

Recap of the Ninth Annual Roundtable Conference 2012

Building Civil Society After the Arab Spring: Progress, Challenges, Needs

Wednesday, May 9, 2012

The Maxwell School, Syracuse University
Paul Greenberg House, 2301 Calvert Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

Summary

The ninth annual roundtable conference of the AACR explored the accomplishments remaining challenges and needs for continued reform effort for civil society and democratic governance in the Middle East. Several elements of reform were focal points: the role of social media, particularly for engagement of youth and the broader public; the relation of economic and political change and the role of business, especially SMEs, and the role of “outsiders” in helping civil society take root and flourish. Stephen Grand, Director of the Saban Center, Brookings Institution project on U.S. Relations with the Muslim World, provided an initial overview that helped direct the ensuing discussion, Farah Pandith, the U.S. envoy to the Muslim World, delivered energizing keynote remarks. Danya Greenfield, Deputy Director of the Rafik Hariri Center of the Atlantic Council, concluded the discussion with an analysis of future policy implications for the U.S. and other states of current reform efforts.

Welcoming Remarks

Dr. Joy Cherian, founder and President of the Association of Americans for Civic Responsibility, briefly welcomed panelists and participants to AACR's 9th Annual Roundtable Conference. He emphasized the value of the organization's annual forums as platforms for connecting those concerned with civic responsibility here and abroad, and as ways to explore, share knowledge and create dialogue around all facets of civic responsibility. Dr. Cherian expressed hope for an ongoing conversation on reform and civil society as a basis for positive change around the world. He encouraged those who were not familiar with AACR, a small, non-profit, educational organization, to read the article, "Why AACR" and to visit the organization's website to learn more about AACR's mission and past activities. Dr. Cherian thanked and acknowledged the event co-chairs, Professor Michael Schneider of the Maxwell School of Syracuse University and Chad Tragakis, Senior Vice President at Hill + Knowlton Strategies, before turning the floor over to Professor Schneider.



Opening Remarks

Michael Schneider, director of the Syracuse University graduate Washington Public Diplomacy Program, welcomed participants to the conference:

"Today we will endeavor in the brief space of six hours to assess the historic changes that have come with the "Arab Spring" of the past year. This is especially challenging since few generalizations about the Middle East can validly represent the very individual and different experiences of individual nations. The range of success and failure, of progress and problems, is wide. An outstanding group of experts will help us examine the institutional and cultural challenges and how the several reform movements have responded. We are especially interested in lessons learned in the past year about the resistance to change, the alternative paths proposed by different involved groups, what seems to be working, and what is not.

We are fortunate also that several young civil society leaders from the region will participate on several panels. They are members of a group here under the auspices of the Maxwell School, under a grant from the Department of State. They will have unique understanding of the Arab Spring, based on their first hand knowledge and deep involvement in the reform movements.

Our conversation will begin with an analysis of the causes of the Arab Spring and an overview of the broad reform effort of the past year, from Steve Grand. We will deal with the role of social media, and of young people in the first panel, welcome Farah Pandith, the Secretary of State's envoy to the Muslim World, who will deliver keynote remarks, and discuss the relation of economic and political reform and how business – especially SMEs – can contribute to economic growth. Our final panel will address the role of "outsiders" in fostering change, with some emphasis on the changing role of women in the Middle East. The forum will conclude with remarks on the implications for U.S. policy by Danya Greenfield, deputy director of the Rafik Hariri Center of the Atlantic Council, and Peter Howard, Middle East analyst in the Department of State."



Introduction: Root Causes, Progress and Problems in the Past Year

Stephen Grand, Director, U.S. Relations with the Islamic World of the Saban Center, Brookings Institution, highlighted the importance of this time of transition in Arab politics, and noted that despite setbacks there is cause for optimism because of longstanding attitudinal changes underway worldwide – a “third wave of democratization.” Important elements include:

- Citizen activists on the ground are taking collective action, which has a contagious effect. They have found their voice and there is no going back. They are demanding dignity, accountability, participation in government, more than just society.
- These bottom up citizen demands play out differently depending on conditions – whether societies are “in transition,” “in turmoil,” or “yet to be determined”
 - Wealth disparity, cultural complexion, insecurity, lack of idea of a shared nationhood, all factor into conditions

Grand noted the difference between revolution and democratization and made the case for the latter:

- Democracy is about much more than elections: basic freedoms, the vibrancy of society to empower citizens to have control over their own destinies, and about effective rule of law.
- There is also the never-ending prospect of striving for a more perfect union
 - Political constituencies for democracy are evident in public demand for change which is necessary, but often overlooked
 - Citizens are the only ones who can constrain corruption of power.
- Continued citizen engagement is needed to define lines between state and society, where power lies, and foster proper governing/governed relationships
- Democracy requires new set of rules of the game that affect people in power, kept in check by the voice/sovereignty of the people
- Those who are educated, with connections with the outside world will be most successful
- A new narrative will help accelerate cultural changes already taking place, powered in part at least by cosmopolitan, change oriented youth – very different from old leaders and Islamists
- The U.S. needs to assist with cultivation of attitudes through public diplomacy that helps at least at the margins to transform society through exposure to technology, culture, universities, entrepreneurial spirit, concepts of democracy, etc.

A few prescriptions:

- Citizens can play a central role of mediating relations with authority, but need transparency.
- There is a need for more “brain circulation,” i.e. greater Internet freedom, more exposure to outside experience for Arab youth, accompanied by more outsiders coming to the region in far greater numbers, more effort to strengthen educational institutions to nurture a new generation of informed citizens to think critically and act independently
- Civic initiatives at the local level are crucial —people taking it upon themselves to address local problems is a vital element. People and organizations might start small and build up lessons learned, networks, techniques, which will snowball. They should find ways to exert collective action



The Impact and Current Role of Social Media and New Communication

Chad Tragakis, Senior Vice President, Hill + Knowlton Strategies introduced panelists and led off the panel on the current role of social media and the ‘new communication’ structures and patterns:

“I would like to introduce this session with a quote from an important thought leader on challenges and opportunities in the Middle East.

“There are today, in the Middle East, two men: one of the past and one of the future. Which one are you? Come close, let me look at you and let me be assured by your appearance and your conduct if you are one of those coming into the light or going into the darkness. Come and tell me who and what are you.”

As some of you may have recognized, that thought leader was Khalil Gibran and that quote came from his essay, *The New Frontier*, first published 87 years ago.

Some have characterized the Arab Spring as the world’s first true 21st Century revolution – complete with all the trappings and tools that come with our 24-7 Digital Age.

We can only wonder what Gibran would have thought of social media, how he himself might have used it, and how he would have called on others to use it to bring about what he saw as “a new awakening” in the Middle East... one that is “growing and expanding; it is reaching and engulfing all sensitive, intelligent souls; it is penetrating and gaining all the sympathy of noble hearts.”

Here to provide insight, observations, commentary and analysis on the impact and role of social media and new communication platforms leading up to, during and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring are three distinguished speakers: Jamal Dajani, Vice President of Internews; Kara Hadge, Head of Digital Media with the British Council; and we are very fortunate to have Ibrahim Yousif Shebani, a Leaders for Democracy Fellow and the founder and Chief Editor of “The Libyan” magazine, who had a front row seat to the historic events in his native Libya.”



Social Media and New Communication

Jamal Dajani, Vice President, Internews emphasized that the Arab Spring, the “first 21st century revolution, is centrally an “Arab Media Revolution,” derived in part from a significant youth bulge:

- Satellite TV (800+ stations, up from 40)—erases borders and allows people to watch what’s going on in real time
- Many more in the region have access to the Internet in the last several years
- It is tempting to call it a Facebook/Twitter Revolution—these tools amplified messages, but it was more about organization on the ground (example unions in Tunisia)
- Also, pre-eminent majorities witnessed the revolution on TV
- Islamists have taken advantage of the fragmentation of the opposition to gain leverage and win-win elections
 - They don’t have too many parties, whereas the opposition has 113—
 - They have the opportunity to captivate the population at mosques on Fridays

Why we are fascinated with social media and its role in the Arab Spring:

Kara Hadge, Head of Digital Media, British Council emphasized the confluence of massive regime changes and huge adoption of new technologies:

- The Internet is finally doing what it was supposed to do In the MENA region; last year, the Internet finally reached its potential as a free press, an open network, a bridge of geographic divides, and a basic means of mass communication.
- In general, social media was used as an alternative to state media: In Egypt and Tunisia, Facebook was used to raise awareness, spread information, organize action more often than used for entertainment or social reasons. Both societies relied the least on state-sponsored media.

Ms. Hadge noted the feasibility of enabling democratic governance through social media:

- Social media is a significant source of information and is used to validate information or provide diverse perspectives.
- Social media needs to be combined with actions on the ground.
- The social media can’t influence events independent of involved citizenry:
- Programming must encourage civic participation: in the US, the correlation between use and consumption of digital media and civic participation has been muddled; media use rarely leads to civic participation among the majority.

The British Council relies on social media for a number of communication activities:

- We work with youth age 14-20 and adults 25-35 on social entrepreneurship and social innovation
- The Social Media are an effective outreach tool to get participants for programs and events, Used for communication within projects, and have been using it for the past three years. The Arab Spring increased users
- We have also used social media to find opinion leaders on the web who are well-versed in tech and use social media to expand impact of projects, e.g.
 - English: the most active pages; create and share content; Go4English: part of “English for the Future” MENA English program; shares free resources (podcasts, quizzes, etc.) and interaction opportunities from LearnEnglish; 663,000 likes; Springboard on Facebook – part of self-development program for women in MENA; Gulf Stage – first time screening theatre from many MENA countries in UK; 100 Questions About Islam; Generation 9/11; Young Arab Voices; Skills for Employability –Facebook page with 8800 likes in just a few months; and Young Arab Analysts

Network International (YAANI) –50 young policy analysts to act as international leaders in employment creation, economic regeneration, social cohesion, and policy formulation with *both policy and social media tools*

Ibrahim Yousif Shebani, LDF Fellow, Chief Editor and Founder, “The Libyan” magazine focused on the early difficulties and the impact of social media in Libya:

- Facebook delivered the message to youth, encouraged people to gather, but only 10% of Libyans have internet access.
- Twitter only existed after the revolution; graffiti/cartoonists carried a good deal of social protest.
- Initially social media users faced numerous obstacles: February 18 internet access was cut off, resulting in only one café with a satellite to communicate to the outside world.
- Early on, people took videos and crossed to Egypt to upload them to the media to spread them
- Independent media—newspapers, radio, TV –The Media Center— were the only way to deliver information
- Social media played a role, but opposing forces also used it: **It is (social media) a tool, but can also be used against you to gather information on the protesters, and hijack accounts to spread false information.**
- It is also not valid, and condescending to say that the revolution occurred only because of the social media.

Keynote Address

Farah Pandith, U.S. Department of State, Special Representative to Muslim Communities stressed that *The U.S. is endorsing an alternative narrative about the Muslim communities “an alternative narrative to the narrative of violent extremism.”* The U.S. is seeking to:

- Build bridges on all sorts of common issues, no “us v. them”, only “we”
- Emphasize young people (under 30) worldwide, and the promotion of civil society. This is a Connected generation—ideas are percolating and resonating around the world
- Ask what does it mean to be young? What are the issues?
- Scout for talent, listen, connect networks of like-minded folks, foster new tools within old boundaries

Citizen diplomacy—people-to-people engagement – is an essential element of this approach. It aims to boost respect for all Muslims around the world, since many of the youth in recent years feel their communities have been unjustly targeted:

- Connect ideas; recognize the diversity of experiences from different people; show how they think about themselves and the world thinks about them
- Deal with the clash of religion and culture
- Recognize a global “Youthquake”— and that their ideas matter
- The U.S. can favor intellectual partnership, bring together communities and encourage them to share experiences to find “mutual interests.”
- Engage outside of politics to move ideas forward: Insert alternative narratives into the space : these need to come from them—peer-to-peer – and push back against old ideologies and structures

Ms. Pandith stressed that words matter—how we talk and what we say; there is no single “Muslim world,” but Muslim communities around the world. There is a noticeable shift in the willingness of youth to listen to other youth. Increasingly Americans are going around the world to speak to their peers. They should talk about who we are— the good/bad/ugly, with pride in our values and awareness that what happens in our country matters.



Democracy and Economic Growth: How Can Business Contribute to Change?

Chad Tragakis introduced the panel discussion:

“From the smallest street market peddlers to the largest global corporations, there can be no mistake that businesses played a central role in spurring, supporting and shaping the Arab Spring.

While experts continue to debate and discuss the specific root causes for the uprisings and escalation of civil protests, it’s likely that historians will one day point to the self-immolation of Tunisian fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, as a primary catalyst. Bouazizi was a man who felt so harassed, humiliated, repressed and defeated that he could only envision one response.

From that horribly sad but galvanizing statement by a small business owner with a fruit cart to the tacit and explicit support of some of the world’s largest global corporations, including Google, business and the Arab Spring have arguably been inextricably linked.

Moving forward, how will economic growth and democratic reform continue to play a role in the region? How can the private sector continue to bring about positive change in democratic governance and economic development? And what role and responsibility does the business sector hold?

Here to help us explore these questions are three outstanding panelists: Joseph Siegle, Director of Research at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies; Gregory Simpson, Senior Project Officer at the Center for International Private Enterprise; and we are extremely fortunate to have with us Nivin Safwat AbdelMeguid, a Leaders for Democracy Fellow and research assistant at the American University of Cairo, who will provide a firsthand account of what she experienced during the historic events in her native Egypt.”

We’ll begin with Joe Siegle.”

Joseph Siegle, Director of Research, Africa Center for Strategic Studies

Transitions are hard

- Economic contraction is characteristic of transitions
- It puts enormous pressure on the democratization process and ability to deliver
- There is an urgent need to overcome autocratic legacies
 - The longer, more entrenched these institutions are, the longer it takes to catch up
- Autocracies are generally sustained by “cronyistic” business networks
 - They dominate access to credit, licenses, property
 - This constrains productivity and growth and leads to dozens of steps to starting a business. Each represents a gatekeeper often looking for a bribe.
 - Entrenched vested interests within government also benefit from this patronage; they have strong interests in resisting change

New business is **Not starting from a Level Playing Field: There is a need to restructure skewed institutions.**

- Commitment and political will are needed for change and will be shaped by discrediting the old order and building a consensus on direction of the political economy

Key Ingredients of Successful Transitions - *Resiliency is key*

- Strong, broad-based civil society networks are invaluable. The strength of such associations is a key determinant in maintaining coalitions for reform and building Social Capital
 - Societies with denser networks of associations (soccer clubs, social service organizations, cultural groups, teacher’s



“There is an important need for legal institutions supporting fair and transparent bidding process, and access to capital”

organizations, trade unions, business associations) are more likely to have higher levels of trust, income, well-being, and less corruption (see writings by Robert Putnam, supported by Deepa Narayan's village studies in the developing world).

The Role of business in fostering successful transitions

Politically

- Democratic transitions provide networks (of traders, suppliers) that connect a society across regions, ethnicities, and class. These relationships build trust and can strengthen social cohesion, and also help build a sense of national identity
- An independent private sector represents a balance to executive branch or ruling party and helps establish boundaries/limits to government
- Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) also represent the middle class; their expansion contributes to democracy and stability, and creates another pole of power in society
- Business associations are less threatening than activist associations

Economically

- Jobs contribute to stability
 - Unemployment is a key driver for armed groups
 - Business can expand opportunity for youth – a key demographic in the region
 - Economic stability can help set new direction: Tied to reforms fostering more equitable competition: break down monopolies; sets new norms for transparency; rewards innovation; improves productivity; helps asset creation and exports, FX, and currency valuation
- It is importance for business associations and for SMEs to lobby for reforms:
 - Ease with which to start a business is a key measure of progress
 - Reform opens path to success and prosperity, independent of political ties, and removes incentives for the economically ambitious to go into government to seek their fortune at public expense
 - Reform can help reduces the predatory nature of governments
- More competition and oversight will also reduce corruption, which harms productivity and fuels cynicism and distrust. Competition helps:
 - Expand networks with international community
 - Combined with democratization and trade, can be a moderating influence
 - Eventually will facilitate more international investment
 - Can raise standards, improve capacity, and facilitate technology adoption

While encouraging the private sector, there is a need to be cautious with the push to privatization



Gregory Simpson, Senior Project Officer, Center for International Private Enterprise stressed that:

The make-up of business:

- Local business associations and civic organizations, as well as street vendors are a good illustration of the diversity of the business community
- There is a tendency to think of “business” as monolithic
 - The business community is made up of small and medium-sized enterprises, the informal sector, large-scale firms, crony firms, and state-owned enterprises, to name a few.
- The business community in a given country is as diverse as society itself.
- Too often in developing countries, crony firms and some of the large firms and state-owned enterprises that benefit from the political status quo tend to monopolize access to policymakers.
- But in any given country, most in the business community have an interest in reform.
 - They want fewer barriers to conducting business.
 - They want access to capital, to information, to technology, to markets.
 - They want the same rules to apply to everybody.

Requisites for business prosperity:

- The countries of the MENA region need to lower barriers to entry and reduce burdensome costs of doing business
- The expansion of opportunity in the formal economy, while at the same time establishing effective, efficient, fair, and democratic rules of the game, will be essential for democracy to deliver for the majority of citizens.

“Without a democratic process, economic reforms are unlikely to succeed. Without a functioning market system, democracies will be unable to deliver for their citizens.”

- This is not something that can be legislated from the top down. Governments will need input from businesspeople, who know best the challenges they face and the obstacles hindering their success.

A few examples of ways business associations played a role in lowering barriers and opening opportunity, even before the Arab Spring:

- The Federation of Economic Development Associations (FEDA) has been active for a decade in grassroots advocacy for policy reform to help improve opportunity for small business.
 - In 2006, in response to advocacy by FEDA membership and an intense private-public dialogue, the Egyptian Minister of Housing and Reconstruction allocated 10 percent of state-owned agricultural and industrial land to private SMEs in rural Egyptian provinces.
 - In 2008, FEDA led an intensive, grassroots-based public-private dialogue effort to draft a new, unified law on industry, to replace Egypt's command economy-era legislation.
 - On the parliamentary docket for a 2011 vote at the time of the revolution, much of the law will be immediately applicable as Egypt's new government seeks to stimulate the economy and create jobs.

The Arab Spring was about freedom from corruption and oppression. It was about opportunity. It was, at a fundamental level, about basic human dignity.

The real challenge for the business community moving forward will be to help keep people's eye on the ball and keep pushing to make the system work for everyone.

Democracy in the region will be short-lived if it does not deliver for the average citizen.



Nivin Safwat AbdelMeguid, LDF Fellow; Research Assistant, American University Cairo

The Economic Front in Egypt

- Although Egypt's economy has expanded by 5% in 2009 and 2010, poverty has crept up in the last few years.
 - According to the U.N. survey in 2010; 90% of the unemployed Egyptians are youth under 30.
 - Egypt's economic structure does not appear conducive to individual economic initiative: The country ranks number 96 in the index of economic freedom (out of 179 states) and is Number 94 in the "doing business" ranking (out of 183 countries)
- Egypt's "Entry Density" (the measures of new ventures registered per 1000 people of working age) is only 0.13
 - Egypt, unfortunately, has among the lowest start-up rates in the world
- Past experience can provide useful lessons for what to avoid in the future, even if unable to impart what exactly should be done.

Challenges and Unmet Needs during Transition

- A successful transition to democracy can be facilitated by a sound economy and economic well-being of the citizens.
- The transitional government was and still is facing tremendous challenges. These include:
 - An increase in the minimum wage and extension of fixed contracts to 450,000 public employees which places more pressure on an already unsustainable budget deficit
 - The high expectations of the citizens from the new government after the toppling of Mubarak's regime

"Managing expectations without compromising long-term stability is the most challenging issue that threatens the success of the transition."

- The long-term implications of continued poor economic policy-making will be harsh and rigorous.
- The effects of the current situation are most visible in terms of domestic consumption, direct private investments, and tourism
 - Whatever political leadership emerges, there can be no doubt concerning the nature of the economy that must be developed in Egypt that should be premised on entrepreneurship as a driver of the economic growth
 - For broadly shared growth, people must own the means of production and they must have the opportunity and the motivation to start and grow new companies, for the entrepreneurial capitalism to develop

Recommendations for Economic Development in Short and Medium Terms

- To support economic development, security must be restored,
- and SCAF must:
 - Respond to the lack of transparency of the public sector – both domestic and foreign – with a clear roadmap that guarantees investment during the period of transition;
 - Ease the strict regulations that are hindering new investment activities and discouraging business initiatives and engage informal sector;
 - Establish new partnerships with independent entrepreneurs and encourage private-public initiatives;
 - Adopt more participatory and transparent approach in the decision-making process and engage stakeholders and new actors (civil society organizations, political parties, youth organizations, and business community) in the decision-making process,
 - Insure the availability of funds for small and medium enterprises, by providing guarantees to commercial banks for a limited period of time, and
 - Reduce the income gap between rich and poor
- Support for weak institutions, correction of imbalances between producers and consumers, and implementation of the correct measures all would help the economy to be put back on track
- There needs to be improved governance through enforcement of the rule of law and an end of favoritism for big businesses, otherwise, the transitional government in Egypt could face the worst scenario of continued economic decline and reverse to authoritarianism.

Conclusion

Egypt's economic outlook will depend on the government's ability to establish political and social stability. A number of constraints exist:

- The high expectations of the public for the newcomers in the transitional and post-election governments and the short time frame in which to achieve stability
- Limited resources
- Weak institutional capacity
- The current downward trend in the Egyptian economy must be immediately addressed
 - The transitional government can begin by regaining the confidence of the private sector and removing barriers for new entrepreneurs.
 - Short-term measures such as production subsidies and limited export facilities could also be implemented during this time of uncertainty in order to boost production and create jobs.
 - The banking sector could assume a more proactive role as well in terms of lending.
 - Coordination by the central bank to avoid repercussions and moral hazard by targeting SMEs based on merit should be among the government's priorities.
- There is a need to reform the bureaucracy, improve its efficiency, and revisit the role of the state to become a facilitator of growth and development.
- Demands are being placed on the state to assume a traditional social and distributive role.

A more likely policy prescription: appeasement policies in the short term combined with a coherent plan to deal with the short and medium-term challenges.

- Movement to forge a new deal between state and society has been timid, and the transitional government has taken no steps to indicate that a new economic paradigm is emerging.

A number of measures can be adopted, such as sharing information and engaging stakeholders that would not burden the budget and could usher in a new trend in the decision-making process to realize real democracy.





The Role of “Outside” Supporters: Government, NGOs, Education, the Diaspora

Mike Schneider briefly introduced the topic and the speakers, noting that while the Arab Spring and similar reform movements around the world will rely pre-eminently on efforts by local citizens, outside groups can be supportive. Although every society deals with very specific challenges, many of the issues, at least on some level, are shared; transnational perspectives and players can assist.

Barbara Haig, Deputy to the President for Policy & Strategy, National Endowment for Democracy surveyed the changes underway and noted the challenges to the growth of civil society in the Middle East and neighboring Islamic societies. Ms. Haig pointed out the World Bank and UNDP supported report on Arab human development as a breakthrough analysis of socio-economic constraints on societies in the region. [See <http://arab-hdr.org/about/firstseries.aspx>] Among challenges were the enormous youth bulge and the lack of services and support for poor elements of the societies.

- In Tunisia, the society is struggling through pushbacks in the government.
 - The people believe that remnants of the former regime are stirring up protest among the disenfranchised and hindering true reform.
- In Egypt, the removal of Hosni Mubarak was the only component of transition that represented a broad consensus among the people. Remaining Mubarak loyalists within the military ruling party continue, at least for the time being in power.
- Struggling post-conflict countries, especially Yemen, haven’t begun to scratch the surface of reform.
- Areas of conflict such as Syria are ambiguous in outcome, and it is obvious that Kofi Annan’s peace plan is not working, which has left policymakers in a difficult position.
- In the Gulf countries, there is the challenge of dealing with Saudi Arabian power and influence
- NED support has focused on support for women’s education and skill building in Afghanistan.

Andrée Simon, Acting CEO, Women for Women International discussed Women for Women International’s role in supporting women engagement in society. One of the biggest ways to impact society, she argued, is to invest in women, who make up half of the population, if not more. Though men and women should have equal roles in all facets of society, it has not been seen across the region. Women played an equally significant role during the protests, but their participation in the aftermath visibly declined, which is significantly attributed to decades of cultural bias against them. Educating the youth about the importance of engaging women is one way to break the continuous cycle of that bias. Additionally Ms. Simon noted:

- Investments in women today is one of the best financial decisions we can make. Societies with greater equality are more stable, peaceful and wealthy. They should have an equal voice and control over our economic resources.

The Impact of Women for Women International Programs:

Women Earn an Income

- Through WfWI’s vocational skills programs, women have access to market-based skills training, job placement services and business startup resources.

Average Daily Income

- On average, graduates report an average daily income of \$1.44 compared to \$0.37 upon enrollment.
- In South Sudan, graduates report an average daily income of \$1.56, compared to \$0.42 upon enrollment.

Savings

- On average, 88% of graduates report having some form of savings, compared to 26% of women upon enrollment.
- In Afghanistan, 90% of graduates reported having some form of savings, compared to just 1% upon enrollment.

Women and Wellness

- On average, graduates reported increases in their knowledge and practice of behaviors that promote health, including reproductive health, nutrition, and stress management.
- On average, prior to enrollment only 31% of women reported having knowledge of good nutrition, compared to 91% following graduation.
- In the DRC, 98% of graduates claim to have knowledge of good nutrition, compared to just 6% upon enrollment.
- In Afghanistan, 100% of graduates claim to have knowledge of good nutrition, compared to just 4% upon enrollment.

Women are Decision-Makers

- WfWI's rights education program equips women with the knowledge and skills required to access the opportunities available to them, such as acquiring control over land, or participating in community and national decision-making.

Knowledge of Rights

- Upon graduation, 95% of women reported that they knew and understood their rights, compared to just 28% at enrollment.
- In Afghanistan, just 25% of women claimed to have knowledge of their rights upon enrollment, compared to 100% following graduation.
- In Iraq, just 44% of women claimed to have knowledge of their rights upon enrollment, compared to 99% after graduation.

Voting in local or national elections

- Upon graduation, 76% of women reporting having voted in a local or national election, compared to just 51% at enrollment.
- In Afghanistan, just 47% of women reported having voted in a local or national election upon enrollment, compared to 79% after graduation.
- In Iraq, just 77% of women reported having voted in a local or national election upon enrollment, compared to 96% after graduation.

Women Have Social Networks and Safety Nets

- Upon graduation, women, both by themselves and in solidarity with others, aid the cause of women by promoting and advocating shared needs and desires.
- After graduation, 59% of women reported participation in social networks or groups, compared to only 28% upon enrollment.
- In Rwanda, 90% of graduates reported participating in a social network, compared to just 45% upon enrollment.

Success Stories

- One of the most important things Women for Women International does is provide women with mutual support groups and a forum for talking about peace issues with a collective voice.
 - Women for Women International provides them with a rare venue to come together to discuss openly about their fears and their desired solutions.



"As women grow in personal empowerment, their confidence and willingness to engage in civic life increases too."



Cole Bockenfeld, Director of Advocacy, Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)

U.S. policy and approaches toward the Middle East

- A key need is for the U.S. to widen its policy circles beyond government officials, ministers, parliamentary members, and ambassadors, to include those who are less represented in those formal entities.
- Engagement with youth, minorities and other marginalized groups – in particular Islamist groups – is important.
- The U.S. has a history of being hesitant when it comes to Islamist groups, but as Secretary **Hillary Clinton** said, people should be judged by what they do, not what they're called.
- The administration has demonstrated some creative thinking in responding to the Arab Spring, including:
 - The development of the Middle East Transitions Office in the U.S. Department of State
 - The \$770 million funding request for the Middle East and North Africa Incentive Fund, for which policymakers should support
- The U.S. needs to exert more creative thinking and restructure relationships in the region, where policies still prioritize geostrategic incentive over democracy promotion as a “zero sum game” that is no longer true.
 - In Egypt, the U.S. waived conditions on assistance despite the lack of democratic reform by the government.
 - This, along with new language in the House appropriations bill on Egypt's aid, sends the wrong signal to democracy promoters in Egypt.
 - In Bahrain, policymakers too often delay promotion of reform by linking it to tensions with Iran, despite the need to recognize that reform is the best way for the U.S. to secure its interests in Bahrain.

Aimee Fullman, Manager of Cultural Relations and Networks, British Council

Role of the British Council with supporting people in different regions around the world

- Sparking calls for change and maintaining the momentum to implement change are very different
 - There are many ways to move change forward
 - A top-down approach does not always work.
- British Council has long-term goals to foster partnerships with countries
 - By maintaining an arms-length relationship with the government the Council is able to retain a level of legitimacy while simultaneously being independent.
- There are four channels through which the Council engages:
 - The arts, civil society and dialogue, education, and teaching the English language.
 - In the Middle East, there is a particular focus on youth and civic engagement, as well as women engagement in society.

The roles outsiders can play

As an external actor, it is imperative that one understands that democracy can take different forms, and in order to foster constructive growth, outsiders can lead by example, be transparent in their processes and values, and hold others accountable by playing a “watchdog” role.

- Know what you mean so you know if you achieve it
- Words/dialogue matter
- It is vital to understand the importance of context, and how that changes

Mirelle Karam Halim LDF Fellow; Operations Manager, Creative Associates

Ms. Halim said women had strong participation in the revolution ... which she attributed to a lack of trust in the candidates, leading to lack of incentive to vote.

Women’s influence during the revolution

Some 40-50% of women in Egypt participated in reform efforts during the revolution in the country.

- However, there was significantly low participation by women in the elections
 - Lack of trust in the candidates, lead to lack of incentive to vote
- During elections women were put at the end of the lists which led to very poor representation in the parliament of only 2% women and minorities.

Aftermath of the revolution

- People are highly engaged, and want to learn more about politics
 - Women with whom Ms. Halim works, outnumber men when they volunteer to work raising awareness, even though they come from very conservative communities.
- Right now we need massive work with women and minorities (Christians and people with disabilities.) International organizations should be:
 - Working on building capacity to women to prepare them become effective and candidates.
 - Working with local organizations.
 - Providing research entities that are effective and efficient.
 - Increasing number of scholarships and exchanges programs and simplifying the requirements.

There need to be more outreach to the female demographic, and education that includes practical experience in societal involvement.



Conclusion: Policy Implications and New Directions

Danya Greenfield, Deputy Director, The Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East of the Atlantic Council

U.S. Engagement with the Arab world in the Post-Arab Awakening Context

- The most fundamental shift as a result of the tumultuous change in the region is two-fold: the simple, but profound recognition that:
 - Supporting authoritarian governments at the expense of open political competition does not guarantee stability
 - The U.S. must engage and build relationships with political and social actors outside government officialdom – that citizens matter as much as, if not more than, the state.
- While this may seem obvious now, it was only after the Egyptian, Tunisian, and Libyan revolutions that this became the standard discourse and was actually reflected in the direction of diplomacy, policies, and programs.
- The United States and many European allies bought the argument that supporting authoritarian regimes would ensure stability, rather than an authentic but unpredictable democracy that might lead to instability benefiting extremists or political disruptions empowering Islamists.
 - The recent wave of popular uprisings has turned that rationale on its head and prompted some serious rethink.
- However, this is not to say that the U.S. won't still make decisions based on real-politic national interest considerations.
 - We've witnessed continued manifestation of that fundamental tension between interests and values.
- Policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic have embraced a fundamental shift in long-term policy orientation, and this is reflected in their both their diplomatic overtures and assistance strategies.
 - The mood in both Washington and Brussels, as well as the Arab street, is unfortunately that the response of the USG and others has not been robust enough, and that little has actually been delivered.
- Compounding this perception, Western powers are able to exercise the lowest level of influence in decades, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf.
 - There is no doubt that the standing of the United States has declined substantially in the Middle East and North Africa region due to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, and continued intransigence on the Israeli-Palestinian front.
 - Europeans, for their part, have also not escaped unblemished due to their action or inaction in these areas.
- To their credit, the United States and the EU have tried to respond with a shift not only in rhetoric, but in policy focus and approach. President Obama delivered a compelling and inspiring speech in May 2011, pledging US support for the democratic aspirations of the Arab peoples. The European Commission has reshaped EU doctrine by advancing stronger political conditionality, increasing the focus on civil society support, and introducing the three M's – more money, market access, and mobility¹. Both the US and EU have placed greater emphasis on engaging with civil society and the private sector -- not just government bodies.
- With secular and liberal political parties under threat in many of these countries, the need for a strong civil society has never been greater. In many cases, the collective effort of civil society organizations will be the strongest bulwark against fundamentalism and intolerance. In a changing political landscape that has rewarded more conservative, Islamist parties, civil society organizations are the best bet to help guard



“Our best bet is to support responsive governments and actively-engaged citizens that will hold it accountable, and U.S. democracy assistance to civil society should factor strongly in that strategy.”

equal rights for women and religious minorities, protect the freedom of expression and association, and build a culture of tolerance and acceptance in an era of new political competition. The US and EU have pledged to deepen and expand support for civil society development but how successful these initiatives are remains to be seen.

In relating to a changing Arab world, five trends should be highlighted that the US should keep in mind as it considers its policy response and effort to promote civil society.

- **There is a clear expansion of political Islam and legitimization of Islamist parties.** The incorporation of Islamist parties into the formal political processes is a positive development. In some countries, such as Morocco, Jordan and Yemen, Islamist parties have been participating in elections and have parliamentary representation, so in a sense this is not new. The extent of support for the Freedom and Justice party in Egypt and the Al Nahda in Tunisia, however, has caused a great deal of concern for some who worry they will not adequately protect the rights of women and minorities, or take a hostile attitude toward the United States and Israel. Rather than fearing the growth of Islamist parties, we should evaluate them based on a commitment to political liberalism and the protection of rights. If Islamists pledge to follow the rules of the game and uphold universal freedoms and equal rights, then we should encourage this development.



- **We are witnessing a shift from presidential to parliamentary systems.** In Egypt and Tunisia, there is a clear move away from the model of centralized leadership to elected, representative bodies, and this will likely play out in Libya and Yemen as well. As new constitutions are being written in each of these four countries, the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches will likely change and the authorities of the parliamentary body will be expanded. While the rebalance is a healthy one, there is a lack of clarity about how this will evolve, and what authorities will be delegated to which branch of government. What this means is that the US can no longer depend on one central point of contact and a strong-man to push – we will have to be flexible and diversified in our approach, recognizing that this is a far messier process without clear lines of authority, but it is ultimately far more representative of what citizens actually need and want.
- **Disenfranchised youth still lack jobs and avenues to channel political engagement.** The demographic changes over the past decade have had a monumental impact and placed enormous pressures on governments in the region.
 - The social contract deteriorated and thousands of young people graduated with university degrees each year, and found themselves with no job, ill-prepared for the global market, and bleak options for their future.
 - In addition, the youth activists that put their lives at risk to participate in mass demonstrations that forced a generation of dictators to step aside have been largely left on the political sidelines.

- Many have opted not to join any political party, instead preferring to remain above the fray, but then forfeiting a viable means to express their discontent.

Supporting new job creation and youth outreach should be the number one priority on everyone's agenda.

The success of these transitions hang on the thread of the economic performance of newly elected governments.

- **Spiraling unemployment, rising food prices, and low wages played a major role** in sparking the revolutions – and all of these pressures continue.
 - Without new job creation and an improvement in the deficit and debt burden, the economic situation could spiral downward, lead to chaos and violence as people struggle to make ends meet.
 - At the same time, each of these governments must resist populist pressures and assure the markets, investors, and the international community that they will implement economic and political policies that will ensure predictability and create a positive investment climate.



National interests of these countries will be far less aligned with U.S. interests.

- The U.S. will have to adapt to the reality that we may not be able to rely on regional partners to advance our agenda as they had in the past.
- In thinking about US policy in the region and democracy assistance, there are a couple lessons that we should glean from the Arab Awakening:
 - Real political change and democracy must be driven by local actors;
 - International assistance can contribute and lend support, but ultimately it is up to the citizens of that country to take the reins and chart their own course.
- The U.S. is certainly helped by providing assistance to some of the human rights activists, civil society organizations, labor unions, business associations, and political parties that engaged in the uprisings, but this played a fairly minor role and had little impact on how or when these revolutions emerged.
 - U.S. technical assistance to some of the groups and individuals that led or participated in the Arab Awakening protests did help lay the foundation and plant seeds for political activism that will emerge in years to come.
 - Now is the time to expand this kind of assistance, through capacity-building trainings, skill development workshops, and knowledge-sharing exchanges with other transitional countries
- The U.S. has an opportunity to re-set or recalibrate relationships with new governments in the region. Most anti-American sentiment is rooted in U.S. support for repressive regimes over the past several decades.
 - Now is an opportunity to demonstrate that our commitment to pluralistic democracy is sincere, regardless of the outcome of elections, and to invest in the necessary human, political, and economic development that is essential for democratic institutions to flourish.
- We can demonstrate our commitment to the well-being and livelihoods of ordinary people, not just the government elites, through support to civil society organizations that work at the grassroots level to affect change.
- The prospects for democracy in the region on the long-term trajectory are strong, and I'm optimistic, but the path will be long, bumpy, and painful.
 - We should expect many steps backward and periodic stumbling as both the people in the region and our own government makes mistakes.
 - In order to achieve success, it requires a long-term commitment to democracy in the region and

the fortitude to withstand some unpleasant stages. In a political environment that runs on two-year election cycles and agencies that are appropriated in one-year increments, it is difficult to maintain a long-term perspective and strategy for how (and why) the US should advance political and economic reform in the region. But this long-term vision is essential if we are to overcome the inevitable setbacks that are sure to emerge.

- There is an inherent tension between advancing our ideals and principles at moments when they may not sync with our need for security and stability in the region.

But what this past year has taught is that it is a false choice between democracy and stability, and that ultimately, no government or regime will remain stable if it loses legitimacy in the eyes of its people.

Peter Howard, Regional Affairs Strategic Analyst, U.S. Department of State

- There are clear changes in the region as it relates to the U.S., but also some components that have remained the same.
 - In terms of changes, public opinion holds more clout, the substance of diplomacy has shifted, and priorities have been rearranged.
 - The U.S. has made it clear that democracy promotion is at the forefront.
- Some things have remained constant:
 - The core interests of the region (fighting terrorism, energy security, trade, and resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict)
 - The key challenges (managing and engaging the youth bulge, the economic downturn, and dealing with spoilers, such as Iran, that threaten the stability of the region)
- The U.S. has taken advantage of its international partnerships, such as its allies in the E.U., and working with the Deauville partnership.
- There still remain challenges, however, particularly in Syria, Egypt, and Iran.
 - In Syria, with the challenges of implementing Kofi Annan's peace plan, the U.S. has faltered in how to proceed forward.
 - In Egypt, the transitional government has posed its own form of challenge as presidential elections approach.
 - Lastly, in Iran, countering its unfettered attempts to gain further influence across the region is a challenge of which the U.S. remains highly aware.

