the south, the Al Qaeda sort of responding from their regions, do you see what's happening and do Yemenis, or Yemenis you're in touch with, see this as a break, breakup and breakdown, or is it using force to influence the political process? Many people compare it a bit to Lebanon, Hezbollah in Lebanon and so on, but Hezbollah also, is also part of a political process, formation of government and so on, so politics does evolve as well, do you see it as impacting a transition and power sharing in a government, or breakup of the national project?

09:20

Charles Schmitz: Yes, how the Houthis are gonna play this is a question that's everybody's asking. When the Houthis when they took Sanaa, they immediately signed what was deemed a peace treaty with the government in which all sides agreed to, they re-agreed to implement the outcomes of the national dialogue, which are all quite progressive and equitable and everybody's happy with it on paper at least. And the Houthi of course have a restricted geographic realm of legitimacy, they're trying to expand and trying to become national representatives in the further south areas, but they're having difficulty doing that. And so they know that they need a national government and so they have got, they supported the technocratic government that was put into power just last week, and they seem to be playing a role of kind of overseeing the government, they formed committees that go into the different ministries and sort of oversee their work and monitor them and whatnot. And so you know on the one hand people say oh well this is you know just, this is government by the barrel of a gun, they're gonna have a government in front of them that's not of the Houthi, but that it will be doing Houthi's biddings. Others say that the Houthi actually may bring stability and may bring in fact oversight and more financial

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responsibility etcetera, etcetera, the judgment is still out on you know how that's gonna play.

Paul Salem: Okay thanks Charles, let me turn to you, Bill, on Tunisia. Obviously Tunisia, especially after the constitution, the elections are next Sunday or Monday is it, the presidential elections?

Male: Sunday.

Paul Salem: Sunday, that this is the success story. And obviously in many ways it is, it avoided a major breakdown, it has passed the consensual constitutions, had peaceful transfer of power, but yet when I was last in Tunisia just a few months ago, you know everybody I talked to was you know very frustrated, very upset. The secularists are upset that they didn't get rid of the Islamists [laugh], the Islamists feel that you know they didn't get their fair you know day and, or that Islamists are waiting for another opportunity to come back and the secularists are afraid both of the mainstream Islamists and of the radicals around them, a sense of, 'yeah this is good and we're happy with the achievement,' but not much sense of you know that it's consolidated and how they're gonna move forward, let alone with the many socioeconomic issues. In other words, the obvious successes of the Tunisian Revolution and the transition, where do you see the, I guess the challenges, the pitfalls and what is the, sort of the challenges in the next period once they have a president and a government to consolidate all of this?

12:09

William Lawrence: Well thank you for adding me at the last minute, I was very much...

Paul Salem: Thanks for accepting Bill.

William Lawrence: ...very much looking forward to hearing Larbi and we had booked him for the next day to speak and we'll try to bring him for all of you to see. I should also add that I would be remiss not to mention my current affiliations, I do still have a relationship with WINEP but, I teach at Elliott and also at the University Stirling's London Academy of Diplomacy and I am also President of the American Tunisian Association and MENA Director at CSID. But I'm speaking on behalf of none of them today, I'm gonna give you my own perspectives. I think that the simplest way to look at the Tunisia transition is to step back and think about the Tunisian Revolution, and I think the simplest way to explain is that in many ways there were two revolutions in Tunisia. There was a more rural, more angry, more male working class, less socially

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networked protest that began near the Algerian border and deployed a lot of the political culture of longstanding unrest in Algeria. And then there was a more urban, more middle and upper class, more both gender, more civil society oriented, more photogenic, more social media linked revolution that picked up, and without which the Revolution wouldn't have succeeded, and in many ways the first revolution has failed or hasn't reached its objectives. And the second revolution succeeded and now we have a bit of a soft restoration going on of some kind because there are different narratives of what just happened.

There were also severe economic failures, which I'm happy to expound on a little bit further, but Tunisia was both the most performing, most diverse economy in MENA and at the same time, really failed its population in ways that no one really noticed and the World Bank has sort of done the mea culpa lately about how they misread what was going wrong with the Tunisia economy. And so in this moment of transition I think there are two important narratives. One is Tunisia has succeeded against all odds and those who say that Tunisia was always gonna succeed because of strong institutions or homogeneity or ten other arguments, are wrong.

Tunisia went through a deep political crisis from August to December of 2013 and the whole thing almost derailed. And so the sort of triumphal discourse that emerged after January of 2014 saying you know Tunisia was always gonna be better, I think is wrong, I think Tunisia succeeded not just because civil society played a big role, not just because women saved the day, but because political leaders, leaders of political parties, made the deals that needed to be made to keep the transition on track. You know deals that are similar to those that need to be made in the countries that aren't having a successful...so a transition, so while I feel there isn't a Tunisian model per se, there is a Tunisian example which says inclusive politics, seculars willing to negotiate with Islamists and Islamists and Islamists on the moderate side willing to negotiate with seculars, can move countries and the region forward politically in ways that when you buy into the polarized discourse, things can crash and burn pretty quickly as we're seeing in some of the other countries.

15:53

Paul Salem: Okay and looking forward in the next year or two, would you say that Tunisia has sort of done the heavy lifting and turned the tough corners? I mean they almost had a breakdown in 2013, they pulled back, maybe partly because of what they saw next door in Egypt and Libya and whatnot, they have this new constitution and they've had one and now two elections, is the sense of yourself and others who follow Tunisia that the real political dangers have, are sort of behind now there's the hard work of socioeconomic development, managing, maintaining the system and so

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on? Or are there any major risks or challenges that could really derail this precious experiment?

William Lawrence: Well, in answer to your question, I'll give that second narrative I cut myself off from providing a minute ago, which is the one narrative is, Tunisia's democratic success is, it was a beautiful thing and everyone should learn from it in the region and democracy is possible in the Arab and Muslim world, but the other important narrative is that Tunisia is entering a very, very difficult period. Economically things are bad and not getting better, they have what the, one of the presidential candidates and former World Bank official, Nabli calls you know the inevitable J curve after a revolution where the economy gets significantly worse before it gets better, and it's not clear when it's gonna turn the corner. Tourism's off, I mean almost all the bases of the Tunisian economy, Europe is still more abundant, Tunisia is more wired into the European economy, so they have a severe economic issue.

Tunisia's the ninth largest recipient of US aid in MENA, it should be second or third, in my opinion, so the US hasn't stepped up, and so we have, we're going into an economic dark tunnel here where the, 65% of the population that didn't vote in the last elections and who are very unhappy about the economy. Secondly, it has a security crisis, there are more arrests today, there are attacks going on, they're badly affected by what's going east of them, badly affected by what's going on south of them, terrorists being caught all the time with connections to the Middle East. A huge number of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, hundreds of them coming back, some of those coming back, in fact the majority of those coming back are coming back disillusioned because they went to fight Jihad and Syria against Assad and they got swept up in sectarian and other types of fighting and so they felt misled. But then there's a smaller portion of the fighters coming back from Syria that would like to continue the Jihad in Tunisia and unfortunately if Ennahda is not part of a national unity government, and I don't think this reason is a reason to make them part of a national unity government, Tunisia looks less Islamic to terrorists and therefore becomes more a target for these terrorists coming back from the Middle East.

18:47

And then there's the whole third huge challenge of transitional justice and justice sector reform, the justice sector's overwhelmed, all the claims coming out of the Revolution have not been met. And then the prospect of a clean sweep for Nida Tunis, if Nida Tunis controls the parliament, the government and the presidency, they can stack the constitutional court with all pro Nida Tunis people, which creates not only angst among the Islamists, but angst among other pro-revolution sectors of

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Tunisian society that didn't like the RCD and its remnants in Nida Tunis and who will be very concerned about justice sector reform getting even slower. So those are three of the big challenges we're looking at.

Paul Salem: Thanks, thanks a lot Bill. Let me turn to my friend Amr and Egypt. Bill talked about a soft restoration in Tunisia [laugh], we have a harder restoration in Egypt, but also a kind of an interesting and odd situation, as we had coffee yesterday, saying, I mean obviously this is kind of a populist, hard restoration.

The president still has a wide, popular base, although is, you know and assuming a very strong crackdown, very authoritarian, in many ways kind of reminds me, in different ways, of sort of the populist illiberal leadership perhaps that Erdogan is going in, towards, the direction Putin is going in, that there is a popular base, there is some element of, we don't call it democracy, but some popular base, that has an impact on the mood, obviously of Egypt, in the media and in public, sort of public space per se. Egypt has also, you were very a much part of the writing of the constitution, in many ways it's an excellent, very liberal in many parts of it and a very democratic constitution in many ways, and yet the exercise of power is going in a different direction, elections are supposed to happen for a parliament, which is supposed to turn constitutional articles into law. So there's sort of a contradiction even in the post Muslim Brotherhood regime as it were. You have great experience in all of these you know aspects, both participating in them and analyzing them. How would you describe Egypt's situation now, is it stalled, is it sort of halted in its transition? Has it reversed completely, because in many ways there are things worse than some elements than was before? Or is there still a path forward from this very security conscious situation to some regeneration down the road, how do you see it? Let me say that Amr is of Egyptian and French educated, so English is his third language and so I'm happy that he accepted our invitation and go ahead. I think the microphone is on.

21:59

Amr el-Shobaki: Okay thanks. I do my best to express myself correctly in English and I am happy to be in Washington, D.C. for the second time. I think for the Egyptian situation we can talk about the democratic process, its halt. It's not failed, but it's halted and I think we can, are trying to put some main points to understand exactly the current situation in Egypt. Briefly I think in the Arab world we have three forums talking about that reform. Reform within the system, case of Morocco, some Gulf countries, and the second experience, the Libya, Libya cases, it's the fall of the regime and fall of the state. It's mean for the Libyan people; they don't fight against the dictator authoritarian regime, but also fight to establish a national state. The third

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experience that's I think was a case of Tunisia and Egypt that after the two revolutions, the fall of regime necessary to reforming the state and I think Tunisia despite the challenges and the problem in the right way, but Egypt has a major problems. Why? I think first point that the way of our transition. After the 25 January, I think when we trying to analyze any other countries starting a transition in East Europe, Latin American, I think it's basics. We have to establish rule of games before to enter the political competition. I think that's what happened everywhere. We can make amendment maybe for the constitution, it happened in Poland by example, they stay seven years with old constitution and after they put it a new one. In Egypt we start political competitions with struggle of power without any rules of game and Muslim Brotherhood arrive in power with the president and all the people don't know exactly if we are facing a semi presidential president system or presidential system or parliament, parliamentary system, so I think that's completely opposite to what happened in Tunisia.

Egypt start a democratic process without any rules of game, without constitution, without rule of, rule of games, and for this reason when the Muslim Brotherhood start to write the first draft of the constitution, I think the majority of the Egyptian people felt that it fate's for, only fates for them, only fates to the Muslim Brotherhood. The second point, it was the experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in power, I think it was also opposite to what happened in Tunisia, Morocco, maybe Turkey, that in Egypt we don't have a political actor, political party to make a compromise, to make a deal. We have, we had a separate organization called Muslim Brotherhood, they refused to legalize itself and continue to be above the state. No any Egyptian institution could monitor the Muslim Brotherhood and we understand it was under Mubarak regime, it was impossible to legalize themselves because it was not allowed. But they arrive in power and they continue to refuse to legalize the Muslim Brotherhood as a legal association. So I think this duality, this between political parties, the political party Freedom and Justice, for me it doesn't exist, but we have a separate organization monopolated the political sphere in Egypt. I think Tunisia it was opposite, Ennahda, Rashid al-Ghannushi, he's a leader of Ennahda party, he's a political actor, so it's by definition you can make a deal and compromise with the political party or with a political act. But with a secret organization, with a secret association, with a closed ideology, with a closed society, I think it was impossible to make this deal.

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Paul Salem: Okay let's look forward, I mean all points taken, where we are now and you know how can we move forward?

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Amr el-Shobaki: The problem is when the first experience fell and the president, the ex-president was ousted and not by the democratic way, so I think it's mean that something wrong in our democratic experience or democratic transition. I think for the current situation we have two major issues. For the Egyptians, for a huge part for the Egyptian who support the current president, they said we have national state that's something very important, our neighbors in Libya or what happened in Syria and Iraq and it's chaos, so for us we can accept a national and authoritarian state, it's better than non-state or the chaos. That's a huge part for Egyptian people now thinking like that. You have the other, two other lines, other lines they said, yes it's very good to keep our national state, but we have to reform it, it's something important to start our institutional reform because this state it's became old and incompetent and we have to start this radical reform. And for sure we have the third school came from the Muslim Brotherhood, they consider what happened in Egypt, it's only, it's military coup and they don't see why huge part for Egyptian people support this way and the current president.

Paul Salem: Thank you, thank you Amr. Fred, I will turn to you [laugh]. I visited Libya right after the fall of Gaddafi and certainly were militias all over the place and coming from Lebanon that didn't disturb me too much, but there was also a lot of sort of consensus, a hostility to Gaddafi what happened before and dreams you know of our beloved Libya, a lot of, obviously there was regional tribal differences, but there was also a strong Libyan identity and enormous popular pride in their revolution, which was really a full scale, of course it had external help, but it went all the way and they were so proud of it, and here we are today you know with a very, very difficult situation. Two parts, I mean what would you point to as the critical elements which sort of made it go wrong? I mean it's a country with a lot of wealth, no sectarian differences and so on, why did it go so wrong? And obviously the second part, there's still a their there, there is you know some you know talk of perhaps another election, a way to perhaps move forward, is it salvageable and is there a path forward?

32:47

Frederic Wehrey: Great okay well thanks for saving the hardest for last. You know you're absolutely right, I mean I think when we visited back in 2012 it was still very possible to be guardedly optimistic about this country for the reasons you mentioned and then you know five visits later it's just heart wrenching to see it's trajectory. I mean I think the sort of catalyst for a lot of this was the legacy of Gaddafi that you're talking, I mean I'm always asked is Libya a failing state? I say well there was never a state to fail to begin with because this is a country that was marked by a real institutional vacuum, I mean absolutely no political institutions, especially no secure,

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formal security sector, it was always hollow under Gaddafi and it evaporated during the Revolution and obviously that was the proliferation of the militias. You had in 2012 relatively fair and transparent elections in the summer and after that you had a very dangerous decline in security and I think I would really pinpoint a couple of factors. I mean I think the failure of this elected body, the GNC, it was immature, it was polarized, it's members didn't serve their constituents well, but it really wasn't equipped from the beginning, it fell victim to a very exclusionary mindset and more importantly, it fell victim to pressure by the militias. I mean there was partnership that evolved between armed actors and politicians and that occurred somewhere around I think early 2013; the militias began becoming involved in politics. And the real turning point was this political isolation law and when I'm asked you know what are Libya's divides? I mean they're often Islamists versus liberal, Misrata versus Intan, you know eastern sort of triumphalism versus the center. I think the real dividing line is between what we can call the revolutionary camp and the older cadre and so it's really a contest for the inclusion of the old guard into the new order and these younger revolutionaries, who include Islamists, about you know to what degree are they going to open up the new institutions to the older guard, and the real battle for this was the security sector.

I mean the degree to which militia should be incorporated into the new army, this was a really polarizing fight and it all sort of crystallized with this political isolation law that many likened to de-Baathification and this was a tremendously polarizing issue for many Libyans, it was passed in the parliament at the force of a gun and from that point onward you really had a spiral, you had the militias using armed force to project their agendas, you had the militias in the east under Jadran seizing the oil fields to demand greater autonomy, and so I think from that point on it really spiraled. The second sort of catalyst I see was an external one and this is obviously up for a lot of debate, but it's what I called the Sisi effect.

The rise of Sisi in Egypt presented a certain narrative that echoed for many Libyans. I was in Libya in the east in November of 2013 and many factions, many tribes, many people, including younger liberals who were opposed to the Islamists, who were opposed, who had their own sort of problems and were looking for a way out, saw the Sisi experience in Libya, in Egypt and said we could use here, this almost nostalgia for an authoritarian return, this adulation of the uniform, this longing for order, for the police and the army to come in. So I always say that at point there was a part that was in the Libyan script for an actor to come in and play the part and that actor, as we know, was General Khalifa Haftar, who moved in and gathered a lot of support. Many Libyans that I spoke to don't necessarily agree with the man or his vision or lack of vision really, but he tapped into a grievance and he launched this Operation Dignity in May of last year, of this year rather, and from that point on I

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think we've had the story that we all know. Libya is split into two camps, the Dignity camp in the east with its own parliament in Tobruk, its own prime minister, the Dawn camp in the west Tripoli with its own prime minister and a very defunct parliament, the General National Congress.

37:21

So there's two I think claims to legitimacy now in Libya and we can't just say these are Islamists versus non-Islamists, I mean it's too, it's very complex, it's about rival towns, it's about patronage networks, it's tribes that have tacked on themselves to Islamists, it's all very dizzying, it's complex. I think moving forward some of the saving graces and causes for perhaps guarded optimism, the oil wealth is one of the few institutions, the National Oil Company has not fallen victim to these factions, it's still sort of neutral territory, as is the Supreme Court which recently ruled, in a very controversial way, against the House of Representatives in the east. All the factions also agree on the Constitutional Drafting Committee, I mean this is a committee that is moving forward on the drafting of a constitution.

So these sort of beams of potential light that we could perhaps latch onto moving forward, I think the way out is this UN sponsored effort toward dialogue that the UN is leading. Other outside actors, including the United States, have waived sanctions, to apply sanctions on certain militias and militant actors, we've already applied them on Ansar al-Sharia, there's also talk of applying them against other militias. And it's also insulating these institutions, the National Oil Corporation, the Central Bank from political pressure and as you perhaps know from the Lebanon model, I mean can armed groups really ever come to the table after they're exhausted, after they've reached some sort of formal pact, I mean a Taif Agreement, you know there has to be some sort of national reconciliation for Libyans to come to the table. And I'll just close with another important imperative and that's for these regional actors, I mean Libya in the past year has really become a war, a battle ground, for proxy intervention, for these regional supporters of the factions to back off. It's not helpful for the Egyptians, the Emirates, the Qataris, the Turks, the Sudanese to play in this fight.

Paul Salem: Okay thanks a lot Fred. Let me I mean use the mention of external actors, we're here externally, we're in Washington, we're in the US, looking at this a bit from the outside a lot of these developments have external regional or international aspects to them, let me start again with Charles because I for one am, I'm confused now as to who's backing who [laugh] in the Yemeni situation, but to say that we'd like your take on how you read sort of the external positioning.

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Yemen is also a country if it fails even further, it's an enormous population, you know Syrian refugees have spilled over into its neighbor. If you have massive, you know more problems in Yemen, though you can spill over into Saudi Arabia and other places, have a lot of consequences, let alone the international terrorism situation. So let me ask and you know sort of a quick, two part question to each, what is sort of the current external game of play as it were? And what should the international community, either do nothing, step aside or obviously in Yemen there's initiatives, in Libya there's initiatives, what you know in a meeting like this one wants to leave with some you know well this might be something to do or not to do. Let's try to be brief, I know these are complex questions, but on all four and then we'll move to questions from the floor, so let me start with you Charles.

40:51

Charles Schmitz: Let me first I think differentiate, many, many people use the allegory of Hezbollah and I think that's erroneous. I think that Hezbollah began as an armed resistance to Israeli occupation, so it began as a paramilitary organization, whereas the Houthi began as a religious revival organization, kind of a civil rights organization, and they were eventually became a military organization. And in that sense the Houthi have very, very deep roots in Yemeni society, it's not something that sort of came from outside and then had it, found itself trying to find roots, no the Houthi are very much a domestic organization and I think the Iranians of course gave them moral support, but little else for much of their history. That may be changing, the Houthi organization has gone through many different transitions, now it's a national leader and you know involved in leading the state and may change its position. The Iranians certainly have some role, but I would, the Houthi could do quite well without them. In terms of the international constellation, I think because of what I just said, the United States, Europeans, and particularly the Saudis, the big player here is the Saudis, the Saudis don't really consider Yemen to be a foreign country, it's sort of their backyard.

The relationship between Yemen and Saudi Arabia is the relationship between Mexico and the United States and so the Saudis, they have been trying to engage in some way the Houthi, they of course are very distrustful of the Houthi, when the Houthi took Sanaa the first thing that the Saudis did as try to reach to them, try to get appointments with them and the Houthis declined, they said we don't have time to talk respect...we don't have enough time to respectfully hear the Brother's words and when we do we'll get back to you. But the United States, there were Houthis here in Washington the other day, in spite of their chant of death to America, the Americans are, we are engaging the Houthi, which I think is the way, the thing to do.

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I don't them see as, and I don't think anybody really sees them as you know an extension of Iranian foreign policy in Yemen, and I think that's the way to go after it.

Paul Salem: Okay, Fred you have an easy case of well I mean obviously in Libya the international role was key in bringing about the result of the removal of Gaddafi and then they sort of pulled back. Now we have a situation, as you indicated, different players in the region backing different parties, there is an UN initiative, Europe is very close, Egypt has occasionally mentioned that Libya is not exactly its backyard, but it's the most proximate player. What regional sort of roles do you see and what could be useful beyond what you already mentioned in terms of the UN initiative?

43:51

Frederic Wehrey: Well I mean it's not for lack of you know planning and will, I mean when I was there in 2013 and I was really struck by the amount, the level of commitment that the international community had made, both multilaterally through NATO, through the EU, which was helping with border control, through individual states, in terms of helping the Libyans with their you know building these institutions, everything from security to you know setting up a border guard, to advising our you know constitution. The problem I think is really one of, what I hear from diplomats, is one of a partner on the other side, I mean there's no interlocutors on the other side, there's no way to inject these funds. I mean they're, and it's also now a problem of pure access because of the security. You know the US I think was very interested in preventing Libya from becoming a failed state and was viewing, to some extent, Libya through a counterterrorism lens and there was a program to train the Libyan security forces, to train the Libyan Army, a number of other states signed up for this initiative. And this speaks to the larger dilemma of you know training armies and security forces in fractured political environments, as we know from Iraq or Mali, I mean we don't do very well in these circumstances. And what has happened with the initial training effort in Libya is that this initial force that was trained has fractured along militia lines, they've gone over to their, or they've been put on leave because there's no real army for them to train.

So it's been a complete disaster in many respects and the US effort has been put on hold. So again, what I hear is you know let's get the Libyans in a room, there has to be a broad political compact, they have to decide on the institutions, the chain of command for the military. You know as far as kicking this to the regionals, I mean there are a number of peace talks being proposed by the Algerians or the by the Sudanese, what I hear is that you know a lot of these regional partners, they have a dog in the fight, they're not, and they're not always the best you know inter...you know mediators for this, so I think the UN is the way to go in terms of mediating and

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a dialogue in, you know these air strikes that have been conducted by the UAE and Egypt, they're allegedly, I mean they're going after some very bad actors no doubt, but I think what they're doing is they're inflaming the situation, I mean they're really pushing a lot of Islamists groups into a corner, some of the groups that they're attacking are not on the terrorism list. And so this regional meddling I think is unhelpful on a number of levels.

Paul Salem: Thank you Fred. Amr let me turn to you. I mean obviously there's been shifts in the regional alignment with the Morsi government and obviously with the Sisi government from Qatar, Turkey, at one point the Saudi Arabia, UAE, the relations with the US have been sort of problematic certainly, but Egypt is obviously a giant, it is not you know it is not a minor player, so it's acted upon, yes Saudi Arabia anyway are more wealthy and they can buy influence in that sense, but Egypt also as an actor has its own views about its role in the region, about perhaps what's going in Libya and Syria and so on. So if you could comment on both sort of the external games that are being played in Egypt, how long and how it might they play out? How long do you think that this relationship with the Gulf, given the enormous economic cost, how do you see that developing? And how do you see, I mean President Sisi and his following is very nationalistic and harks back to the old Morsi days when Egypt set the agenda on the issues, how do you see that expressing itself, whether it was in Gaza or Libya or Syria or other places?

47:46

Amr el-Shobaki: I think it's true what you said about the nationals, the schools in Egypt and I think Egypt cannot play an independent or important role without solve big part of our domestic or our internal problems. So I think they're both related for sure after 25 January, the majority of the Egyptian need new pact with USA, many people prefer that Egypt could be independent country, can said yes or no and function is interests, but I think the problem in Egypt still internal. I mean, to play important role Egypt need to be a normal country, to go to through the normalization between old, the political actors accepted who inside who is violent, who practice it. I think that's the fairest step for the country, I think what happened last three years, it was the case, they felt that we hear this the school very strong now in Egypt, that the Egyptian society or the political actors fail to organize themselves so we need the strong man as a public order and I think it's happened in Libya or could happen in any other countries. We need to make a reconciliation and also to respect the diversity of the Egyptian society. I mean that in Egypt we have a conservative network, we have a conservative party, we have a part of the society don't participate in the Revolution, don't like to be all the time in the revolutionary, the schools, and we have in the same time this progresses or this leftist or this liberal

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movement. Now we have every day character assassination, we have, so I don't think that we can play influential rule without solve this, all this kinds of problems and make a reconciliation between the pacifists and the political actors in the society.

Paul Salem: Okay thank you Amr. The last version of that question to you, Bill, but let me say we'll then turn to questions, so I you want to, those who want to ask questions, there's microphones in the room. Let me turn to Bill, perhaps Tunisia had the good fortune of not having had regional alignments so much for and against, yet it is in a rough neighborhood, Libya to one side and authoritarian Algeria to the other, it has its own you know security concerns, it has a long and deep economic relationship and maybe even somewhat political with Europe. How do you see sort of Tunisia's you know placement in its regional international relations, both in terms of things that are still impacting it from the outside and in terms of how its international relations can help move it forward?

52:47

William Lawrence: There's a proverb in Morocco and some other Middle Eastern countries that says, "Never marry the neighbor's daughter" [laugh] and I was thinking about that when Fred was talking about Libya because there is a problem of neighbors having interests in Libya and neighbors having interests in Tunisia, which is one of the reasons there's such a loud call for help from further afield than the neighborhood, and this is a problem for US diplomacy because we like to regionalize any number of things and we like to deal with regions because it's bureaucratically, and in fact, regions themselves often make things worse not better. Let me also say that when Libya or Algeria sneeze, Tunisia catches a cold, they're a small country, hugely affected, I mean Algeria's 37, 38 million now, Tunisia's 10 and has already turned the demographic transition, it's not growing, so it's hugely impacted by its neighbors for any number of reasons. Let me also say that all the countries affecting Libya are either affecting Tunisia in the same way, or perceived to be affecting Tunisia in a similar way.

So a lot of talk about the Saudi influence, eh Emirates influence today in the press, the Qatari influence, the Turkey influence, only Sudan really, there isn't a narrative about Sudan meddling in Tunisia, which is significant. I would also would say that I think sometimes the Sisi effect can be overstated on the region. It wasn't that Sisi set a model that anyone really likes, it's that Sisi picked up on political narratives which were already present in the countries, I mean all of these dictators stayed in power through their anti-Islamist discourse, so Sisi was just the latest manifestation of a discourse, which was impregnated in all these societies, Tunisia, Libya. But I think the bigger story on Sisi was the perception that Sisi was accepted by the West,

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and in particular the United States. It was the non-action on Sisi that created a lot of confusion in the region because the Arab Spring was all about oh the West has finally figured out that democracy moves the region forward, the Sisi coup happens and then suddenly oh the West doesn't care anymore about democracy, look what's going on in Egypt. So the perception of a Western indifference to Sisi has had a very negative impact, increasing alienation towards politics in all the countries, including Tunisia and increasing Jihadism.

I would also say that Turkey's influence is declining, Erdogan had that victory lap after the Arab Spring where huge crowds came out without being you know asked to come out by governments, which is often the case when leaders visit town, and if Erdogan took the same tour today he wouldn't get that kind of reception. Largely because people are watching what happened in Turkey domestically and that had a very negative impact on...there's also a democratic camp, it's very interesting, in Tunisia the huge number of Scandinavian, you know NGOs, huge German assistance, even India, India is part of a democratic camp that's very active in Tunisia and so there is a worldwide kind of grassroots effort to support Tunisia even though there aren't enough resources there and so that's another piece of this puzzle. I don't agree with Thomas Friedman when he said Tunisia succeeded because the West didn't mess it up, he had an Op-ed to that effect last year. Tunisia wants more international help and let me just echo what my Egyptian colleague said about Tunisia's early excess, Daniel Tavana has a great piece in the *Princeton Review*, Monica Marks has one with *Brookings*, where they lay out in 2011,12, all the things the Tunisians got right in terms of the electoral law, in terms of the constitution, they have tremendous leadership, 20, these 27 presidential candidates, it's now dropped by about a quarter, but the voting going on now in the US and on Sunday in Tunisia you know any number of these candidates could be a national leader with skills and I can't think of a Libyan you know with that skillset. So we've had a real plus in terms of leadership, I'll stop there.

57:01

Paul Salem: Thank you Bill. Okay we'll turn to questions. Do keep them brief so that we can get as much questions as possible, and I'll ask panelists to note the questions so I can get as many as possible and I'll start with you sir, introduce yourself and the question.

Yaya Fanusie: My name is Yaya Fanusie. I'm with the United States of Africa 2017 Project. I do not have a question, just an observation and it's part of what I call values, political values. I hope next year when you're having this conference you will

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have women from the respective country on the panels, otherwise you will hear from us.

[applause]

Paul Salem: All right thank you. Question from you?

Mohamed: My name is Mohamed, I'm from New York University, my question are for Dr. Amr el-Shobaki, so you have said that transition Egypt isn't whole and it didn't feel yet, but don't you think that the fierce crackdown on the civil society organization, the Protest Law, the detention of so many, many people now in the prison is a failure of the transition Egypt? Second question is about the parliamentary election, according to the constitution that you were a part of its drafting process, the parliamentary election should have been held like you know within six months, but it didn't happen yet and President Sisi keep issuing a lot of laws and a lot of decision without any civilian oversees, oversight...

Paul Salem: Yeah not three questions each; there are too many questions, the next person, thank you.

58:29

Stephen Buck: Hi I'm Stephen Buck, retired Foreign Service officer, former Office Director for Egypt and North Africa at the State Department, two quick questions. Sisi, there's lots of support for his repression, that said, isn't his repression going to lead to the very terrorism that he says he's fighting? And second question, cracking down on the border with Gaza, isn't that going to make the conditions in Gaza even worse and therefore facilitate ISIS and other radicals growing because of the conditions that would be much worse by what is being done on the border? Cutting off the border.

Paul Salem: Okay, thank you. Question right here.

Karissa Gonzales: Hi thank you, Karissa Gonzales, I'm with the US State Department, I actually had a chance to live in Yemen for two years, so this question is for Mr. Schmitz, just a question about the shifting political alliances we tend to see in Yemen. The Houthis used to fight multiple wars against President Saleh and the central government and now they're sort of overseeing central government and working with Saleh. And also the tribes and how they got kind of pulled into the fray during the Revolution in 2011, given that what should the US posture be? Can the US really do something actively to partner with the Yemeni people and navigate this

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complex environment that we have today? And the final piece of that, that I'd like to hear your take on is the southern separatists movement, how do you assess the southerners and some of their grievances and do you see that that is still something that they're looking for in terms of independence from northern Yemen? Thank you.

Paul Salem: Thank you. Well let's take the comments with Amr first and then Charles.

Amr el-Shobaki: I think it's again what you mentioned, it's partially true, but I think we have political party, Egyptian civil society youth in the university; I talk about the youth movement who never incite the violence, tried to establish a democratic system in Egypt. Two, three days or four days ago, you remember when famous actor in Egypt criticized Sisi openly and he said he have, he must go away or something like that and we hear of attacks against this actor from many supporters of the president, but the result he took the prime (Best Actor Award) of the Cairo Festival, this Kaled Abol Naga and all the Egyptian, sensation for the Egyptian actors publish a petition to define these actors. So what I said it's like any other country trying to establish democratic systems. For sure it's not easy, for sure also it's not true, it's not, it's true, it's not something invented by Sisi, we have a terrorist threaten in Sinai, it's rare, so under these conditions I still saying that Egypt has a chance to establish a democratic system, but it's not easy. We had a lot of problems, we have adulation for the human rights, we have many problems, that's true, but I think the society and political actors in Egypt not die.

1:02:53

Paul Salem: Thank you Amr. Charles?

Charles Schmitz: Thank you for that, those very good questions. I think your first question about the shifting alliances in Yemen is a very important because people often want to simply things and one of the simplifications that we get is sectarianism because the Houthis of course are Shia and so we think oh this is the Shia Crescent or something like this. But we have to recognize that it's really about power, shifting centers of power. The Saudis, for example, supported the Shiites, supported the royalists in the war in 1962, they were allies, not enemies, it's not a sectarian basis. Ali Abdullah Saleh first supported the Houthis early on as a counter way to the Islahis, the Wahabis, that were gaining strength. Then they got into a fight with each other and fought each other and now they seem to be in alliance again, so what do we get from that? That we have to be very careful about putting say you know Islamists secularists, Shia Sunni, these kinds of labels don't help much in sort of clarifying what's going on. What we want to look at is you know how is power being

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organized in society? And your second question kind of addresses, what's the relationship of the tribes?

I think it's dangerous to talk about a thing called the tribes. Tribes are going, also undergoing rapid social change, the meaning of what a tribe is and how it operates in Yemeni society is very different, there are very different kinds of examples of it that I could speak to. And so Yemeni society, the tribes, the tribe is very important, but we have to be very careful about what we refer to as a tribe, very specific about what we refer to as a tribe. Then on the last question, the southerners, the Houthi of course they do very well in the north, they're power is that they know Yemeni society very well and they are able to sort of intervene in local politics in such a way as they set themselves up as the mediators, as the establishers of justice, and the extent to which they can do that will be determine how well they're able to extend, establish the rule, particularly in the areas that are further south. And the Houthi very much want the southerners to come and negotiate with them, they've tried very, very hard to get a coherent southern leadership to come and deal with them. But the southerners are so incoherent that even the Houthi can't get them to respond to what is a golden opportunity for independence. It there's any, any time that the southerners could get independence it's right now because they're getting international backing, in the Gulf they're seeing the southern movement as a counter to the Houthi influence in the north, so they've got lots of support, but the southerners, the southern leadership is so divided and there are so many different factions in Yemeni, in southern Yemeni society that haven't been able to sort of come together and create a coherent vision or a coherent political apparatus that could represent the south that I see the southern issue festering and not really going anywhere.

1:06:11

Paul Salem: Thank you Charles. Bill or Fred do you want to add something?

William Lawrence: Yeah, a couple of quick points. First of all, last year MEI had women on this panel, Ayat Mneina from Shabab Libya and a woman advisor to Marzouki, so I'll say...

Paul Salem: Yeah, I can assure our Senior Vice President, Kate Seelye, my boss, Wendy Chamberlin, my colleague, Randa Slim, who was on the panel earlier, are very aware of that. It's not your fault that you're not women.

William Lawrence: I'll say half in jest let's give men a chance this year, but MEI's done well on that score. But let me also say on women, the women's issue as long

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as it's been raised, cuts both ways in Tunisia. There was a really interest...during this presidential campaign, the election's happening now, there was a really interesting moment where Labidi from the Parliament, who's an Islamist woman leader, criticized Beji Caid Sebssi's government's lack of policy towards Ansar Sharia and the person who's about the win these presidential elections responded, "Labidi's a woman, only a woman." And so Labidi responded, "Yes, I'm a woman but I'm fighting for the most democratic and Islamic party that we have in Tunisia" and Beji Caid Sebssi came back and said, "Yes, women saved the Revolution in Tun..." meaning the secular women. But we have a real I think disconnect and it doesn't fall well into the western discourse because we always want to see women succeed, but sort of in a secular framework, but most of the women, huge numbers of women in the Tunisian parliament are Nahdawi and there's a lot of the new crop, too, and so there are two different women's discourses we need to pay attention to. And let me just add one quick other point. The Algeria, Egypt comparison's very instructive. I sat down to write a piece on why Egypt probably wasn't gonna become the next Algeria and looked up about ten pieces online and found out they were all arguing that it wasn't gonna be on, with poor justifications. Not because people didn't understand what's going on in Egypt, but because people don't understand what happened in Algeria in the '90's. You can find the piece is, *Egypt the Next Algeria*, it came out about two weeks after the coup and it's mostly coming true. But let me say that even though Sisi's more vulnerable, in my opinion for the actions he's taking in terms of not being able to control Islamists for the reasons Stephen Buck point out, authoritarian leaders like Sisi can hang on for a long time. They hung on in Algeria, you know so this idea that the government's imminently gonna fall in Egypt I think is an erroneous one; I think the Egyptian military could hang on and in Algerian style for a very long time.

1:09:05

Paul Salem: Thanks. Fred, do you have something you want to add on this? No. Take a question from you, ma'am?

Hala Bahk: Yes, hi I'm Hala Bahk, I'm a foreign service spouse, a Lebanese American and a cross cultural educator, so I'm gonna take it a little bit on a transient. We talk a lot about democracy and trying to establish democracy in the Middle East, but I see trying to do that like an organ transplant, you've gotta have the recipient and the donor compatible. And I would like your opinion because as we talk, I think the panel before talked, every Arab country is different, we're not all uniform monolithic. So how do each of you see this transplant and I like the word transition instead of revolution because transitions take time and between point A and B, we're in the no man's land, which as we all know, takes so long. So I'd like to, and also the

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lack of trying to understand the culture there in terms of US policy and how that messes things up in general.

Paul Salem: Thanks. From over here?

Female: Thank you for the intervention. I'm Mouna Ben Guerga from Counterpart International, an international implementer and I'm a proud Tunisian woman, too, however, my question is about Egypt, so Mr. Amr I was like wondering about where you see the civil society acting in the radical institutional reform, is there a rule for civil society? And do you see like the current you know kind of decision that happen for several organized you know civil society organization in Egypt with a restrain or make civil society step back to you know to implement or to be, to have a rule in the Egyptian transition? Thank you.

Paul Salem: Thank you. Sir?

Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad: I'm Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad from the Minaret of Freedom Institute. My question is for Ambassador Shobaki. You made the comment that a successful transition in Egypt will require the acceptance of all nonviolent political actors. I agree completely with this, but my question is, how do you see that happening when so many political actors are quick to label the opposition violent and I don't just mean within Egypt, but in the whole region, like the UAE, which has not only called the Muslim Brotherhood violent, but a number of respected American and British charitable organizations?

Paul Salem: Thank you. Ma'am?

1:11:30

Paxton Roberts: Hello my name is Paxton Roberts and I'm a graduate student at the Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce. So you all have been discussing transitioning countries, and I was wondering what internal policies you think that these countries will implement in order to facilitate further economic growth in the future to try and get them back on their development path?

Paul Salem: Okay thank you. And the last question?

Female: Elham Qadri from the Muslim Public Affairs Council. My question is about Egypt also and I was wondering there's this notion that Egyptian economy is basically two fold, there's a regular economy and there's the economy under the military, which runs its own stores, its own housing. So is it possible that the reason

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you're gonna have a lot of support for Sisi and it's not gonna change, is because so many people depend on the military for their livelihood and in order to change anything in Egypt you have to you know provide a way for people to survive economically without having this military support?

Paul Salem: Thank you. Fred let me start with you; there was a question or two of general nature of transplants, transitions and other issues.

Frederic Wehrey: The question on the transplant of democracy is an interesting one for Libya given its 42-year, I mean, history of absolutely no participatory governance. You can argue that the 2012 parliamentary elections were premature, that there wasn't sort of the structure in place to facilitate you know the growth of democracy. I don't think we can say that it was inadvisable to push for this in Libya, I mean when I speak to Libyans I mean they talk about, they think in terms of democracy and they want a say in government and you have actual very successful democratic projects at the local level, I mean municipal councils, elections in places like Misrata, Benghazi, so they're thinking in these terms and I think the broader you know question for US policy is one of incremental change and not necessarily demanding democracy, but rule of law, transparency, reforms on the judiciary sector. I mean I can't emphasize this enough, in a place like Libya where so much of the resentment of Gaddafi was because of the nature of the police and the judiciary, I mean this is really a, the prison system in a lot of these countries is a really catalyzing factor for dissent. I think in Libya what you're seeing is a reaction to the hyper centralization of the Gaddafi period, so anything that happens at the national level, be it a project to put in place a national army, be it national elections, is gonna have a real problem with these local centrifugal forces, and this is really the story of Libya is these emergence of local power centers. So I think moving forward I mean US policy has to think in terms of reaching out to the local level and striking a balance between you know decentralization and authority at the national level.

As far as the economy, I mean this is a huge problem in Libya, I think roughly 80% of the, of Libyans are employed by the state sector or receive some sort of subsidy, I mean the budget, the state budget has swelled since the collapse of Gaddafi, of the Gaddafi regime, I mean this is a classic case of the oil curse. The problem in the case of Libya is that many of these rents, many of the state payments are going to the militias. Going back to Paul's question earlier, I mean this was another fateful decision that you can point to by Libya's transitional leadership that I think sent the country on its spiral was the decision to subsidize and pay militias to try to bring them under the state's control, to start handing out payments to militias, what did this do? It mushroomed the militias, I mean Libyans were telling me you know people started joining the militias en masse because you wanted to get a salary so you had

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young men with no jobs suddenly getting a very nice, fat paycheck and the militias that you see in Libya, I mean probably two-thirds of them never actually fought in the Revolution, they arose after the Revolution. So this was a real, I mean this is a problem of leadership, it's a problem of the economy, how do you put the genie back in the bottle? But not I mean economic reform is an absolute must in this country, cutting the subsidies, diversifying the country, it's a long term challenge that's gonna have to proceed in tandem with the political reconciliation.

1:16:01

Paul Salem: Thanks Fred. Charles?

Charles Schmitz: In terms of democracy, everybody in Yemen is for democracy. Everybody in Yemen is for democracy; the idea of democracy is firmly established in Yemeni political values. The question is who's gonna set the stage, who's gonna frame the state in which democracy will take place? And there the political struggles are taking place. The Houthi, the Isla, you know Ali Ab dullah Saleh, they all agree on kind of the ideological basis of the state in terms of its you know institutions and democracy and whatnot, it's just who's gonna control, and that was the issue in, actually in the overthrow of Ali Ab dullah Saleh, who's gonna control the election process, who's gonna control the basis of the state? This is what's going on in Yemen. So we haven't had, we don't have the political foundation yet for elections, we may be building it now, but it's still very much up in the air. In terms of the economy, it's huge in Yemen, it's a huge issue. The Houthi actually exploited the economic situation to take power in the sense that the transitional government was occupied and sort of refining the documents that would be the new, basis of the new constitution, but on the street people felt their fancy talk was irrelevant and the economy was deteriorating rapidly. I think this was a big part of the Houthi's ability to take power. The situation is very difficult because Yemen is, the oil is going down, oil revenues are shrinking and the economy and state were heavily dependent upon oil. The Yemeni economy has to quickly transition to a more diversified economy and one that's much more focused on Yemeni labor, domestic labor, organizing domestic labor to increase employment. It's gonna be very difficult, it needs an effective state, there are some very nice plans and very nice, very capable people who are in a position to perhaps do this, but it's gonna depend on the political will. The Houthi when they took power, one of the their key demands was to get technocratic group in to oversee the economy, this was, they know that the economy's a big part of this and so there's some hope that some coherent plan for the economy could take place, but it's gonna depend upon the political battles that are going on very hotly right now to subside so that the state policy can begin to have effect.

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1:18:33

Paul Salem: Thank you. Bill?

William Lawrence: I think organ transplant is the wrong medical metaphor for democracy, I think it's cosmetic surgery. Most political actors in North Africa that I've met complain about (inaudible 1:18:49), right, the form of democracy, without the content of democracy, superficial democracy. I said on BBC in 2012, and this is the thing I think I said in public that got the biggest reaction ever, I said democracy's learned by doing and I talked about my own great, great, great, great, great, great, grandfather who was an illiterate farmer from Massachusetts two centuries ago fighting the British, and they didn't have the skills or the education level, they weren't gonna vote the right way and they had to learn and democracy's a messy process you can't learn in school, you have to learn democracy by doing it. I've interviewed thousands of young people in twelve countries in the region that overwhelmingly they're for democracy, but then they start asking about which democracy. So for example, if you're a Tunisian woman activist on the secular side, you are about rights, right? If you're a Tunisian woman political actor on the Islamist side, you're talking about collegiality and Islamic principles and you know it's a different set of values within democracy. There's a huge debate in Tunisia right now about presidential versus parliamentary system, which masks the more populist parliamentary approach the Islamists like, or a strong hand presidential, but this is not questioning democracy. US can't impose democracy, unlike what a lot of my NGO and human rights activists seem to think, if you just bash leaders over the head hard enough and shame them publicly enough, the US can force countries to become more democratic, that's doesn't, it doesn't happen that way. But the US can certainly influence, particularly at transitional moments like we're in right now, in ways positive towards democracy. In Tunisia we had 9,000 candidates in the parliamentary elections last night, last month, three times the number of fighters in Syria, I mean that was 9,000 Tunisians coming out to run, an incredible number. And let me just say, Islam, usually the argument that says this region's not ready for democracy is masking the argument, well if you hold elections Islamists win. Well guess what? They often don't win and there's great data on this. About half the time, and increasingly in a lot of Muslim countries, the Islamists don't win, they didn't win in Libya, they came in a distant second in the Libyan elections, which helped propel us into the situation we're in now. They came in second in the parliamentary elections in Tunisia, so you know let's let people learn democracy; the populations would really like to have it.

1:21:18

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Moderator: Paul Salem

Paul Salem: Thank you Bill. Amr?

Amr el-Shobaki: Thank you. Yes for the first point concerning the civil society, yes there are problems now in Egypt, but I think also it's very important to know that Egypt compared with Tunisia experience, in Egypt under Mubarak we had maybe larger space to criticize more than Ben Ali. But the problem, if we compare the UGTT, they are known for the labors Tunisia with our labors union in Egypt. In Egypt it was employees for the state, in Tunisia it was independent laborers union. Sure make a compromise with the old regime, maybe they didn't have revolutionary school, but that's something else, in Tunisia it was independent. And for this reason they play for in my point of view, an important role in all the negotiation between Ennahda and the several parties. In Egypt we don't have this political syndicate intermediary. So that's it was a huge problem and hope we can create a real civil society and independent syndicate, that's until now it's not the case in Egypt. So it's more complicated than the current situations is what I would like to say. That in Tunisia this civil society play important role because it was by definition independent, independent from the state, it was not employees for the state, compared with the laborers in Egypt. The second point, the second question, yes for sure for who we, I talk about the political actors; I don't talk about ISIS or any organization practice the violent or on side to the violent to be integrated in the political process. But we need a political discussion in Egypt, political discussion with the student, political discussion with the political actors, but if an organization on side to the violence or practice as a terrorist, it's by definition out of the process, of the political process. The third question concerning the military, you asked that many people working, I if will understand, if I understood, for the military and maybe for this reason they support Sisi. No I think it's more complicated than this issue, maybe it's a factor because in Egypt we have six million people working for the state, as a public service, it's a huge number, if compared with Iran or Turkey, six million working for the public institution in Egypt, but I think we need to understand that it was culture of fear, what happened after three or four years it was partial chaos for the Egyptian people it's something very important to have this central state, we know it's working badly, it's incompetent, but for the majority of the Egyptian, they supported Sisi for this reason. It's we would like to establish the public order to define our national state, we have the tourists in Sinai, in Libya, Sudan divided in two countries and for the culture, political culture, for the Egyptian, the integrity of the state and nation, that's something very important, that's something, it's a country, the boards didn't change from five years ago, so it's sacred. It's some, so I think that's the real reason for what you said.

1:27:06

Panel 3: Travails of Transition in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen

Amr el-Shobaki, William Lawrence, Charles Schmitz, Frederic Wehrey

Moderator: Paul Salem

William Lawrence: Paul would you like one minute on the economic question?

Paul Salem: One minute, go for it.

William Lawrence: I can do it. The short answer is we're not gonna have good economic policies because of the economic crisis, it's very hard to reform economic, the type of overhaul you need in these transitions countries, whether Tunisia, Egypt, because of the crisis we're in, and we also didn't diagnose what was wrong with the economy as well. For example, in all the North African countries, over half of the populations and over half of the, excuse me, over half of the economies in over half of the population, work in the informal sector and most of these countries still see the informal sector as the enemy as opposed to an engine for turning economies forward. So until the diagnosis of economic problems becomes more sophisticated, I don't think we're gonna see very good economic policies.

Paul Salem: Thank you Bill. I really learned a lot from all the panelists, these are very complex developments. I hope the audience learned as well. I'm sure they did and I take hope from the sense I got from all of you that the populations think in terms of transition and going towards democratic institutions, whether they get there soon or later or the joy is in the process, we shall see, but please join me in thanking our panelists.

[applause]

1:28:24 Discussion ends