



National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

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23rd Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference

*Framing and Charting the Region's Issues, Interests, Challenges, and Opportunities:
Implications for Arab and U.S. Policies*

Washington, DC
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"ARAB-US RELATIONS: VIEWS FROM THE REGION"

Chair:

Ms. Elizabeth Wossen - Principal and Lead Consultant, Energy Links Group LLC; former Coordinator, Congressional and Government Relations, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation; Member, Board of Directors, National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations.

Speakers:

Dr. Abderrahim Foukara - U.S. Bureau Chief and Host of *Min Washington*, Al-Jazeera Arabic; Member and Secretary, Board of Directors, Al-Jazeera America; former Senior Editor, Al-Africa.com.

Dr. Christian Koch - Director, Gulf Research Center Foundation (Geneva, Switzerland).

Ms. Judith Kipper - Director, Middle East Programs, and Member, Board of Directors, Institute of World Affairs; Partner, International Strategic Insights, LLC; former Director, Middle East Forum, Council on Foreign Relations; former Consultant on International Affairs, ABC News.

Dr. Jim Zogby - Founding President, Arab American Institute; Director, Zogby Research Services; Vice Chair, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom; author, *Arab Voices: What They Are Saying to Us, and Why it Matters*.

Commentator:

Ms. Barbara G.B. Ferguson - Adjunct Professor, Marine Corps University; Washington Correspondent, *Arab News*; Consultant, Center for Advanced Operational Culture, U.S. Marine Corps.

Remarks as delivered.

[Elizabeth Wossen] Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We have an hour and some to cover a very important topic, so I'm eager for us to get started, please take your seats.

The title of this panel is Arab-U.S. Relations: Views from the Region, and I'd like to just start by noting that it is often said that hindsight is 20-20, with a popular and long-lasting lament which is that the activities of the ISIS or Da'esh today is the price the Middle East region is paying for more than 50 years of wrong policies including repression, corruption, bad governance, and so forth.

These same voices still call for deep, meaningful changes in the region and reforms in order to get to the root of the problem that we're dealing with today. Let's keep this in mind as we move forward and maybe we'll revisit it again.

In the interest of time let me simply recap quickly two points. One is that everyone of course is well aware of the complexities of the issues in the region today. The second is that the U.S. regional friendship, long-standing friendship is in turmoil, and possibility irreparably altered. So having made these points let me quickly introduce.

We are very fortunate to have five speakers at the podium, keen observers, each impressively authoritative on the Middle East and North Africa region.

Today, Ms. Judith Kipper will be our first presenter. Ms. Kipper's biography is in the conference booklet. Suffice to state that Judith is an internationally recognized Middle East specialist. She's currently Director of Middle East programs at the Institute of World Affairs. Among her important contributions and accomplishments, Kipper established and until 2007 led the Middle East Forum at the Council on Foreign Relations, and that is where I first ran into her. Judith has noted that unpredictable events in the region were inevitable, and we look forward to her expanding this point.

The next speaker will be Dr. James Zogby, President of the Arab American Institute, to my left here, which he founded in 1985 here in Washington, D.C. Again, Dr. Zogby's full biography is in the booklet. Suffice to state that Dr. Zogby is a prolific writer including on a variety of issues impacting Arab-American communities in the United States. In addition as Managing Director of Zogby Research Services, he and his team conduct important public opinion polling across the Arab world. He is author of a very well regarded book, "Arab Voices," published in 2010. Here among other thoughts perhaps Dr. Zogby will

blend his various experiences and research to offer a glimpse of the Arab-U.S. relations, of course with an emphasis on regional views.

Our third speaker, Dr. Christian Koch, is the director of the privately funded, non-partisan Gulf Research Center Foundation in Geneva, Switzerland. In the interest of time please find his longer biography in the booklet as well. Dr. Koch, too, acknowledges the deep concern in the region about the direction of U.S.-Arab policy including the U.S.'s failure to listen properly to one's allies. We will be especially interested to hear Dr. Koch's views on the consequences of this breakdown in the relationship.

Next we will hear from Dr. Abderrahim Foukara. His bio is in your conference booklet as well. As most of you know, Dr. Foukara is one of the prominent faces of Al Jazeera, and heads the U.S. bureau of that successful organization. His weekly show in Washington zeroes in on American politics and culture. Needless to say, the media plays a pivotal role in reporting and even interpreting every aspect of society's activities over and above reporting news as accurately as possible, the media shapes how people perceive the world, and the media including social media determine which issues should be highlighted. We look forward to hearing from Dr. Foukara along these lines including on the challenges such as censorship, self-censorship, and so forth within the larger theme of this conference and this panel.

Last but not least we have Ms. Barbara Ferguson to the left as well. As a reporter, Ms. Ferguson has covered the Middle East for 25 years. She was an embedded war correspondent in Iraq with the Marine Corps. She now continues to write for "Arab News," the English language daily published in Saudi Arabia. Her other professional activities are also in the booklet. Ms. Ferguson will serve as overall commentator on the presentations. Each distinguished speaker will have an opportunity to give a maximum of ten minutes. Hopefully we'll have time for question and answer and further discussion thereafter. Thank you very much.

[Judith Kipper] Thank you, Elizabeth, and thank you to the organizers and other panelists. I'm going to take a slightly different approach and step back slightly to talk about U.S.-Arab relations, which of course have their ups and downs, are strained from time to time, are very cozy other times, but in my view they are permanent. I think the long relationship that the United States has had with Saudi Arabia is proof of that. We went through all kinds of crises, many wars, oil embargos, and nevertheless the relationship has sustained itself even with differences. The United States and the Middle East are linked and I think they will continue to be, so even when we have strained relations, and lots of people we heard yesterday said we're going to be independent, we don't need the U.S., get out, etcetera - okay, we'd love to, but I don't think that's going to happen.

The Middle East is going through, the Arab countries are going through monumental, historic change, and I admit freely, openly, and willingly that the mistaken U.S. invasion of Iraq so deeply destabilized the area and so disrupted what was already a very tentative status quo that has speeded up the change and it certainly made it much more virulent. Had we not gone to make the war in Iraq we would have been out of Afghanistan ten years ago and it would be a very, very different picture. But the monumental, historic change that's taking place and referred to as the Arab Spring and now has taken a more deadly turn - from my point of view - was inevitable for a whole lot of reasons.

The Arab world was thrust into the international community after the 1973 war and the oil embargo, which created an incredible amount of wealth without work. It could no longer be a sleepy, quiet area - was suddenly in the eye of the storm of the entire world and everybody wanted to get a piece of the petrodollars, which was very, very disruptive to traditional societies.

Since the 1970s, the West and the international community have focused on energy security - the free flow of oil at reasonable prices. During that time, everybody - the U.S. included - supported dictators and monarchs because they assured us of the free flow of oil at reasonable prices, and they were willing to keep their people quiet at any price. The dictators were worse than the monarchs. The monarchs were much more benign than dictators. We've seen that the dictators, many of them have been kicked out already when people stopped being afraid of their governments.

For the region decades of quiet from 1973 until the Arab Spring were mistakenly interpreted by the region, by the international community, and by Washington as being quote, unquote stability, that unknown thing that we all yearn for - stability, whatever it means in whatever place. It was never stability. It was always quiet that was created by repression, oppression, depression, and it was doomed not to last, and we saw that it exploded.

Some 15 years ago some of you will remember, and it's well worth remembering the U.N. Arab Development reports primarily researched and written by Arabs, beginning to describe the real situation in the region, and now I quote from that report, "The reports paint a stark picture of an Arab world in virtual arrested development. Even as the Arab world is at the crossroads of political, social, and economic issues that affect the entire planet, regimes entrench power at the expense of development." Income has declined in the last 20 years in the Arab countries. That is second only to sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2002, the reports were coming out – and they’ve been doing them pretty much every year ever since but nobody pays attention – 65 million Arabs were illiterate in 2002. It’s not much better today. Two-thirds of those are women who are systematically repressed, almost more than any other region of the world. The 22 Arab countries have about the same population today as the United States – 300 million or a little bit more. Arab population has doubled in the last 20 years. 20 years ago, the population was 150 million. By 2020, which is five years from now, the Arab population is expected to be 400 to 460 million people.

Politically, the Arab world lags behind other regions, and I’m quoting, “Politically the Arab world lags behind other regions in participation and good governance. This freedom deficit undermines human development in all areas.” Human insecurity is what it’s called. Fear of government, no hope in the society, nobody cares about your aspirations. Ironically, the Arab world in 1970, before petrodollars, was more industrialized in 1970 than it is today. 50 million jobs are needed by 2020 in the next five years.

So we’re talking about U.S.-Arab relations – how should we and the Arabs deal with that reality? Right now we’re trying to cooperate to get ISIS. ISIS will hopefully be degraded and destroyed over a period of time, but what about the 60 percent in the countries in the Middle East that are under, more or less, the age of 20 to 30? In Saudi Arabia, 60 percent are under the age of 18, 40 percent under the age of thirteen, approximately still seven children per woman. The population of the Kingdom doubles every 20 years. I’m only using Saudi as an example – it’s not much different in any other country.

So you have recruits to ISIS now, to al Qaeda, to Nusra, the exceedingly violent, violent groups. We have to fight ISIS. That’s urgent, immediate, and today’s goal, but what are Arab governments going to do with the remaining youth bulge that is growing up in the same undeveloped atmosphere as they did the last 30 or 40 years?

Decent education that prepares you to work and to think. Civil society so you feel like you belong to the country. Good education, civil society, some kind of participation, some kind of information about your government. None of these things have taken place. So how do we, the United States, the West, and the rest of the international community that have interests in the Middle East, like the Middle East, care about the Middle East – how are we going to work with Arab governments which have refused categorically since let’s say petrodollars 1974 to institute the kind of reforms that will create what we really know is stability.

People who are not afraid of their government to now have an address for their grievances, who have a chance to dream. I come from L.A. and we know very

well in east L.A. and it's true all over the world – bad guys have one very clear characteristic – the number one characteristic of people who are prepared to do this random, hideous, heinous, savage violence is alienation. Alienation. They don't feel they belong to anything. So when they join a violent group or a gang they get a sense of belonging.

Secondly, it gives them a purpose because they're indoctrinated, and it gives them a sense of excitement, which they don't have in their ordinary lives, which are very, very dreary.

So in U.S.-Arab relations we have a tremendous amount of consultation, dialogue, and work to do on the development side at the same time that we're fighting ISIS and the other extremist groups and allowing some kind of political discourse to develop in these societies along with good education and civil society.

Thank you.

[Elizabeth Wossen] Feel free to send your questions up, in writing that is, anytime.

Dr. Zogby next.

[Dr. James Zogby] I'm going to speak on what Arab's are saying to us. As you know, as you may know, we poll rather extensively in the Middle East and have been doing so now for about 14 years.

I'm actually going to urge you to go to our website, ZogbyResearchServices.com or AAIUS.org and you can get a whole range of polling that we've been doing from Egypt and Tunisia and the transformations that have taken place over the last several years on which we've tracked in some cases almost monthly, Iraq and Iran and how Arabs see Iran and how Iranians and Turks see Arabs, Israel-Palestine, and of course what our topic is today, and that is perceptions about the United States.

Given time constraints I want to give you just a few bullet points about what Arabs are saying to us and what we need to hear.

The first question would be what do Arabs want? It is something that has been provoking us and we've been thinking about it since we began our polling, and we poll, therefore, political concerns and values and priorities now for all these years.

I like to say this. The prevalent American myth about how to talk about the Arab world is that Arabs go to bed at night hating us, they wake up in the morning hating Israel, and they spend the day watching Al Jazeera which makes them hate even more. That's the kind of notion that we have is that it's a society on some kind of need to hate to sort of fuel itself out of lethargy.

Actually from our polling we learn something quite different. They go to bed at night thinking about their kids, they wake up in the morning thinking about their jobs, and when they watch television they actually want to be entertained like everybody else.

I have a great story. I was in Saudi Arabia during the uprising in Tunisia and the collapse of the government in Lebanon, and people were flipping back and forth as they are want to do between Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya getting different perspectives and debating heatedly, and at one point the 18 year old son of one of the gentlemen comes in the room and he says "It's on!" And it was "Arabs Got Talent," and he switched over and they spent the next hour and a half watching that and debated as heatedly who should win as they were debating the developments in Tunisia.

Arabs are like anybody else. Their top priority is close to home. It's family. It's their job. It's their kids. It's the health of their parents. It's what they're going to do when they get old. Number one priority - and there are changes from country to country and from year to year and sort of the shifting order of things - but for the most part it's economy and jobs in almost every country. Education and health care round out the top three, and in some countries - in particular, Egypt, and also to a great extent Lebanon, and sometimes Jordan - the issues of corruption and nepotism will creep up into the top four.

The next question that we'd ask is what do you want from us? What do you want from the United States? And the answer here is revealing because for the most part they want nothing. When they do want us, those countries that do want us, want us to build capacity. In other words they want us to invest in their economies. They want to partner with us to create jobs. They want help in building their educational institutions. And they want to improve their health care delivery systems.

When they think about us of course they think about what we've done, the damage we've done to the region that has impacted their lives, most notably Palestine. And the most recent poll we did, when everybody here in America is saying Palestine is over, the Arabs have other things to worry about, the number one top issue involving their understanding and relationship with the United

States, absolute plurality in every country was Palestine. Even among Iraqis the issue of Palestine was of preeminent importance.

And it's interesting to me because President Obama in May of 2011 gave I think a very important speech at the State Department in which he absolutely got it right. He spoke about Arab Spring and about the Arab world today two years after his Cairo speech, and he said here's the challenge. He said we did not create this Arab Spring. We cannot direct it. And we cannot determine its outcome. All we can do is be of help when they need it, and the help he offered, the help he suggested was capacity building, it was job creation, it was investment in infrastructure, it was creating jobs and improving lives as the best way to promote a middle class that could sustain the development towards change.

It was not dictating terms about politics because the problem is that America offers the region what it doesn't want from us and doesn't give it what it does want from us. They want us to send in people to train them in democracy to the same extent that we would've wanted Sweden come over and help us with our health care system. Or if somebody said when we were having the handgun debate you know the Brits, they don't do handguns the way we do. Why don't we bring the British over to advise Congress on how to - and the answer would have been screams and yells and whatever because we do not want people involved in our internal affairs. It's pretty much the same thing there.

What he also added was that the second help, the second most important thing we could provide is a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And he proposed the '67 borders with land swaps was the formula that he used. The problem was that Congress upended him on both fronts. They did not move forward on the budget to help build capacity in the Arab world, and of course they invited Netanyahu to insult the President a few days later, and pretty much put an end to the peace process at that point.

Here's the problem. We do not listen. We do not listen to the Arab world. We do not pay attention to what they want. What we're offering them is what they don't want, and we're failing to recognize what they do want, and even when we do recognize what they do want our political system is dysfunctional and we simply can't act.

So what do they think of the United States? Well it's complicated.

Arabs actually like our culture - I remember there was poll a few years back. Eighty percent of Americans said that they believe that Arabs hated our culture and values. Well actually it's about two-thirds of Arabs like our culture and

values. They like our people. They like our products. They respect our advances in science and technology and they respect our institutions.

What they don't like is the fact that we don't apply our values to them, that our politics and our policies have taken a toll on their lives and on their trust.

One interview - after we do the interviews we sometimes do anecdotal interviews to just get a feel for what respondents are saying and one guy said "You know, I went to school in Boston. I love the city. I love the people. And I love your country. And I love everything about your country. I just don't think your country likes me. I feel like a jilted lover."

In our most recent polling what we have found is the following. If you look across the region, and again, variations from country to country, but the overall markers are clear. Lowest ebb was 2006, the pit of the Iraq War, Israel-Palestine was again in shambles, George Bush had let the region down again. We climbed up again, Arab attitudes towards America climbed up again in 2008 after the election of Barack Obama. 2009 by the time of the Cairo speech it was at a very high point. It plummeted again in 2010 and 2011. The levels in 2011 were almost equal to the low point in the Bush years. In 2012 with the second Obama Administration they went up again to higher points than they were in 2008. They dropped again in 2013, and in 2014 they're up just a notch, but pretty much within the margin of error of where they were in 2013.

I dare say that the Arab world has a bit of exhaustion about the U.S. Hopes have been raised, hopes have been dashed too many times. To be clear there is little support, for example, for Bashar al Assad, and barely a trace for ISIS. Substantial majorities, however, do not want American military involvement in the region. Arab governments want it, but Arab people do not. It's almost been like we've done this before. We've seen this play out. It doesn't play well. You leave us in the lurch. Please don't come.

They prefer - what they tell us in the polls - they prefer the U.S. to lead a negotiating effort to solve the conflict in Syria. They prefer a negotiated effort to the Iranian nuclear issue. They also prefer a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israel conflict, but they do not have confidence or trust that the U.S. is committed to it, or will pull them off.

Now, we weren't polling in the 1990s so I can't compare where we are today with where we were then, but from the earliest poll we did 14 years ago it was clear that we were in trouble. The neglect and the hubris of the Bush Administration only compounded it. The raised and dashed expectations of the Obama years have not helped. There remains however a residual good will. But

it is offset by a lack of trust and the confidence that we are serious about our relationship.

In a real sense, Arabs feel that we do not care about the people of the region, their needs, and their aspirations. The solution is simple. It's to listen. It's to pay attention. It's to actually show people that we do care in the policies that we promote, and then it's to act on those policies. Thank you.

[Elizabeth Wossen] Next is Dr. Christian Koch.

[Dr. Christian Koch] Thank you very much. It's definitely a pleasure to be back. I want to thank of course the National Council and Dr. John Duke Anthony for the invitation. The fact that this is my second time here so that you get invited back means you didn't mess up too bad the first time, and that's always nice to know.

A lot of the points of course coming in this late to talk about U.S.-Arab relations, and I'll focus more specifically on U.S.-Gulf relations - a lot of points have already been made. But I really want to make three points, three main aspects to put them forward.

The first follows a little bit of what Judith already sort of mentioned - there is a lot of talk about crisis but I think we do need to put relations into the proper context and not necessarily overreact and say we are about to see a complete break in those relations.

That leads to a second point, and that is nevertheless definitely there are deep disappointments about the U.S. policy, both - especially now the policy in the last decade, and more specifically also the policy direction in the near future. So I think we have experienced a period where a lot of trust has been lost and we're not necessarily going to recover all that trust very quickly.

And that then leads into my third point to say that I think the U.S. does need to get used to a much more independent policy streak by the Arab Gulf states, by the GCC states, that there will be sort of at least a continuation of a search for alternatives, not that that's necessarily going to lead anywhere right away. But I think we are not looking necessarily at a break in the relationship, but we're looking at something that might be a little bit of a different kind of a relationship, and I think that's a realization that still has to sink in especially in the U.S. of what kind of relationship we're talking about. I don't think it's necessarily negative. I think it has a lot of positive aspects to it as well.

So let me just go briefly back – again the first point, I think there are still many instances of cooperation that is around. We heard it yesterday – defense cooperation, on counterterrorism, definitely two areas that the cooperation is very, very strong.

We now have in place a U.S.-GCC strategic dialogue that takes place, so we have it also at the more multi-lateral level. I still feel that there is many more American officials that come to the region and many more Gulf officials that come to Washington than could be the case for Europeans coming to the Gulf or for Asians coming to the Gulf.

I think that the point of contacts are still out there, and an incredibly wide scope, and of course we mentioned as well yesterday you have a number of students studying here and the interchange that takes place at the people to people level is still quite extensive.

I think it's kind of normal, again, that we have ups and downs in the relationship. Both sides have interests. Those interests aren't always the same. There's certainly been a number of times in the past where they have differences of opinion, but still it's almost 70 years now since the meeting between King Abdulaziz and President Roosevelt and still the relationship more or less is intact. So I think this is an important fact to consider.

I also think there are two other aspects that limit sort of the possibility of a quick break up, and one has been mentioned before. This is really the lack of alternatives at the moment. Who's going to take on the role that the U.S. has played in the region? I don't see Russia doing it. Russia is looking much more on a global perspective and the competition with the United States much more broadly.

I don't see Asian countries doing it. China is more concerned of course to maintain its economic growth rates and expanding its business opportunities, but certainly doesn't want to expand on the political security front.

The EU of course – we still see a hamstrung organization. We might have to see what comes out of this new EU government now. We have a whole change in Brussels having taken place with a new commission president, new president of the council, a new foreign policy person coming in, a new parliament being elected, but I still don't expect that the EU is going to take on now suddenly a much more forceful role. So again I don't see really any alternatives at the moment.

The other aspect really is a little bit more internal, and that is that I think also the GCC states have been much too complacent in the last decades to simply rely on the U.S., and they failed. They failed simply to build up their own capacity, whether to invest in proper institutions, into recruiting the right number of people into their governmental structures, whether to build on what really should be the basis of a strong foreign policy mechanism in place, and I think that slowly is changing. I can see it, for example, in the case of the United Arab Emirates. I think they've done some tremendous efforts here in building up policy planning unit, in the foreign affairs ministry, and trying to think a little bit more structured about what their process looked like.

I see also an expansion of the diplomatic institutes in the region in terms of training their own people and bringing in more qualified personnel, but I think we're still at the beginning of this process, and that's going to take time. So again I think this is another limitation that we should look out for.

Okay, so at the moment we have a relationship that is I think is not really in a deep crisis, but that being said of course there are many issues that have led to sort of a loss of trust between the two sides. And we've already heard yesterday a lot of times that one of the main reasons is the failure of the United States to listen to some of the advice that has been given by its Arab allies.

I think here really the pivotal year definitely was 2003 and the decision to invade Iraq. I think it opened the eyes of a lot of GCC officials to say we don't necessarily can assume that our interests are necessarily always going to be the same, that there is a divergence there, and we have to also realize very quickly that the decisions made in Washington can have quite deep and devastating consequences on the security of our own countries, and to simply just sit around and wait to see what those consequences are going to be is insufficient.

So it wasn't just the decision to invade Iraq but it was also the really terrible decisions that were made in the aftermath that added to the loss of trust and this realization that the GCC states also need to be a little more active on their own regard. And of course what we've seen in the last decade is that one bad policy has simply followed on another, so we see the opening of Iraq to the dominance of Iran, we see the precipitous withdrawal of U.S. troops under the Obama Administration, and of course the failure to take more forceful action in Syria, and as Prince Turki already mentioned yesterday by failing to arm the moderates we have ended up arming the extremists.

So this is the situation where we see this, where the GCC states I think they simply feel that they're not really part of the decision making process, and even then they're not being listened to at all, so why should they necessarily carry all

the burden of U.S. misguided policy? That trust is not going to be replaced very easily, and especially as the U.S. Administration tries to give new assurances really without the readiness to commit to a change in policies. I don't think we're going to see any kind of recovering of that trust in the near-term.

But having said that, this brings me down to the third point, and this is why we see all this more action-oriented, a little bit more independence by the GCC states on their foreign policy front, and I think the U.S. very much has to get used to this fact. The U.S. has called in the past for more burden sharing, but now they shouldn't be surprised when suddenly Qatar takes more independent foreign policy decisions, when the U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia have a different position on Egypt than maybe Washington does. I think this is all – should've been expected, at least. So what we have at the moment – we have a fairly solid relationship, which is supported again by the lack of alternatives and a lack of capacity on behalf of the GCC states, but we have a relationship that's moving to a different sort of relationship where we're going down the road.

I think Abdullah AlShayji's assertion yesterday that the GCC states are being caught between abandonment and entrapment is a real possible development, and I think we need to take that more seriously. But at the same time I think there are a number of steps that one can take.

I think the U.S., although Dr. Zogby already mentioned, they're not going to listen to you necessarily, but I think of course they have to take a little bit more serious the views from the region. I think in addition they should also really begin to support this more independent streak in the GCC, support in building up more of their institutional processes, support them both at the bilateral and at the GCC level. Because in the past the GCC has proven to be a valuable ally to the U.S. and I think their independence, even if it's not always the same as the U.S. policy might want, I think their independence is going to serve U.S. interests also down the road, the longer road down the way. So I'll stop there.

[Elizabeth Wossen] Ladies and gentlemen, please send up your questions. We haven't seen them. Are there people to collect questions out there?

Dr. Foukara, please come up.

[Dr. Abderrahim Foukara] Thank you very much, National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, Dr. Anthony. Thank you for the invite.

I don't have an awful lot to add. I know you guys have had two heavy days with discussion and reflection, and I don't want to overburden you at the end of a busy day, so I'll make it short and sweet. But on the other hand if you believe an

Arab who says he's going to make it short and sweet you've got another thing coming.

In all seriousness, I'm going to try to make it short and sweet. I, just on the issue of what is wrong with U.S-Arab relations, I would probably sound much more sanguine today, 2014, than I did in 2010. Even back then I was very depressed by the state of Arab-U.S. relations, but I found many fountains of optimism even within that state of being depressed. And I'm really sorry to say that standing here in 2014 I am much less optimistic now than I was back then.

And to try to hark it back to a particular event, what the problem is, you could take it back to Iraq in 2003 and you would be absolutely justified in my opinion, and you could take it back 60 years to the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict and you'd be absolutely justified. I just happen to be Arab and living in the United States, and to me when I look at this issue I instinctively find myself peddling back not just 60 years, I find myself peddling back several centuries, just to be fair and square.

The relationship between the Arab world and the United States is caught up in the same dynamics that the relationship between East and West has been caught up in for several centuries.

You could go back to the beginning of Islam, you could go back much further than that, as far back as you want, but I think it doesn't do it justice to really evaluate the real size of the problems in U.S.-Arab relations to say that it only harks back to 2003 or it only harks back to Israel-Palestine, although the issue of Israel-Palestine is obviously crucial in the problems that have bedeviled relations between the Arab world and the United States. And incidentally, I also happen, because there are people who say well in a hypothetical situation let's imagine Israel and Palestine has been solved, would it follow automatically the relations between the Arab world and the United States would be better? I say I don't know.

I'm not even advocating solving it to improve relations between the Arab world and the United States. I'm advocating solving it for its own right as an issue of justice, period. And if it follows later on that relations between the United States and the Arab world follow, fantastic. If it doesn't at least you've addressed the one single issue that has been the engine of conflict throughout human history, and there is justice or lack thereof.

Now, the issue of what are we hearing from the Arab world? Let me just say this as a journalist. What I'm hearing from the Arab world is "America - what the hell are you doing?"

And I'm hearing that from two camps. I'm hearing that from the camp of those Arabs who think that the United States has stoked up change in the Arab world and in Egypt and elsewhere in the region, but I'm also hearing it from the other camp which is the camp of those Arabs who want change and feel that the United States is not doing enough to help bring change.

This paradigm is very familiar – I know. I've lived in the U.S. long enough to know that this paradigm is very familiar to U.S. ears. They'll say America will be blamed no matter what, that that's what the region is saying. And notice I didn't say Obama, I said America. And then you narrow it down to Obama, and when you get to a situation where a journalist – we journalists, we're not exactly renowned for saying I don't know – but I feel that I am at that stage where I just cast a look over the region and I try to understand what's going on and where it's all going, and I say the honest truth is I don't know.

If you ask me four years ago I may have staked out some sort of prediction. Now I don't know where the region is going, and therefore I don't know where relations between the Arab world and the United States are going. People in the region, they look at President Barack Obama and as Jim said earlier they went from a time where they heard a clear message from him, both at the State Department, but also in his first speech as President from Cairo University saying, laying out his vision for how he saw things moving forward between the United States and the Arab world to a particular point in time, 2014, where the message is almost, almost completely indecipherable, even to an Arab journalist living in Washington.

We went from a president who for five years maintained his position that there is no way I am going to drag American blood and treasure into another war in the Middle East to a President saying I'm going to a war which my successor in 2016 will inherit.

This lack of clarity – I'm not saying that it's intended by the Obama Administration, maybe it's just a consequence of the process – but it's giving people in the region a lot of tough times trying to read it. And I'll just end with where I started – I personally don't know where it's going, but I know that people in the region are saying, "America – what the hell are you doing in 2014."

Thank you.

[Elizabeth Wossen] Ms. Barbara Ferguson will give us an overall commentary on the presentations.

[Barbara Ferguson] This is very interesting to do a quick synopsis, but the ideas that you all have expressed have been so interesting that I'm happy to do it.

Judith Kipper spoke about the destabilization in Iraq and how we would have been out of Afghanistan had we not invaded the country. She spoke about the oppression versus stability in that region, the difficulties we've had as the U.S. government in choosing which way to go. Very interesting as well to speak about the decline of income in Arab countries and also the illiteracy. It is an issue that I'm very concerned about as well, throughout the Arab world and especially as a woman to see two-thirds of women in these countries becoming more and more literate. Another big issue for all of you to think about who are doing business in that world, that 50 million jobs, according to Judith, are needed by 2020.

Dr. Jim Zogby, his polls were very interesting. I like the idea of the quarrel with the young child who came into the room and how they all started to watch "Arabs Got Talent." I guess that's what it's called. Oh, the things that we export in the United States overseas.

The misconceptions that he talked about that we have in the United States for the Arab world I thought was quite poignant. Also the questions that he asked as a pollster - what do you want from the U.S.? They don't want anything from us in regards to politics. They want us to help them build their capacities, jobs, their infrastructures. Palestine reigns as a huge issue, and good quote I thought from Dr. Zogby - the U.S. offers the region what they don't want. They don't want us to get involved in internal affairs, something that we don't seem to be listening to perhaps in the White House. And also we fail to recognize what they want.

When he asked the question what do they want. They like our cultures and their values. How many times as a journalist have I heard Arabs say to me we love you American people, we just have issues with your government. They don't want us to apply our values to them exactly. Why don't we ever try to understand their values? Arab folks don't want U.S. involvement in the region. That was something the Iraqi Ambassador spoke to me about as well earlier. Dr. Christian Koch I think with his interesting background - were you raised in Germany or just educated in Germany?

[Dr. Christian Koch] Very first years.

[Barbara Ferguson] In very first years, and then you've lived in Switzerland, in the U.A.E., and the U.S., and that's it? Okay. So we had a really interesting international perspective. I think especially poignant was the fact that he spoke not of the break in U.S.-Arab relationships, but that it's going to be very different

and we need to be prepared for that. I would like to have a few more specifics on that as well.

The lack of alternatives, it was good to know that the Arab world is not going to reach out to Russia, China, or the EU, but I don't think we should take that for granted and we need to work with them always as our partners.

Interesting point that Dr. Koch brought up as well about the GCC states being too complacent. They've relied on the U.S. and not built up their own capacities. But this is slowly changing and they are becoming more independent. We need to work with them to develop their independence. Again, to summarize, Dr. Koch said the U.S.-Arab relationship is not in deep crisis but there is a lack of trust and the U.S. fails to listen, which is a point that Dr. Zogby brought up as well.

For Dr. Foukara, I thought it was very unfortunate about the depression, but also very well founded. It is difficult to be optimistic when talking about the situation of U.S. involvement in the Arab world. What are we hearing? What he had to say was another way of what Dr. Zogby told us - "America, what in the hell are you doing?" We're not doing enough to bring change that they want in the region, and we do not know where the relations are going, Dr. Foukara said. He also faulted President Obama for not giving a clearer message to the Arab world, having promised so much and now it's become very confusing.

Before I leave the podium, the Ambassador of Iraq asked me to ask you as panelists two questions. In regards to the U.S. Administration, he wanted to know is America prepared to fight ISIL in the long run, and in regional perspective he said do you think that the Arabs have the stomach for soul searching in the region, and are they willing to admit mistakes that they've made in the region? And I'll leave that to the panelists to answer.

[Elizabeth Wossen] Well since you have a plane to catch, Dr. Koch, would you like to come and answer this first question? No? Okay. Who'd like to discuss the Iraq Ambassador's questions first?

[Judith Kipper] I think that the American commitment to fight ISIL is very serious. I think the real question is what are the Arabs prepared to do? We could send 100,000 troops there, smash ISIS - is the problem going to go away? ISIS will pop up here and there; maybe it will have another name. Al Qaeda's there. Nusra's there. Violent extremism is there, so how do the Arabs mobilize, first, to defend themselves militarily and really contribute even if it's only financially and with some other kinds of help, and secondly it's up to the Arab countries. The U.S. cannot develop the Arab world.

You have 60 percent of 300 million people under the age of 20. Every one of them is a perspective candidate for extremism, and I personally don't think it has to do that much with Islam, which they are simply using as a vehicle without a different more modern interpretation and reformation in Islam to approach modernity as all other religions have had in the past. It's just that Islam has to do it in front of the world.

So there's two things to do. Everybody get together and cooperate and fight ISIS and work with Turkey so that they behave a little bit more strategically, shall we say, and secondly to begin that process of development.

I know somebody wanted to ask me - and I'll finish with this - about will democracy work and will it solve the problems? I don't think I ever said the word democracy. The Arab world is very, very, very far from democracy, but there are different ways to have participation so people feel they have a voice in their own society and civil society, because civil society produces tolerance, and there is zero tolerance in the Arab world, and that's all part of development.

We've gone through it, every other country in the world's gone through it, and the Arabs now are going to have to face the dilemma of how to get people, young people, the youth bulge a stake in their own societies.

[Dr. Jim Zogby] Judith, I'm sorry - I don't want to be disagreeable but I must disagree. I think that the statements are a bit over the top.

Number one - the 60 million children under whatever are not all - there are specific causes for why this movement has come into being, and the causes are as disparate as the tumultuous mess that we left Iraq, the horrific dislocation, and conflict, and bloodshed that has become Syria. But it is also alienation in Europe. It is also alienation in other countries around the world where Muslims have traveled and gone to settle and found themselves permanent outsiders. There are issues here, and when a young African American guy gets out of prison and is recruited because he too is alienated and dislocated and feels a sense of frustration, the causes of this extremism are no different than the causes of extremism a generation ago, which had different names and different language, and I can't put it all on Arab countries.

And in particular the countries that are earning the most money also happen to be the countries that actually are, at least today, the most stable, and are doing pretty well, thank you, and actually dealing with issues within their midst, and it's Egypt, and it's Libya, and it's Tunisia, and it's Syria, and Yemen that had the biggest problems, and I think actually Tunisia is doing quite well, thank you. It's

moving fairly well. And I think Egypt is going through a very difficult situation, which troubles me deeply, but the two big messes are Libya and Syria, and those both happen to be ones that we got ourselves into.

And I'm going to disagree with those who think that we made the mistake of not getting into Syria soon enough. I think the fact is that these revolutions that occur in societies are – you either win them or you don't. Other people can't win them for you. And the situation in Libya was not ripe for an alternative system of governance to come up from within to takeover, and frankly the U.S. was not going to become an occupation army in Libya to stabilize the situation until a new government came – we've already tried that twice, and frankly it's not just that we don't listen, we don't understand. So don't ask the U.S. to do what it is not capable of doing. So your initial question is are we in this fight for the long haul? I really don't know, and I'll tell you one thing. I think that the White House may be committed to it, I think there are those generals who may be committed to it – I'm not convinced American public opinion is committed to it and is prepared for it, and numbers may be 52 now, whereas they were 30 a month ago – Americans start dying, they'll drop down to 30 again, and political pressure will be such that we'll be forced to withdraw, and I think the President knew that which is why he hesitated.

The question is – these wars are not sustainable in a democracy unless there's public support. There is not public support. Americans are war weary and war wary. They don't want to do it again. Bush led us into two failed wars, cost us two to three trillion dollars and six to 7,000 lives – they're not going to do it again. We probably made the mistake of exhausting our capital – political, military, human, and treasure – in two wars we couldn't win. This may be one we could, but frankly no one's ready for it. So I'm going to let it go there. Thank you.

[Elizabeth Wossen] So as you heard – very complex, very confounding, no clear answers, but yet we want to get to some other of these panelists to answer.

[Dr. Abderramhim Foukara] I just wanted to say that I reside somewhere in the middle between what Judith said and what Jim said on certain issues.

First of all the issue of tolerance – and I know something about this because I'm a journalist – I think we have to be very careful when we use certain words in certain environments that may not necessarily know much about the Arab world. If you're like Judith or me who know the Arab world, maybe. But otherwise I think we have to be very careful. When I go home – I'm from Morocco – when I go to Morocco or to Tunisia or to other parts of the Middle East – the issue, there is no tolerance in the Arab world? That just doesn't resonate with me. I know almost everyone I meet when I go to the Arab world is tolerant, and not just in

the present. There is a long tradition of tolerance among groups and tolerance among each other.

Where that picture becomes “jarry” is when you begin to talk about politics. Yes, when you talk about politics, what we are seeing in Libya, what we are seeing in places such as Syria, maybe attests to the fact that there is something to be built, which is political tolerance.

By the way, I was in Iceland a couple of years ago and I was in a cab, and I was being flippant in the conversation with the cab driver and I said to him so apart from Nokia what else have you produced as a country? And cool, calm, and collected he looked at my back in his rear view mirror and he said compromise. And I said what does that mean? And he said we had a civil war in the 1920s and we came to the conclusion that we either live together or we perish together. So our best national product is compromise, and that remains so.

But when you're talking about society at-large, the Arab world has always been and continues to be a place of great tolerance and of great kindness, and by the way I find a great resonance of that in this country – socially the people are very hospitable, very generous, very tolerant, but look what you hear when you come to closer to the mid-term elections. The filth, the political filth that politics drives out of people – the Arab world is no different in that sense.

The other thing that I wanted to add is that in terms of -- what have we learned from this, from all this – are we, as Judith said, are we as distant as she said from democracy, we as Arabs? The sad reality is that yes, in 2014 we are, but in 2011 we weren't. And the responsibility of having strayed so far in three years from where we were in 2011 is quite frankly for me, it's a shared responsibility between the Arabs themselves and the Americans.

Why the Arabs? Because take what happened in Egypt, the icon back in 2011 of change happening in the Arab world. You had young people who organized and dragged other segments of society with them. They basically toppled a dictator who had ruled them for 40 years. And then he said I'm stepping down. And we all made the same mistake – he said I'm stepping down, but we didn't hear the second part of the sentence, which is I'm passing on the baton to the armed forces, and the Egyptians celebrated and the Arabs celebrated everywhere. And that's the part of the responsibility that the Arabs made. But this government, this Administration also had its share of responsibility because to this day as a journalist I'm not aware if the Obama Administration has had a comprehensive review of its foreign policy in places, in crucial places such as Egypt. And therefore I say that the responsibility is shared.

I always say this. In a marriage of whatever shape or form the problem is never from one side. It always takes two to tango. But what makes this uniquely different is that it's a serious power relationship. It's a part of the world that has been under power, subjugation of one kind or another for a long time. And it's very difficult to come to terms with that in such a short period of time, and when I say such a short period of time. I'm not saying that I'm optimistic about the future, I'm just making a statement of fact.

[Elizabeth Wossen] Very strong observations. Just to try and get to one or two of the questions from the floor – I think I'll direct this to Dr. Koch. Representatives of GCC states have generally classified the U.S.-GCC relationship as faltering, but American voices have mostly claimed that the relationship remains strong. What has produced this disparity and how can we get on the same page?

[Dr. Christian Koch] Well, I think what's produced the disparity has certainly been the concerns from the region itself about where the U.S. policy is going. Not just based on the mistakes that we've seen in the last ten years and the consequences that now can be seen as the region is imploding on many fronts but also in terms of what the direction is on the next ten years because you hear the instances of the pivot to Asia. You see the U.S. in terms of its energy independence and shale oil. You see the war weariness and the reluctance to commit military resources at certain times. And I think that combination has produced this reluctance in the region in asking where is U.S. policy headed? So I think that's where the concern comes from in the region. Not really understanding, not really fully recognizing what the outlook is.

[Elizabeth Wossen] Thank you, Dr. Koch. There is one question from the floor here on a country that we didn't visit during this panel's presentation, but it regards Yemen. The question – and anyone can please help answer – how do you view the future of Yemen under the current civil religious conflict with the Houthis? What could be the recommendation to help overcome this shaky period of time from the local and international level?

[Dr. Christian Koch] I can comment just briefly. I think one of the mistakes that has been made in Yemen from the GCC side is that they put forward the initiative to have the transfer of power from Ali Abdullah Saleh but then didn't really follow up on that afterwards to see how to take this initiative forward. And then to deal with – you still left a role for the former president inside the country, and you sort of left developments on their own afterwards, and that has created now the situation that we have at the moment, that you have many different forces but not a clear strategy of how to deal with them.

So I think one thing that has to happen is even the GCC needs to sit back and needs to decide on making an initiative number 2 for Yemen that looks at the developments of the past few years and then tries to steer a more clear course as far as the role of the GCC is concerned.

[Dr. Jim Zogby] Can I be totally inappropriate right now? Remember the Seinfeld episode where George Costanza gets fired but he keeps coming back to work? Abdullah ali Saleh reminded me of Constanza a couple of times. If I were then President Hadi I'd say are you still here? Because he kept hanging around. Okay, sorry.

[Elizabeth Wossen] I think we're clearly out of time at this point. I'm sorry for those who passed up questions we couldn't get to them. I think panelists have done an amazing job blending old problems with new problems, solutions, observations.

So please help me in thanking them. Give them a round of applause.

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