

THE MIDDLE EAST: NEW GEOPOLITICAL FAULT LINES



ROUNDTABLE REPORT
(Including Policy Recommendations)

HELD IN
NEW YORK CITY

April 23, 2014

Our Mission

The National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) was founded in 1974 by Professor Hans J. Morgenthau and others. It is a nonprofit activist organization dedicated to the resolution of conflicts that threaten U.S. interests. Toward that end, the NCAFP identifies, articulates, and helps advance American foreign policy interests from a nonpartisan perspective within the framework of political realism.

American foreign policy interests include:

- preserving and strengthening national security;
- supporting countries committed to the values and the practice of political, religious, and cultural pluralism;
- improving U.S. relations with the developed and developing worlds;
- advancing human rights;
- encouraging realistic arms control agreements;
- curbing the proliferation of nuclear and other unconventional weapons;
- promoting an open and global economy.

An important part of the activity of the NCAFP is Track I½ and Track II diplomacy. Such closed-door and off-the-record endeavors provide unique opportunities for senior U.S. and foreign officials, think-tank experts, and scholars to engage in discussions designed to defuse conflict, build confidence, and resolve problems.

Believing that an informed public is vital to a democratic society, the National Committee offers educational programs that address security challenges facing the United States and publishes a variety of publications, including its bimonthly journal, *American Foreign Policy Interests*, that present keen analyses of all aspects of American foreign policy.



Dear Reader,

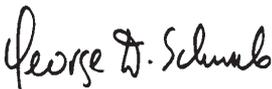
Enchantment with the notion of “people power” is largely the only success Arab Muslims can claim to have achieved from the so-called Arab Spring. They flock to polling stations, irrespective how rigged an election may be. Otherwise, as we all know, the Arab Spring is, by and large, in shambles. In this highly unstable and violent region, how can the United States be expected to advance a meaningful and comprehensive long-term strategic vision in accordance with our national security interests?

Realistically, we can do little more for parts of the region than promote ideals of Western liberal democracy with all that that implies, including the sanctity of human life, the rule of law, freedom of expression, and truly free elections. Practically, we should, by all means, continue our humanitarian aid as well as expand our cultural and education exchanges. Concretely, to realize material U.S. short- and medium-term security interests, please review the National Committee on American Foreign Policy’s recommendations at the end of the summary of the roundtable presentations and discussions.

The NCAFP thanks the speakers—Ali Alfoneh, Hussain Abdul-Hussain, Judith Miller, Amir Taheri, and Ambassador Frank Wisner—and conference participants for their informative presentations and thought-provoking remarks—which sparked instant and continuous debate.

For providing support for the roundtable, the NCAFP is especially grateful to Mutual of America; Kenneth J. Bialkin, Esq.; The Eugenie Fromer Endowment; Ms. Sheila Johnson Robbins; Ms. Nina Rosenwald; and the George D. Schwab Family Fund.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George D. Schwab". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

George Schwab
President

SESSION I: Elections and the Status Quo

Many nations of the Middle East—from Morocco to Pakistan—have recently held or are about to hold elections. However, the ballot box and the concept of democracy have come to the Middle East via a path different from that of the nations of the West, where democracy grew from the bottom up. In the Middle East, elections are held, the results come in, and the process is called “democracy.” This illusion sometimes turns into reality but more often not. We do have some good news: the citizenry like voting in elections and are beginning to come to expect them. Afghanistan had record turnout, including many young people and women. Turkey’s voters showed in the recent municipal elections that they can readily discern between religious and political views and programs. On the other hand, Algeria’s electorate was offered no real choice in its latest elections, while the elections in Iraq came under heavy and dangerous pressure from the situation in Syria and pressure from Iran.

However, the region’s leaders have, for the most part, been discredited *and* lack a clear strategic vision. The consequent pessimism among the peoples of the various nations of the Middle East has led to a level of hopelessness that the United States has contributed to by seeming to offer weak (or even no) support for democratization of these societies. Those high up in the governments have become confused by U.S. policies and are no longer confident that they can “read” U.S. intentions; contributing is the apparent U.S. indifference to the expressed wishes of the leaders of Saudi Arabia.

Economic underachievement and even crisis are endemic to the region with no end in sight. “Home-grown” political alternatives offered by the left and by Islamists have failed, with Egypt, the region’s lynchpin state, being a prime example. Add to the above the resurfacing of border disputes and revived territorial claims—the result is a region in flux that could go in any direction.

Finally, although the energy resources of the Middle East are becoming less crucial to the West, the region and its resources will continue to be important because of its proximity to Europe, Russia, and China.

Questions:

1. Why should the United States care about this region? What are the implications of the spread of Islamic terrorism?

Answer: The United States cannot wrap itself in an isolationist cocoon; the Middle East's strategic location will always make it important to the United States and Europe. Islam has various groups—ranging from peaceful proselytizers to those who violently impose the harshest form of Islam on weak states. These groups, like most groups, go where they see opportunities.

2. Can you give three specific steps that the United States could take to improve the situation?

Answer: 1) Do what you say you are going to do; 2) Be clear who your allies are and who is not an ally; 3) Make clear that the U.S. interest in the Middle East is not only its oil resources; the United States was interested in the region long before oil was discovered there.

3. Is there a difference between the older and younger generations in their relation and loyalty to Islam's organizations and beliefs?

Answer: This is not uniform throughout the region. In some nations (Iran in particular), the youth ignore Islam for the most part. What is concerning is the difference between piety and translating piety into a political weapon. Islam has no vocabulary for expressing political concepts; what is needed is a way to “de-theologize” political discourse so when you are challenging a political statement, you are not perceived to be calling matters of faith into question.

4. Will these artificial states of the Middle East break up?

Answer: Although there is always a chance, most states seem solid enough to survive.

5. What about elections held in monarchies?

Answer: Saudi Arabia has a long way to go; most hopeful sign: women in cabinet-level positions.

Jordan: elections are 70% acceptable; country has “strong measure” of freedom and many opposition groups.

Kuwait: women's participation is strong. I'm optimistic.

And Iran: candidates vetted in advance; voter participation lowest ever (which means Iranians are unhappy).

6. Kuwait has largest gender gap—so why optimism?

Answer: Kuwait is the only Arab country with women present in all areas of society.

7. Please comment on Turkey in relation to other Middle East democracies.

Answer: Turkey has a majoritarian system of elections. Turkey has an unmuffled media, people can freely express their opinions, and opposition remains inside the borders—not in exile.

8. What about Russia?

Answer: Everyone is trying to court Russia but Russia cannot play the power role in the region. Russia has no saleable exports except oil. China could be an influence but, like Russia, has no experience.

SESSION II: The Deadly Crescent: Syria and Lebanon

Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq have broken down into their basic elements. Historically, Syria comprised five states: Lebanon; Aleppo; the state of the Alawites; Damascus; and the Druze state. The three divisions of Iraq: Kurds in the north; Shi'a in the south; Sunni in the west. Syria now appears to be separating into four states.

Why is this dismemberment happening now? 1) U.S. retrenchment after Iraq war; 2) oil-supported rise of Saudi Arabia and Iran; and 3) the death of Hafez al-Assad.

The U.S. concept of nation-states does not apply in this region; tribal leaders pledge loyalty to a chief and receive protection and support in return. Add intermarriage and allegiance can readily cross national boundaries. Unlike his father, who kept Syria out of internecine fights, Bashar al-Assad is neither subtle nor savvy. Once in charge in Syria, he attempted to force a new system on Lebanon; the result: in 2005 he was forced out of Lebanon and Hezbollah became ascendant. When the fighting began within Syria in 2011, Assad appealed to Iran for help and refused to concede; he has thus remained in a position of influence although Iran is now in charge in Syria.

Iraqi militias (Shi'a) also play a part in the ongoing Syrian civil war. The issue of Palestine arises with the introduction of Shi'a Iraqis, who associate Palestine with Saddam Hussein and thus it is of no interest to them and they cannot be mobilized to fight for it. Add to that indifference the fact that three Shi'a shrines are located inside Syria, and you have a reason for the Shi'a to fight on Assad's side. Another group that has joined the fray is al Qaeda of Iraq—so two militant, outside groups are fighting in Syria.

As for U.S. foreign policy, I have three recommendations: 1) hold a steady course with allies; do not run hot one day and cold the next; 2) treat terrorist groups consistently; don't label some groups as terrorists while turning a blind eye to others—we don't have terrorist "friends" and terrorist "enemies"; 3) the U.S. should have a domestic debate about what military "tools" can be used and where.

Questions

1. What influence does Hezbollah have in Lebanon?

Answer: Hezbollah controls the security and foreign policy of Lebanon. Hezbollah controls security through the intelligence of the army.

2. What is the Russian game in Syria?

Answer: Assad really needs Russia for its Security Council veto power. I am not sure what Russia's end game is in all of this. In Lebanon, the Russians are trying to gain some influence.

3. Why hasn't France intervened in Syria and Lebanon?

Answer: The whole system is changing in a way that the French can't understand. Although the French have taken the toughest positions inside Syria and Lebanon, their power and influence are limited. The French can't keep Iran away from Lebanon.

4. Do the sectarian lines determine and define politics and political conflicts? Or is it the games that nations play? What is in it for Iran, especially because it is engaged in the P5+1 negotiations?

Answer: The region has always had networks organized along tribal lines. You pledge allegiance to the chief and the chief protects you. This social organization predates the formation of the present nation-states. What you have are networks, with the biggest networks supported by Iran and Saudi Arabia. The concept of elections is one of competition between networks and network members vote for their network. In addition, everyone is trying to project power, especially with American power receding.

5. What is the role of women in Syria and Lebanon?

Answer: In terms of politics, Kuwait is in a much better place than Lebanon or Syria. Lebanon talks a good game but only three women serve in its legislature; of these three, one is a wife of a leader, another is the sister of a leader. The women serving in government are associates of the men in charge.

(Aside on nation-states: I would like to introduce a note of caution to this talk of nation-states disappearing; the Middle East's nation-states are not disappearing as fast as we think. On the contrary, some of them are beginning to become nations.)

LUNCHEON SESSION: Egypt in Uncharted Waters

The Middle East is still of strategic importance to the United States—the region is four years into a continuing “tidal wave” of revolution that has shaken all its nations and brought down two governments in Egypt. The balance of power has shifted in the region; the United States is still trying to regain a firm strategic footing.

This discussion will focus on Egypt and its stability (Egyptians hate chaos); as I see it, U.S. foreign policy and its ability to pursue its national interests in the region, will remain adrift until stability is restored. I also argue that stability is a necessary precondition to achieving economic evolution and growth. Nor can human rights or democratic principles be protected and maintained in unstable environments.

With stability in hand, Egypt can reassert its place in the region. Since late January or February 2011, a combination of events within Egypt and the events in Tunisia came together in an explosive outburst in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Ultimately, the army intervened and Mubarak was gone. A year of army rule succeeded in alienating just about everyone and putting the army's own unity in jeopardy. By the time elections were called, the Muslim Brotherhood was the only party organized enough to be successful at the polls. Once in office, Brotherhood members proved at least as venial as those they supplanted and the populace lost faith in them. In mid-2013, massive numbers of people were calling for the replacement of the Brotherhood at the helm of government. Institutions of state—army, police, intelligence services, judiciary, the press—have long had a voice in governing Egypt; these deep-rooted actors are one of the reasons why Egypt has been as stable as it has; it also helps to explain why Egypt is very different from the rest of the region. However, these institutions have left little room for competitive democratic politics in Egypt; the country's inexperience hampers it in addressing the current crises.

During 2013 and into 2014, two forms of violence marked Egypt as the Muslim Brotherhood was being dismantled: violence within the borders of Egypt and violence in the Sinai, which has been abetted by

imported Arab radicals. Egyptians seem to be willing to live with some level of street violence as a price of restoring stability. Egypt's future will not be decided by the Muslim Brothers nor shaped entirely by street violence. Egypt is headed in a slightly different direction.

By mid-2013, the army had passed governance on to a civilian regime; Egypt's most able joined this government—but they were without a ballot-box mandate and thus had a rather constricted capacity to accomplish what they wished. But they promised to organize a constitution, keep the country together, and set up an election; all of which they did. Egypt is now moving into presidential elections. Abdul Fattah el-Sisi, the outgoing army commander, will most likely be elected Egypt's president. By the fall, legislative elections will have been held: Egypt will then have reestablished political as well as bureaucratic institutions and will be on the path to stability—but only if it can: 1) successfully address the many problems of Egypt's much-battered economy (virtually 70% of the economy operates off-the-books, no taxes are collected, no investments are made, no jobs of a sustainable nature are being developed, no funds are available to invest in education and health, inflation rates are running well above 10%); and 2) settle what faction will be politically dominant: those who want a sense of order and stability or those who are still arguing that they lost in the race for government. This is going to be a tough challenge, but Egyptians know in their hearts that they have to find a way.

What about the U.S.–Egyptian relationship? For three decades, the United States based its policy in the region on a close relationship with Egypt. Our original guiding principles: peace with Israel and eliminating Soviet power in the Middle East. Egypt continues to offer us strategic advantages. But, the relationship with the United States is at an all-time low; we are enormously unpopular with government and the populace at least in part because we are seen to have not stood by Egypt in these very turbulent times. However, Secretary of State John Kerry has just indicated that we are going to resume economic aid and military assistance to Egypt.

What should be our guiding principles going forward? 1) Egypt must continue to be an “anchor of peace” between Israel and the Arab world; 2) U.S. again enter into strategic cooperation with Egypt and recognize need for policy coordination; 3) provide advice and resources for Egypt's economic plan; 4) support democracy but don't make it a deal-breaker.

Questions

1. What about the Salafis?

Answer: The Salafis are different from Islamic radical movements; they have been prepared to accept the basic order and premises of the somewhat secular order they intend to operate. I think the Salafi order is possible; it is uneasy, but possible.

2. What will be expected of Gen. el-Sisi's presidency?

Answer: He has never been actively involved in politics. I think he is a creature of the army. The government's ability to deliver on the current high expectations will not be 100%. el-Sisi is a very deliberate man and has taken on the job in the context of a new constitution. There will be a shifting of power and a rebalancing of authority. He will have to address the crisis in U.S.–Egypt relations; the situation in Libya; and continue the balancing act with Russia.

3. Why did the Egyptian army feel comfortable taking action against the Muslim Brotherhood? Why not wait until the first election that the Brotherhood would have lost? Don't most Egyptians and non-Egyptians consider the el-Sisi candidacy to be a military takeover of the government?

Answer: Egypt was in crisis—with popular grievance and anger, fear and chaos. The Brotherhood was cleaning out the entire government. Only the army remained intact. Many questioned if elections were going to be held. To the last question: Egypt looks to the president to be the decider, but el-Sisi would be wise to give his prime minister a lot of leeway.

4. I have a problem with how you are quantifying the Egyptian popular will. The Muslim Brotherhood won two elections and the referendum fair and square. Egypt seems to want to dictate the narrative of the revolution, saying Americans brought the Muslim Brotherhood. Why do we have to endorse the narrative to win the friendship of Egypt?

Answer: Egypt is a wonderful confusion of statistics; you need to be careful with Egyptian numbers. The point I was making did not deal with popular will, but rather with the threat to the core stability of the country—which is why the military made its move. As to narrative, the United States has no ability to shape the outcome, to write a conclusion based on its own narrative—we have neither the economic tools nor the political tools. As we

contend that great harm was done to democracy and that is why we are suspending aid, I think we have gotten ourselves into a terrible trap.

SESSION III: Iran and the Rise of the Revolutionary Guard

I am going to compare the U.S. Middle East policy with triangular diplomacy. As for the U.S. opening toward China in the 1970s and what we are experiencing in the Middle East today, I think there are some similarities but greater dissimilarities. I will try to explain why the Nixon administration cannot be repeated with Iran today—mainly because of the power centers inside of Iran and the role of the Revolutionary Guard in the political system.

Following Iraq and Afghanistan, little support can be found in the United States for further military adventures in the Middle East. Many maintain that the current public mood strongly resembles that following the Vietnam War. At that time, President Nixon and Henry Kissinger had become increasingly aware of the conflicts between China and the Soviet Union and began to work to exploit the rivalry between the two. This brilliant strategy helped the United States reposition itself in world affairs.

Can this strategy be repeated in Iran today? With the election of Rouhani, who is sending the right signals, behaves like a statesman, and speaks in a very sophisticated way, it perhaps seems possible. There are those who ask: Why is Washington not reaching out to Tehran? If the United States is unwilling to play the lead role in the Middle East, why not try to create some kind of balance of opposing forces?

Ayatollah Khamenei however, is not Chairman Mao of the late 1960s. Mao did not perceive the United States as an existential threat to his regime's survival, while Khamenei certainly believes the United States to be. Recently, Khamenei spoke to Revolutionary Guard commanders saying that Iran needs to make a tactical shift. Washington interpreted this as a call to make a strategic shift—it was not. Another difference is that Mao had used the Cultural Revolution to kill criticism and dissent. Iran's power structure has Khamenei at the top but there are other power centers: the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, an ideological military organization, and a third group more or less personified by Rouhani. A political system with three power centers has a very different political dynamic than China under Mao's dictatorship.

Rouhani has managed to convince Khamenei that Iran is nearing economic collapse because of sanctions. To keep the current regime in place, but the Revolutionary Guards, which has become a power center outside the control of civilian politicians, is indispensable as an instrument of suppression of the domestic opposition. Accordingly, the Guard is cashing in its chips and demanding the development of an atomic bomb, rather than nuclear concessions in the face of sanctions regime. Why? Because it would offer protection and raise Iran's prestige, influence, and power in the global sphere. It would also almost certainly make Iran the recipient of aid.

The Guard, however, hates Rouhani and his ilk. Rouhani has purged Guard members from the cabinet. Rouhani has replaced every former Guard officer in provincial governments and is also trying to negate the Guard's influence on Iran's economy of Iran.

Thus, Iran's multiple power centers deny the United States the ability to replicate what Nixon and Kissinger did in China.

Questions

1. What might Iran's response be if the deadline on the U.S.–Iran discussions passes, Iran does not agree to give up its objective of a nuclear weapon, and America or Israel either jointly or separately attack Iran?

Answer: Several possibilities: 1) Talks completely fail. There is no success; 2) Iran's government enters an agreement with the United States and the Revolutionary Guard is opposed. What then? I would expect acts of sabotage. The Revolutionary Guard's response would not be classic warfare, their response would involve what they are good at—particularly terrorism.

2. Speaking of terrorists, please comment on the ambassador who Iran is trying to send to the UN and what role do you foresee Iran playing in this crisis in Syria?

Answer: The man appointed as ambassador to the UN was involved in the hostage taking. Who informed the U.S. government? The Revolutionary Guard. As for Syria, we see a clear division between Rouhani's line and the line of the Revolutionary Guard: Rouhani condemns Assad, while the Guard supports Assad "until the very last day." In the end, the line of the Revolutionary Guard prevailed.

3. You hypothesize that the Revolutionary Guard wants to survive and

that they are not necessarily ideological. Given that the economy was about to collapse, is it the case that there could be an alternative explanation that they can give to support for a bomb? Is Ayatollah Khamenei an ideologue or is he just trying to survive?

Answer: Ayatollah Khamenei is an anti-Semite; in most of his speeches, he says something against Israel and against Jews. This rhetoric does not resonate with the Iranian public. The regime officials use anti-Israel propaganda to mobilize the Arab world.

Bureaucracies think mainly about short-term advantages. The Guard could see that the Iranian economy was going down, but were quite happy that sanctions prevented foreign oil and gas companies from contributing to the development of Iran's oil and gas sector. Why? Because the little money that was left in Iran was channeled to entities owned or controlled by the Guard.

4. What proportion of the economy does the Revolutionary Guard control and command? What has been their response to not being appointed to any jobs?

Answer: I cannot say what percentage the Guard controls. Studying Tehran's stock exchange allowed me to identify companies owned by the Revolutionary Guard. Many Iranian companies are now sanctioned by the U.S. government. The Guard has been very quiet about losing their jobs—waiting to see what happens with negotiations.

SESSION IV: Egypt- The Middle East Lynch Pin

On my recent trip to Egypt, in addition to meeting with several high-ranking government and cabinet officials, I walked out on the streets and spoke with everyday Egyptians. Egyptians have always really liked Americans, but I am here to report that Egyptians are not happy with Americans or Obama at the moment.

Egyptians are not happy with the U.S. because they feel utterly abandoned. They feel that we—as people who owe their creation to a revolution—have failed to appreciate that they have had two revolutions in the span of two years—the latter of which we insist on calling a military coup. They are facing the largest insurgency in their history while the United States has cut off aid. With at least 300 terrorist attacks in the Sinai and 100 on the mainland, the situation grows ever more dire. When outsiders ask: “Why did Morsi have to be ousted from office? Why couldn't Egyptians have

waited another three years until Morsi faced reelection?” The response: by the end of four years nothing would be left of the Egypt they knew.

Where are we now? Egypt’s new line is that el-Sisi wants to deliver a message to America that Egypt needs America, the Middle East needs America back, the secular Middle East needs American leadership and let’s make amends. Let’s start with restoring military aid, which is crucial. Egypt’s other problem is the Libyan border. In Libya, I was told, there are three Qatari-funded training camps—each training 1,500–3,000 people in something they call the “free Egyptian army.” Such training could transform terrorism from pipe bombs into the kind of terrorism we see in other places where Islamists are battling for control. The Egyptians want to get a handle on this now, and they are going to need America’s approval and military spare parts to do so.

I met with el-Sisi, who made a very compelling case for America having misread what is going on in the Middle East. He said all you have to do is look around and see that our presidents seem to be very good at getting rid of bad leaders, but we are not very good at sticking around until stability and legitimate leaders can begin to govern. We have left Egyptians in chaos and in the hands of thieves, assassins, and murderers. I think we have made a terrible mistake in Egypt.

Something subtle is going on in Egypt. This country of 94 million people is the largest Arab country and is adding a million Egyptians every nine months. The challenge: the economy must grow by 7 percent a year just to create enough jobs for the new entrants to the workforce. America, its European allies, the Gulf States—all have an interest in Egypt’s success because the fate of the Middle East is tied to Egypt—it always has been and it always will be. If the U.S. fails to seize this moment, we will regret it.

Questions

1. On President Obama’s peace initiative, do you see any prospect in the next few months that anything tangible will be done as a result of the secret conversations?

Answer: This Arab–Israeli peace track is ambitious; I have never thought it was going to go anywhere. I simply don’t see a Palestinian government that is able to deliver on Israel’s, at this point, very minimal demands. Israel’s response to the Palestine Authority’s paralysis has set the world against them. Just now, when you have a BDS [boycott, divestment, sanctions] movement, you shouldn’t start building more settlements on contested land. My concern, however,

is the Palestinian end of this bargain because while leaders are talking about a two-state solution—we are actually discussing a three-state solution. The Palestinian Authority doesn't even fully control the West Bank. It faces a severe threat from Hamas. If there were real elections in Gaza, Hamas would be thrown out. You can't have a unified Palestinian position; you have a Gaza and a West Bank position, which means "no." Israel is being asked to make all the concessions?

2. In U.S. foreign policy, where do we draw the line if we decide that stability trumps other aspects of political life, including democracy? Why do Egyptians insist that Americans say this is democracy?

Answer: I believe that democracy in the Middle East means, more than elections. What you have in the Middle East are societies that are simply not ready for democracy as we know it. I think Egyptians are slowly moving in that direction. Democracy doesn't just mean majority rule, but not oppressing the minority. We are not in the position yet where you can guarantee that in most Arab states.

3. Regarding the number of strikes in Sinai, who is responsible?

Answer: Sinai is crucial to Egypt's tourism and its tourist sector and, at the moment, it is a no-go zone. El-Sisi can't even campaign there because it is too dangerous. Roughly 20% of the population still supports the Brotherhood and would like to kill him.

4. At the beginning of your talk, you said that you couldn't see yourself defending military dictatorships, however, you do. You also said that Arabs were not ready for democracy. What is your conceptual framework for what constitutes democracy? Is there such a thing as Western democracy and Islamic democracy? When you say that Arabs are not ready for democracy and that you do not wish to see another Iran being made out of Egypt, I would like to bring to your attention that a number of Middle Easterners, a number of Egyptians, continuously express their criticism of U.S. meddling with their domestic politics. Including the support of the military dictatorship that you are in favor of. If you go to Iran today, you will see that it is perhaps one of the most developed countries in the region.

Answer: Generalizations are always dangerous. The Egyptian consensus is that the Muslim Brotherhood experience was disastrous for Egypt. The youth who went out into the streets in Tahrir Square three years ago were now demanding that the military return. They understand that democracy implies having real political parties which can compete in a legitimate system.

There are certain constants in democracies: those who win elections don't have a right to oppress minorities (that was what was going on in Egypt and is what is going on in Iran under an Islamic democracy); it means that if officials are voted out in an honest election, they must leave. We know what our democracy is, and we know that theirs will invariably be different from ours, but there must be certain agreed-upon ground rules.

5. The NCAFP is interested in American foreign policy interests; what is your definition of our foreign policy interests in the Middle East?

Answer: They are changing. I would have said oil, Israel, and the promotion of less oppressive systems that create jobs and do not threaten their neighbors, and stability. Now, I see us growing less interested in the Middle East and less concerned about what is going on there. Israel is still a major concern as is the support of governments that oppose terrorism. What worries me most, in addition to the utter incompetence of Obama's foreign policy, is the growing isolationism at home and our lack of interest in foreign affairs.

6. In your conversations with el-Sisi, did he mention what he would like Obama to do?

Answer: He wants our support. The U.S. can also restore spare parts for his American-supplied Apache helicopters and other military assistance. He doesn't like hearing that Morsi's ouster was a military coup, which offends Egyptian dignity and pride, even if it were true.

Closing Remarks by Speaker One

I wish to warn you not to buy the bundle of goods that el-Sisi wants to sell—take everything with a grain of salt. This is a military regime and military rulers know how to talk to Americans. At the moment, they have thrown a lot of journalists in jail and they have closed newspapers.

The Arabs are not ready for democracy? I do not believe this. It is like swimming, you just throw them into the water and they will either learn or sink. Are Americans ready for democracy? Maybe not; less than half of them vote. The main thing is don't cheat and don't change the rules of the game. If someone wins fair and square, you can't change the rules of the game. Who is to say that the next military commander in Egypt won't take el-Sisi out?



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Sunni-Shia divide, civil war in Syria, turmoil in Iraq, unrest in Egypt and Turkey, al Qaeda-linked terrorism, Iran cementing the Shia Crescent that runs from Tehran to Beirut by way of Baghdad and Damascus, combined with Iran's nuclear weapons ambition, characterize much of the heart of the Middle East. An overarching vision for the region is thus impossible to articulate. Yet, we have material interests that need to be addressed and defended. They include:

Materially supporting countries and peoples that are well-disposed toward the United States.

Materially supporting pro-reform forces in the Arab and Shia Muslim worlds.

Preventing the emergence of a hegemonial power from emerging and overwhelming the region.

Preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability.

Preventing the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, including the falling of such weapons into the hands of extremist movements.

Safeguarding the freedom of navigation.

Destroying al Qaeda-linked forces, including ISIS.

Expanding and deepening U.S. cooperation with Israel in the intelligence, technology, and military fields.

Promoting a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

To realize these security goals, the means in the U.S. toolbox are impressive. With diplomacy, sanctions, and boycotts at its disposal, the United States does not necessarily need to commit boots on the ground. However, it must be prepared for a limited targeted intervention that may include the use of advanced technological tools such as cyber weapons and drones, as well as traditional air strikes, helicopter gunship assaults, and missile attacks from warships.



THE HOSTS, PRESENTERS AND OTHER PARTICIPANTS

The Hosts

DR. GEORGE D. SCHWAB
President
National Committee on American Foreign Policy

MR. AMIR TAHERI
Senior Fellow
National Committee on American Foreign Policy



The Presenters

MR. HUSSAIN ABDUL-HUSSAIN
Washington Bureau Chief
Alrai Newspaper

MR. ALI ALFONEH
Senior Fellow
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

MS. JUDITH MILLER
Adjunct Fellow
Manhattan Institute

AMBASSADOR FRANK WISNER
International Affairs Advisor
Patton Boggs LLP



Other Participants

MR. CHARLES BERNHEIM
Member
National Committee on American Foreign Policy

KENNETH J. BIALKIN, ESQ.
Board of Trustees
National Committee on American Foreign Policy
Partner
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP

THE HONORABLE DONALD BLINKEN
Board of Trustees
National Committee on American Foreign Policy

COUNTESS RENATE VON BOYENS
Member
National Committee on American Foreign Policy

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PROFESSOR MICHAEL CURTIS
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National Committee on American Foreign Policy
Distinguished Professor Emeritus
Rutgers University

DR. EVE EPSTEIN
President
Epstein & Associates

MRS. MARJORIE FEDERBUSH
Member
National Committee on American Foreign Policy
President
Strategies & Synergies International

MS. EDYTHE M. HOLBROOK
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