



Countering Islamists at the Ballot Box

Alternative Strategies

David Schenker, Editor

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Front cover: A convoy of cars waving Hamas flags and displaying campaign posters drives through the West Bank city of Hebron, January 15, 2006, in support of the Islamist group's eventually successful bid to win the parliamentary elections. Copyright AP Wide World Photos/Nasser Shiyoukhi.

This Policy Focus includes edited portions of a panel discussion from The Washington Institute's 2006 Weinberg Founders Conference. The speaker's remarks are presented as edited transcripts and may be cited as such.

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Introduction

SINCE SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, promoting democracy has been a cornerstone of the Bush administration's Middle East policy. The best antidote to radicalism and terror, as President Bush has said, is the tolerance and hope kindled in free societies. To promote this vision, in December 2002 the administration established the Middle East Partnership Initiative, or MEPI, an office in the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs assigned the task of promoting democracy in the region. Since then, Washington has allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to advancing Middle Eastern civil society. From 2002 to 2005, the administration also pursued an active policy of challenging regional allies and adversaries to liberalize and democratize.

Almost four years since MEPI was established, the results on the ground have been decidedly mixed. On the one hand, the region has witnessed an unprecedented array of elections—from Morocco to Saudi Arabia—in which voters have gone to the polls to express themselves through the ballot box. Indeed, perhaps the most telegenic example of the administration's pro-democracy effort was the images of long lines of Iraqis braving death threats in Ramadi to cast ballots for the first free and democratic government in Iraq's history. On the other hand, in many places, including Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian territories, and Iraq itself, Islamist political parties—whose long-term commitment to democracy is, at best, questionable—appear to be winning the day. In the 2006 Egyptian elections, Islamists took an unprecedented 87 of 454 seats in the parliament, a sixfold increase from the previous elections in 2000. In Lebanon, the Shiite political party cum militia Hizballah controls a significant parliamentary bloc. And in Turkey, the secular state is under attack from within by the democratically elected Islamist government that currently controls parliament.

Detractors of Washington's "freedom agenda" point to Islamist political successes as evidence of the policy's failure. Not only has the administration helped Islamists, but it has also weakened those liberal forces

in the region that are America's natural allies—the much-needed third-party forces that align neither with local authoritarians nor with local Islamists. No doubt, elections held during the past two years in the Middle East have not proven kind to Arab and Middle Eastern liberals, for a number of reasons: state repression, poor organization, underfunded party infrastructures, and unattractive political platforms that have failed to capture popular attention, to name a few. And the Islamists, of course, had the advantage of being able to organize in the mosques during the many years of authoritarian government and repression.

One can debate whether the recent success of Islamists in parliamentary politics suggests that democracy is inappropriate for the region or is the result of the administration's excessive focus on elections as a substitute for real democratic development. Regardless of how one comes down on this issue, Middle Easterners increasingly want to have a say in how they are governed. In this context, authoritarian governments are having difficulty opening the political space and at the same time keeping the growing Islamist trend in these societies in check.

In a perfect world, Arab liberals would prevail in open political contests in the Middle East, and the emergent governments would be tolerant, open, and pro-West. Regrettably, however, in the current regional environment, the chances are slim for moderate Arab liberals to emerge victorious in elections.

Is it possible for the U.S. government to both promote democracy in Arab countries and prevent Islamists from winning the day? This foreign policy dilemma is not new. In the 1990s, Algeria was poised to elect the Islamic Salvation Front—a party that ran on a platform of one vote, one man, one time—instead of returning the repressive Algerian authoritarian regime to power. (These elections were subsequently invalidated by the Algerian armed forces, leading to a civil war.) Fearing the same outcome, and still stinging from the Islamist victories in Iraq and the Palestinian territories, Washington continues to be faced with a seem-

ingly Faustian choice: promote democracy and accept Islamist electoral victories, or continue its longstanding status quo support of pro-Western authoritarian regimes and risk Islamic revolutions à la 1979 Iran.

Presented with this choice, Washington appears to be toning down its aggressive support of democratization for the time being. But the issue will persist—whether it is the Bush administration’s “freedom agenda” or the Clinton administration’s “democratic enlargement” policy—not necessarily driven by Washington, but rather, by Middle Eastern liberals and Islamists. For U.S. policy, the question is: How can Islamists be countered at the ballot box? What strategies might be used to strengthen liberals and to prevent the empowerment, through elections, of political parties inimical both to U.S. policy goals and to the fundamental elements of democratic life?

On September 16, 2006, The Washington Institute convened an extraordinary panel discussion at its annual Weinberg Founders Conference in Lansdowne, Virginia, titled “Countering Islamists at the Ballot Box: Alternative Approaches.” The three speakers—Soner Cagaptay, F. Gregory Gause III, and Mona Makram-Ebeid—offered three starkly different prescriptions for U.S. policymakers. This Policy Focus includes edited transcripts of each of their remarks.

During his talk, Soner Cagaptay, director of the Institute’s Turkish Research Program, argued that the U.S. government should commit to investing huge sums in time, energy, and capital to support liberal, pro-Western parties in the Arab world and thereby defeat Islamists. The model he offered was how the United States—both covertly and overtly—worked to prevent the Communist Party from taking control of Italy in the post-World War II period. The effort may

take years, Dr. Cagaptay said, and cost billions of dollars, but it is the only way to defeat Islamists at the ballot box.

F. Gregory Gause III, associate professor of political science and director of the Middle East studies program at the University of Vermont, offered his own provocative argument. Because elections in the Middle East will unavoidably result in Islamist political victories, he said, the most effective way of preventing Islamist success at the ballot box is for the United States to stop supporting democratization in the region. That approach may not sound appealing, he said, but it is the most realistic approach to advance U.S. interests.

Mona Makram-Ebeid, a former member of the Egyptian parliament and a political science professor at the American University of Cairo, offered a different approach. Based on her own political experience, she essentially conceded that the Islamists had defeated the liberal option, at least for now. Therefore, she suggested, Arab liberals would be wise to cooperate with the younger generation of Islamists, working with them in order to both gain entry into closed political systems and deepen internal divides that are beginning to fissure Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Only by working with Islamists, she argued, do liberals stand a real chance of creating change in an authoritarian regime like Hosni Mubarak’s Egypt.

In the wake of Islamist successes across the region, senior U.S. officials are no doubt rethinking the tactics, if not the strategy, of promoting democratization in the Middle East. They would be wise to review the options offered in these candid and compelling presentations.

David Schenker
Senior Fellow, The Washington Institute

Soner Cagaptay

I'D LIKE TO START with a discussion of what is causing the demise of secular parties—liberal nationalist secular parties in Turkey and the Arab world—and then look at some prescriptive suggestions as to what we can do to help defeat Islamists at the ballot box in the Middle East and in a variety of countries. Let me start with Turkey. There are certain reasons why the secular parties that have ruled Turkey for the last sixty years seem to be in terrible shape.

First, they're fractured, they're weak, and there is not a unanimous front to counter the rise of the Islamist Justice and Development Party, the AKP government, which has been ruling since 2002. There are parts of this you can't really help or correct or control from outside. A part of it has to do with Turkish political culture. Turkish political culture is very leader and personality oriented. It's run by kings, and there are people who are unwilling to share power with others even though it's in their interest to unite. So you have a political landscape that is extremely fractured.

There are two parties on the right that believe in the same thing, and two parties on the left that believe in the same thing. Those of you who followed Turkey in the 1990s will remember the constant changes of government from Ciller to Yilmaz. These politicians essentially represented the same thing. They were both center-right; they just couldn't bring their act together to unite in the face of rising Islamist parties. So about this little can be done.

The second aspect of Turkish politics that I think explains the demise of the secular liberal parties is the issue of corruption—of which there were extensive amounts in the Turkish political system in the 1990s. Well, corruption is everywhere, but I think what made it worse in the Turkish case was that Turkey is a country with a vigorous free press. A lot of this corruption was publicly laundered in the 1990s, and it really hurt the credibility of the secular parties on the right, paving the way for the coming to power of the AKP.

We also see the demise of secular liberal nationalist parties in the Arab world. Arguments have been made

by scholars such as Khairi Abaza about how, for so long, liberal secular nationalist parties were oppressed in the Arab world by dictatorial regimes, and that these people simply could not speak up; they were in jails. The only alternative available was the mosque, to which Islamists had secure access and which they could use as a base for political activity. So clearly, the level playing field was not there, and I think what we see now is whenever elections are called for, whenever there is political space opened up, the first actor that emerges is the Islamists, who are the only organized political force with the infrastructure to have been able to conduct political activity, unlike the liberals, who were shut out.

Yet, even in places where there is a more level playing field in the Arab world—look at the Palestinian areas—Islamists are doing better, and they are doing well in Turkey as well, as I said earlier. So why?

I think there are a couple of ways of looking at this. First and foremost, Islamist political parties and activists have access to loads of money. Much of it is coming with the new oil wealth from the Gulf and from Iran, and I think this is the sort of political financial backing that is helping catapult Islamist movements to power in a variety of places.

How is this happening? It seems to me that if you look at—whether it's Turkey or the Arab world today—the access of Islamist movements and parties to financial means, the oil money is clearly helping them thrive in a number of ways. How? First, because they have money, they can organize better and establish better grassroots appeal. They can go down to the district and village level, and they have the means and ability to establish themselves, which secular liberal parties don't have necessarily because of lack of funds.

Second, and also something that applies both to Turkey and the Arab world, is the ability of the Islamist parties to use these funds—billions and billions of dollars—to provide what states are failing to provide. The population bulge in the Arab world has created a situation where the state services of

education and health care that were built for 10 million people now have to serve 70 million people, for instance, in Egypt. Clearly, there's a lack of quality; there's a lack of access to services. Where the states are failing in both Turkey and the Arab world, Islamist parties, organizations, and charities are moving in to provide those services, which is creating a mass public appeal for them, whether they are setting up health care clinics or providing free education.

In fact, in the 1990s, I remember when there was a showdown in Turkey between the then Islamist Welfare Party government and the army. The biggest issue was whether or not the government would be forced to move ahead to shut down Islamist schools, which are run out of the national educational curriculum and which are providing free education—not only winning the hearts and minds of the parents, but also indoctrinating kids at these schools at a very young age. It was a big debate in Turkey. So I think money is a huge factor. It's something we can't underestimate, especially given the availability of oil money from a number of Islamist countries and institutional and state sponsors of Islamist parties across the world. For the lack of a better word, I'll call this "Islamist International."

It's not all money, though. I think I should emphasize that it's not just because Islamists have more money. They also have something else that secular nationalist liberal parties don't have: a utopian revolutionary vision of a new life. It's very appealing, whereas secular national liberal parties are boring. What they are offering is [the same] stuff they've offered for the last fifty or sixty years, and I think this is more the case in Turkey than in the Arab world, where there was access to all sorts of secular national liberal political activity, and yet we see the demise of this kind of activity as well.

So then the question is, are we doomed? We're facing this enormous challenge of billions of dollars of oil money, the enormous challenge of this utopian revolutionary ideology, which is very attractive in the face of boring secular liberal politics. But I don't think we are doomed, as history provides perspective that this does not have to be the case. This is not the first time

America has faced a scenario [in which] anti-American forces, with the help of a serious international backer, were about to take over a country in the ballot box and were defeated. It's happened before, at the end of World War II. I'll discuss one specific case: what happened in Italy at the end of World War II. There are amazing, amazing similarities. Let me go through some of [them].

Italy at the end of World War II was a country that had a powerful communist socialist movement, which did so well in the elections of 1947 that it came out as the largest bloc in the parliament. [Communists] controlled 219 seats in the Italian parliament as opposed to 207 by the Christian Democrats. They were supported by the Soviet Union—by the Communist International—and had all sorts of mechanisms—grassroots organizers, money, funds, arms—and it looked as if Italy was a lost cause. And yet by 1958—it took a very long time—Italy was securely in the hands of Christian Democrats for the rest of the Cold War, taken away from the communists. How did it happen?

Before I continue, I can hear question marks in the backs of people's minds, saying, "Well, Italy is not quite like the Arab world today. It isn't a realistic analogy." Today, that's the case. Back in 1945, however, that was not the case at all. GDP [gross domestic product] per capita in Italy in 1950 adjusted to today's prices was at \$4,100; that is less than Egypt's GDP today at \$4,184. Life expectancy at birth in Italy in 1945 was sixty-six years, which is less than what Egypt today is at seventy years. It was as poor and as impoverished as Egypt is today if you want to make a comparison.

How did the [United States] bring around change in Italy? First, I think it's important to highlight that there was almost a quantum leap [decision] made at very high levels of government that this was a battle of political warfare, that you cannot just win Italy with small steps. The country could be won over only with a bold initiative of political warfare. I'm going to read this very brief paragraph from George Kennan, the founder of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, an organization specifically designed for Italy:

[P]olitical warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives. Such operations are both overt and covert. They range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures, . . . and 'white' propaganda to such covert operations as clandestine support of 'friendly' foreign elements, 'black' psychological warfare, and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.

A variety of means from the very benign to the more hostile were employed, and what it meant was, first and foremost, a fundamental restructuring of U.S. government. Why was the National Security Council [NSC] set up? It was set up to make sure that Italy would not go communist. The NSC's first directive, Directive 1/1, was "prevent Italy from going communist." Why was the Policy Planning Staff set up? To prevent Italy from going communist. Many other organizations were established in the 1940s—clearly it took more than using the existing departments of government to fight the communists at the ballot boxes of Italy. [It required] setting up new government departments which would be solely responsible [for] crafting a policy [to defeat] the communists at the ballot box.

It was not just organization of government; it was covert support to liberal political parties. Bags and bags of money were flown into Italy and passed into the hands of Christian Democrats. Certain political leaders were identified and supported: di Gasperi of the Christian Democrats, for example, for about ten years. Less benign means [included] secret arms shipments to Italian security forces so they could crack down on communist insurgency, communist uprisings, and strikes. Collaboration [meant] bringing not just government force and not just money, but also ideas—bringing American NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] into the struggle. The AFL-CIO promoted the idea of noncommunist labor unions and was able to shift the Italian political landscape in which communists were so dominant. [There were] campaigns by American civil society, recruiting Italian Americans to write letters and send cables back home saying, "Life is so good here. We want Italy to be some-

thing like this and not like the Soviet Union." Ten million letters and cables were sent by Italian Americans home during those years to convince people.

The U.S. government also threatened to cut all Italian immigration to the United States; back then I'm sure as many Italians were desperate to get from Italy to here as Egyptians are today to get here. But the United States made it very clear: if Italy went communist, there would be no immigration from Italy; it would be banned. Italian Americans wrote letters back home saying, "If you go communist, . . . I can't bring you here. So make sure this is not the case."

Measures were used to isolate communists in power, including making U.S. assistance and aid going to contractors and to projects in Italy conditional—[they] were not, for example, [to employ] contractors with communist connections or contractors that had unions with communist connections. This was to make sure the communists were isolated [from both] the political structure and means of financial gain.

Finally, media is hugely important. As I said earlier, white propaganda (that is, inflating the benevolence of American efforts, for example sending the ambassador around on highly publicized tours) as well as black propaganda (spreading internal rumors and lies about the communists; exposing their weaknesses, corruption, rifts, and their connection to the Soviet Union) was critical.

What does this mean for today? Examples such as the Italy [measures] can be multiplied. I don't think we could apply all of them, but the reason why I discuss Italy is because it's such a good case demonstrating [how] a country in which anti-American forces [that had] significant financial and political backing from an international sponsor, and who appeared [ready] to take over, can be won over if you employ the right means and if you have the kind of grand vision that applied in the U.S. government at the end of World War II.

So what do we do, then? I think that's lesson one for today. It seems to me that the struggle we see today, a lot of us look at it as the West versus the Muslim world. But there is another and perhaps more important struggle; it's the battle between Muslims who are

Islamists and Muslims who are not Islamists.¹ The question is whether we take sides in that battle, supporting Muslims who are not Islamists so that Islamists can be defeated at the ballot box. Much of what I'm going to suggest now applies to taking sides in this [manner].

The first task is to identify our allies clearly. I have just done that: Muslims who are not Islamists. What does that mean? Do we not talk to Islamists at all? Do we not engage them? I think, taking once again the Italian example and looking back to the Cold War, it's always good to talk to these people so you can exploit the splits between them. You can create rifts by getting to know them better, but to support or engage or try to bring over would be the same thing as turning Italy over to communists back in 1945, admitting, "It's a lost battle, this country is all communist and we can't do anything about it."

Are there shades among the Islamist camp that you can deal with if you reject the idea of dealing with Islamists? Some people have said, "How about moderate Islamists?" Such a thing does not exist. Here's why. Anytime I hear the term "moderate Islamists," this is what comes to my mind. It basically says that this is a strategy that's bound to fail in terms of its applicability in the Muslim world. Why? Let's say for the sake of this discussion that people in the Muslim world are divided among those who practice and those who don't practice. What are they going to think of the term when they hear that America's allies in the Muslim world are moderate Islamists? Those moderates who are practicing are going to be offended because you're basically saying they are practicing a diluted diet version of the faith. It will be the most offensive thing you can say to a Muslim when you're saying, "You're a moderate Islamist, come work with us."

That camp is lost; the other camp of secular types will also be offended because any time they hear that

America's allies are moderate Islamists, they're going to say, "Well, America has dropped us in favor of Islamists. "It doesn't matter how you qualify Islamists; once you're working with Islamists, you have dropped the seculars from the radar screen. You can talk to the Islamists, promote rifts the same way we did between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, and China and the Soviet Union later on. There are so many ways of exploiting those rifts—but not [engagement], and not support, because they are not our allies.

Second, now that we have identified allies, what do we do? I think this is where I go back to the beginning of my discussion where I highlighted a scenario and said we're facing a massive effort of mobilization by the Islamist International to support Islamist political parties through financial means and political means across the world. Here is, I think, what we should do: study what Islamists are doing and do it better than them. Fund what Islamists are funding and fund it better than them. So if Islamists are funding political parties, media, NGOs, charities, free schools, and free education, do it the way they do and do it better with more funds. It's the only way you can defeat them. This is not a battle of a few hundred million dollars. It's not a battle for the weak; it's not a battle for those who are saying, "Well, we're going to do this in two years." Italy was won over in thirteen years, so it's a long-term battle. It will take a huge financial investment, and it will take extensive study of how the Islamists are doing it. They have been able to win so many hearts and minds in this struggle.

Now [suppose] we have identified our allies, we're funding our allies, and we're doing it better than Islamists are doing. Third, there's got to be a cost to being an Islamist political party or movement figure in the Muslim world when it comes to relations between America and that part of the world. Right now, there's no cost to

1. During the question-and-answer session that followed his presentation, Dr. Cagaptay provided additional detail regarding his description of Islamists: "The problem with, for example, the current party in Turkey is that it is not an Islamic party; it's not a Muslim party; it's an Islamist party. Here's what I mean by Islamist. I'll give you an example. Anyone who thinks that I should be punished for drinking beer is Islamist—period—because they have a vision of how to live that they want to impose on the rest of the society. It's utopian, it's revolutionary, it's unrealistic, it's totalitarian, and that's what I have problems with. I also have problems with the idea of letting the Muslim Brotherhood come to power. Okay, so they'll be "moderate" Islamists. But isn't it against the liberal tradition to allow a totalitarian vision to impose itself on the rest of the society and expect there is going to be a happy and enduring system?... My problem is not with people who drink beer; my problem is not with people who do not drink beer. My problem is with people who do not drink beer and don't want me to drink beer. It's that simple."

being an Islamist as far as America is concerned. What do I mean by that? When America grants contracts to build schools—contracts to NGOs, contracts to political parties—how much of that money goes to Islamist businesses and how much of that money actually ends up funding Islamist activities? When exchanges are organized and people visit the [United States] because we want to engage them, I wonder how much of that actually ends up benefiting or promoting Islamists? When money is given away for media activities, I wonder how much of it actually ends up in the hands of liberals, nationalists, and secular types?

There are, I think, many, many ways of creating a cost to being an Islamist in the Middle East and making sure that that cost is felt. Once again, I'm thinking of the example of Italy. Why not, for example, ban the immigration of Islamists from the Middle East and from Muslim countries to the United States? It's totally acceptable. When I first came here in 1988—I was born and raised in Turkey—I filled in a visa form, and it said: "Are you identified or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" It was done during the Cold War. It was acceptable. Why give the privilege of access to America to Islamists? Why bring them over? What's the use? I think the idea is to get some creative thinking going in the sense that Islamists in the Muslim world have to feel that there's a cost to them of continuing their activity when it comes to their access to America, America's means, America's support, and America's finances. And non-Islamists have to feel privileged.

[In sum], this is what we can do over there, the three points: find allies, support allies, and make sure Islamists bear the cost of being Islamists. Fourth, what do you do here [in the United States]? This step involves a massive undertaking of financial responsibility. This is not going to be done with a few hundred million dollars. Suppose that we are thinking once again in pre-Cold War terms in saying, "Okay, we're going to organize government. We're going to create these huge bodies that are going to oversee our efforts from Pakistan to Morocco to make sure that Islamists

don't take over the ballot box." Who are we going to staff those departments with? How many Arabic, Pashtun, Urdu, and Farsi speakers do you have? I think you need a massive effort to have not hundreds, not thousands, but tens of thousands in the short term, and hundreds of thousands in the long term, of speakers of Arabic, Farsi, Pashtun, Dari, and Urdu, so that when you're setting up these departments, you're going to have qualified people coming from well-trained universities who speak the languages, have spent time in the region, and are able to look at this [issue]. Something like the Manhattan Project for the Oriental languages. It's a massive undertaking the likes of which we saw at the beginning of the Cold War.

So I think it's going to take a lot of money. It takes a rethinking of government. There were so many government agencies established at the beginning of the Cold War to manage the situation in Italy. They set up one, and they shut it down if it didn't work. Then, they set up another one. Mistakes are okay. People will make mistakes, as were made back in the Cold War, until you find the ideal thing that [offers] bold thinking, a bold vision.

For example, one of the ideas developed to fight the communists in Italy was called Plan B, which came out in 1951, and this shows how courageous the thinking [was] of the U.S. government people of the time. Until that time, they had been fighting communists with economic measures. It didn't work. Communists were becoming more and more powerful in the elections, [so] they came up with what's called Plan B, and it said, basically, "isolate and weaken the communists with any means possible." If you remember my description of political warfare from Kennan, that's what I mean. This was 1951, when communists were the most powerful party in Italy, and the OSP [Office of Special Projects] came up with the eventual vision to outlaw communist parties. How much more daring can you get?

Unless you're bold, you're not going to win this battle. Unless you're aware that it's a long-term battle, you're not going to win this. Unless you're aware that this will take billions of dollars, you're not going to win this battle.

F. Gregory Gause III

THE TITLE OF THIS PANEL is “Countering Islamists at the Ballot Box: Alternative Strategies.” My alternative strategy is to stop encouraging the ballot box; it’s to stop encouraging democracy in the Arab world in particular, which is the part of the Middle East that I’m most familiar with. I have two major points to make and I’ll try to make them as briefly as possible. The first point is this: the rationale behind U.S. security interest in promoting democracy as it has been enunciated by the administration is that the more democracy you get, the less anti-American terrorism you will get. That’s a nice story. It accords very much with how we like to think of ourselves and how we like to think of our own political development. Unfortunately, there’s no evidence for it.

In the social science literature, there’s absolutely no evidence that regime type has any relationship to the amount of terrorism or the amount of terrorists that come out of a particular country. In fact, the early literature on terrorism—and there’s not a whole lot of literature on terrorism and its quality is decidedly mixed and the statistical bases on which one can make these judgments are open to question, I’ll grant you that, and I think we’re just beginning to see better statistics on this—but if you look at some of the early statistical literature on regime type and democracy that was produced in the 1980s, it came to the conclusion that terrorism was a particular problem of democracies. Why? Because the statistical base from which those articles were written was the 1970s, and the 1970s was the time of the Bader Meinhof and the Red Brigades and the Provisional IRA, Basque separatism, and the Japanese Red Army, and it just looked like terrorism got produced by democracies.

Subsequent statistical work has demonstrated, I think, that there is no correlation—positive or negative—between regime type and the production of terrorism. The roots of terrorism come from somewhere else. They don’t come from type of regime. I could throw all sorts of numbers at you, but I’ll just put one outstanding binary comparison in front of you. The

country that has experienced the largest number of terrorist attacks, far and away, in the State Department’s annual recording of international terrorist incidents is India.

The State Department has stopped compiling these statistics, but if you go back and look at their annual country studies from 1999 to 2004 when they stopped doing it, India overwhelmingly is the country with the most terrorist attacks. Some of that undoubtedly is from across borders; some of it undoubtedly comes from Pakistan; but a lot of it is homegrown—whether Indian-Kashmir, in the Tamil areas, or in Assam in the northeastern parts of India. India, the largest democracy in the world—and an admirable democracy—is also the country that has experienced the highest number of terrorist attacks. Compare that with a country with a similar population, China, [which is] hardly democratic; in the same period, [it had] fewer than one-tenth the terrorist incidents that were reported in India in terms of numbers.

If, in fact, democracy dries up the swamp—if, in fact, democracy prevents terrorism, I don’t think we would see that huge disparity between India and China. One could get into anecdotal evidence on this point, too, whether it be the London bombings—or the most recent terrorist attack in London, where the perpetrators were all British-born Muslims who had spent their entire lives in democracy. One can talk about other anecdotal bits, but I think that the evidence is overwhelming. There just doesn’t seem to be a relationship between terrorism and democracy, either positive or negative.

Also, considering our particular enemies, al-Qaeda and groups like it, it’s absolutely clear to me that democracy is not going to end their jihad. They don’t like democracy at all. They see democracy as an innovation—a Western innovation that will take the Muslim world away from what they think proper Islamic government should be, which is based on the *sharia*. You’ve got the law from God; you don’t need a legislature. In fact, it’s impious. It’s absolutely polytheist, the

worst sin in Islam: it's polytheist to associate man with the divine function of giving law.

So I doubt very strongly that al-Qaeda and groups like al-Qaeda will be deflected from their jihad either against us or their own governments if these governments were more democratic. I also doubt very strongly that they would like these democratic governments if they were the kind of democratic governments we would like to see: tolerant, pluralist, with good relations with us, and at peace with Israel. So my first point is basically that the security benefit that's posited for the encouragement of democracy in the Arab world by the administration is unlikely to occur, even if we were able to achieve democratic progress in the Arab world.

My second point is that if we do have democratic elections in the Arab world, the Islamists will win. Now, we can spend a lot of time talking about why, and I think Soner [Cagaptay] made some excellent points about why liberal democratic and more secular and leftist parties, which had real presence in the Arab world in previous decades, are no longer able to compete with the Islamists. I won't bore you with a whole rundown of recent Arab elections, but I will just make a couple of points.

David [Schenker] mentioned the Iraqi elections. It's particularly interesting to break down the Iraqi elections—the most recent Iraqi elections at the end of '05—and see where the parliamentarians come from. If you take a look at the total Iraqi parliament, about two-thirds of those who won seats won on Islamist platforms. Let's take the Kurds—who had strong nationalist parties that mobilized almost all the Kurdish voters—out. If you just look at the Arab parliamentarians in the Iraqi election, 81 percent of them campaigned on lists that were sectarian and Islamist, both Sunni and Shia. Only 9 percent of the Iraqi-Arab parliamentarians from the list of former prime minister Ayad Allawi—the only list that was explicitly secular, explicitly nonsectarian, and explicitly multiethnic—won.

I emphasize the Iraqi example here because I think it's absolutely true that authoritarian Arab governments have disproportionately cracked down on liberal and secular oppositions, allowing Islamists more, if you will, political space to organize. I think that was very

much the case in Egypt, but that was not the case in Iraq. Iraq was a very difficult area in which to mount a political campaign, no question about it. But everybody was starting from pretty much the same level. There was no government help toward anybody. Everybody had to deal with the difficult situation in Iraq, and from that relatively level playing field in terms of the government's position, secular and, if you will, moderate or liberal candidates did very poorly.

I'd also point to the Palestinian Authority, another place where, if anything, the government tilted against the Islamists. Indeed, Fatah, the secular nationalist Palestinian party, was the incumbent party from 1994 to 2006. And we also know that the Palestinian territories have probably the most vibrant civil society in many ways in the Arab world, much of it funded by Western governments and Western NGOs [nongovernmental organizations]. Yet from that not just level but, if anything, tilted toward the secular parties base, we know what the results were in the January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary election.

Can the [United States] build up the liberals? I think that they're a weak reed right now on which to rely. I wish it was otherwise, but it seems to me that at least right now, for reasons that we can spend hours discussing, secular, leftist, nationalist, liberal political groupings in the Arab world are not selling something that most voters want to buy.

Now, I want to make clear that I'm not saying that Arabs cannot be democrats or even that Islamists cannot be democrats—although I don't think that Islamists will be liberal democrats. And when a lot of people who want to salvage the democratization platform, the democratization push from American policy, say: well, we can't focus on elections, we've got to focus on the other elements of democracy; we've got to focus on rule of law; and we have to focus on individual rights and minority rights. Well, that's liberalism. That's not democracy; that's liberalism. Right?

And I don't think that you can conduct a policy that you call democratization or democracy promotion and say you're not going to have elections, or you're not going to have elections for twenty years, or you're not going to have elections until you, the Arabs, get to

be liberal. These people are not dumb. They can smell hypocrisy. And talking about democracy and not talking about elections and not encouraging elections is the height of hypocrisy. They would see it as a height of hypocrisy. If we're going to talk democracy, we have to talk elections, and if we're going to talk elections, Islamists are going to win them.

Now, in many ways, I think Islamists might be better governors than the existing authoritarian Arab regimes. They might be. I say "might be" because we don't have a huge evidentiary basis on which to discuss what Islam in power looks like. We have Iran; we have Sudan for a little bit. We don't have a lot of evidence. But they might be more honest, and they probably would be closer to their populations. But what they would not be is particularly friendly to American foreign policy goals in the region.

I think that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is a pretty moderate bunch on all sorts of issues. They're professional in many ways, have very articulate leadership, are very well organized, very disciplined, and might make good governors of Egypt. The former general guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mahmoun Hudeibi, during the Iraq war of 2003, declared that it was a legitimate jihad to fight America in Iraq, and the current general guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammad Mahdi Akef, has made it extremely clear, even in the last few weeks, that one of the requirements of civil peace and political compromise in Egypt is that the Camp David accords be abrogated.

So while Islamists, I think, in many ways could be very responsible governors, they are not going to be particularly friendly to American foreign policy aims in the region. So my sound bite on this—it's not that Arabs or even Islamist Arabs can't be democrats—is that the [United States] will not like the governments that Arab democracy produces. And I think with that in mind, we should stop conceptualizing this as a problem to be solved—Islamists at the ballot box. Stop thinking of it as a problem to be solved—which is very American, and if there's a problem, there must be a solution; if there's a solution, we must have some answer to it. It's not a problem to be solved; it's a condition to be endured. It's a condition to be endured.

We can't do much to stop Islamists, I don't think. Maybe if we commit the kind of resources Soner [Cagaptay] talks about, maybe we can help build up [an] alternative to Islamists, but it will take decades. I think he was very honest about that. What happens in between? A bumpy road, it seems to me. Think of this as—think of this situation as a condition to be endured, because things change and we can't predict how they're going to change. And I'm positive we can't direct how the ideological development of the Middle East is going to change, right? We have to hunker down. I'd say back our friends and wait for things to change, and then maybe we can reassess the issue of American support for democracy in the Arab world. But right now I say we should put it on the back burner.

Mona Makram-Ebeid

THANK YOU, MR. CHAIRMAN. I certainly differ with both preceding speakers. Now, let me start by stating something. In the year 2005, I participated in the parliamentary elections in Egypt. Egyptians had only two choices: either vote for an autocratic government or for an Islamist party, which they weren't very convinced of. So what did the Egyptians do? Only 20 percent went to the ballot box, and that says a lot, and this says a lot [about] what can happen if there is an alternative for the Egyptians.

Now, let me start by saying that the Lebanese tragedy has emphasized more clearly than ever four main dynamics. One is their assertion of Islamist identity; two is Shiite empowerment, causing the status and safety of the Sunni Arab leadership to be at stake; three, the phenomenon of anti-Western defiance; and four, domestic challenges to autocratic Arab regimes. Against this background, three major dilemmas of the current political situation in Egypt are worth mentioning.

One is the undemocratic nature of the ruling regime, hell-bent on consolidating and sustaining its power, unwilling to relinquish any of its control over society, and owing its support to two main institutions: the security apparatus and the military. Two, the structural weakness of opposition parties, liberal and leftist, without any grassroots penetration and which are more like talk shops than political parties. And three, the Muslim Brotherhood: it has wide popular support, but it also has its own private and ambiguous agenda that takes priority over national interests although its discourse contains many of the democratic concepts and [much of the] content espoused by the secular opposition. But the government refuses to engage in political dialogue, although these movements seek to pursue their goals by setting forth political demands.

Now, among the main reform imperatives that are demanded by the Egyptian opposition, as you know, are constitutional reform, a limit on the term of the presidential office; reducing the vast powers of the executive; changing the laws that are obstructing civic

liberties, such as the emergency laws; and so on. However, recent crackdowns on opposition movements, mainly Muslim Brothers, have limited the existing public space available for the articulation of democratic alternatives.

The rise of Islamist movements in Egypt and throughout the region has become a matter of great concern. For Western governments, there is a suspicion as to these organization's ultimate goals, while Arab governments are fearful of the growing power of these movements, which they have trouble controlling. That's the main point that they have trouble controlling today, and I would say particularly after the Lebanese tragedy.

Yet the general impression in the region is that the tepid pressure on autocratic allies of the [United States] to democratize in 2005 had all but disappeared in 2006, in part from the chill they felt from the emerging Islamist political forces in the region like Hamas, Hizballah, and the Muslim Brotherhood. The fear and anxiety at what may happen the day after the disappearance of an aging leader has prompted the administration to bank more on the regime and be less prone to [apply] pressure for more democratic reform; not because they do not want to see a democratic Egypt—as this is in favor of their interests. But because the cooperation of the Egyptian regime with the U.S. administration plays an important role in securing American interests—whether in Iraq, the Gulf area, or occupied Palestine with all its tensions—[the administration has] reduced any pressure to reform.

However, the main reason, once again, is that there is no alternative. The only alternative being the Muslim Brothers, which is causing of course growing concern both to the [United States] and to secular movements. However, we believe that even though it is true that Egypt has maintained stability in an explosive region, it still faces major political and socioeconomic challenges. In this case there is a limit for the political leadership to contain opposition movements by ruling undemocratically.

One of the big problems today facing the government is what to do with the Islamists. This is the major challenge of democratic change in Egypt. To eradicate them is proving quite impossible. Opening the door to their participation is not without risks, of course, but we believe it cannot be avoided. Until now the Egyptian government has refused to legalize them, although it has regular contacts with them and has allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to contest the recent elections.

The strategy of legalizing Islamic parties and including Islamists in the political process is not without risk, and I repeat it again—is not without risk, but the examples of Turkey and Algeria provide powerful examples. Turkey integrated Islamist parties and this helped it to move toward greater democracy. Of course, time is a key factor in determining whether the Turkish scenario of peaceful integration of the Islamists and transition to democracy will prevail or whether a more violent and confrontational course will be taken, resulting in a radicalization of politics.

In Algeria, repression of the Islamists triggered a situation of protracted violence due also to the Algerian mismanagement of social and political demands during the two decades leading up to the crisis. So banning Islamist parties has other negative consequences. Because they have not been allowed to form their own party or parties, Islamists in Egypt have instead infiltrated every existing political party or parties, state bureaus, and nonstate institutions, and they have become a pressure group in all of them. Because the influence of political parties is so limited, party leaders, secular party leaders, are forced to co-opt them.

In last year's election, for instance, the speaker of parliament, a member of the People's Assembly, joined forces with a candidate of the Muslim Brothers against his own party to ensure his success. Even Ayman Nour, the young liberal who's now in prison and contested the presidential elections, sought the support of the Brotherhood.

Recently, newly emerging so-called liberal parties bent backward to invite the Muslim Brother[hood] leadership to attend their launching ceremony. Again, we do not assume for one moment that these movements are generally committed to democracy, that they

have given up on the goal of imposing Islamic law on all by making it the basis for all laws, or that they truly accept equal rights for women and non-Muslims.

However, to close the political space for the Islamists it sees as a threat, the government has paid a price far higher than it would have by allowing them formal existence. It has given in, on the other hand, to the religious establishment, which is far more reactionary and conservative. In the words of an incisive political analyst, religious scholars and their institutions today are the actors par excellence in the clash of civilizations, not the Islamist movements.

And now let's move to the reasons for the plight of the liberals. Apart from the restrictions imposed on them by the government, they all suffer from chronic weaknesses and internecine rivalries and decisions. What is more important is that democratic norms and procedures are contested in the Egyptian public sphere but do not enjoy a relatively high degree of popular acceptance.

Concepts such as democracy, good governance, and pluralism evoke at least partial distrust among the majority of Egyptian citizens because of the government's systematic misuse of these principles. Two other factors are responsible for this bleak reality. First, religious-based perceptions of society, which present themselves as an alternative normative order particularly attacking the corrupt nature of the regime, appeal to a large portion of the population. Second, the prevailing political culture since the Free Officers took over in 1952, is one of submission [to] and fear [of] the rulers.

To return to the liberals, it is clear that they're unable to fashion a message attractive to large numbers of citizens. Their abstract message about democracy resonates only at the very general level and has failed to serve as the basis for political mobilization. Egyptians are not averse to democracy, yet when they vote they do not choose to cast their ballots for liberal democratic parties. Remarkably, the Islamists have managed to incorporate key elements of the liberal platform in their agenda: demands for accountability, constitutional reform, an end to political repression, and clean and uncorrupt government.

Organizationally they are ahead of all other parties and movements, in part because they have been able to circumvent the restrictions imposed by the government on political parties by using mosques as a meeting place and religion as their message. On the other hand, moderate Islamist sources, when rooted in the social fabric of Egyptian society, are more able to create social capital than other political parties or nongovernmental actors have been. Gaining political [backing] in recent years especially [are] younger generations in the Muslim Brotherhood and the still unlegalized new Wasat Party. And here I would like to really underline the intergenerational struggle that is happening within the Muslim Brotherhood movement today, and where new leaders much more in tune with what is happening in the West, much more in tune with the information revolution, with new technology, with advancement, are emerging.

There is also one major point that often seems to evade the attention of Western analysts. Within the Islamist spectrum, in contrast to other countries in the region, the political relevance of radical Islamism in Egypt has been declining in recent years. The last wave of radical Islamist-motivated violence can be dated back to the first half of the 1990s. Government counterviolence and stringent policies succeeded in destroying the power base of the radical groups, [as did] the rejection by many Muslims of this uncalled-for violence.

A significant process of rethinking the radical Islamist legacy and questioning the use of violence for political objectives has been taking place among members of both Gamaa Islamiya and the Jihad group. This division has contributed to decreasing religiously motivated militants.

What should the foreign partners do? One, by focusing on political reform and not only on economic reform, donors would be acknowledging that cultural and educational reforms are part of the political responsibilities of the government. Two, liberal organizations capable of mobilizing [a] large constituency simply do not exist in Egypt. Islamist organizations are so influential because they have little competition. So the inclusion of the Islamists in the democratization

process is a necessary evil. It is also essential and more urgent than ever for foreign partners to help in revitalizing and nurturing other political forces, as cultivating diversity is an urgent priority.

Three, in order to mitigate the influence of the Islamists, who represent the only organization with a genuine social basis and a social strategy that addresses the concerns of 90 percent of the population, combining a religious ideal with a concept of social justice, donors should encourage both the ruling party and opposition forces to develop a credible social agenda and show interest in social issues.

Four, liberalization in Egypt could succeed because a public space exists with a diversity of opinions, trains of thought, political parties, and civil society organizations. In fact, there is a vibrant civil and political society able to mobilize, to formulate demands, and to make good use of the international and Arab media to exert pressure on the government, as we saw last year.

Five, the real challenge today that faces both the donors, the Arab secularists, and the Arab governments is strategically and intelligently how to pave the way for Islamists to become supporters of liberal democracy and not advocates of theocracy. This will demand integrity, a political will, and a sustainable commitment to political reform.

In conclusion, the possibility that existing non-Islamist parties will compete effectively with the Islamists in the near future is almost nil. Islamists will continue to be the most important force. However, new challenges are facing the Islamist movements within their own ranks, developing some kind of internal division. And that is a generational power struggle, with intergenerational tensions giving rise to a new generation far more eager to play politics, more open-minded, and which thinks the situation requires new ideas and political tactics.

Given the influence of Islamist movements, the outcome of the struggle will determine the future of political reform. I myself had to deal with the Wasat Party, a breakaway reformist faction of the Muslim Brotherhood not allowed yet by the government. They call for establishing a democratic political system, and I can say that the Islamists are becoming much more flex-

ible and sophisticated and that recent political success in some countries is increasing their influence within their respective organizations. There is no possibility of encouraging a process of democratization or at least liberalization, as Greg Gause suggests, without taking into consideration the increased influence of Islamist movements.

The policy today is to play modern Islam versus radical Islam. However, it is also unlikely that Islamists will succeed in the near future in removing doubts about the limits of their tolerance as long as they have both a political and a religious agenda. They must distance themselves from religious dogma sufficiently to gain

credibility as genuinely democratic parties. One step in that direction is to remove the ambiguity in their statements: for example, they call for full-fledged democratic reforms, but they remain reluctant to endorse equal rights for Copts, Egypt's native Christian minority, or for women.

I believe that a policy of engagement with the reformist wings of the Islamist movement offers a golden opportunity to non-Islamists to form new types of alliances with reformists in ruling regimes and moderate Islamic currents in the hope of developing a national consensus in a highly polarized and embittered society.

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