Global food and water shortages are rapidly emerging as the most critical crisis of our time. Rising food prices, shrinking water availability, climate change, and relentless population growth are converging to force this issue onto the world agenda. Shortages of food and water are already destabilizing societies and governments, and creating hundreds of refugees. Jim Yong Kim, president of the World Bank, recently gave a sobering warning about the risk of conflicts over natural resources. If the forecast of a four-degree global increase above the historical average temperature proves to be accurate, he said, “There will be water and food fights everywhere.” Kim called for action to create a carbon market, eliminate fossil-fuel subsidies, and “green” the world’s largest cities. He noted that the 2012 droughts in the US, which pushed up the price of wheat and maize, had led to the world’s poor eating less. For the first time, he said, extreme weather that affects food production had been connected to climate change brought on by human activity.}

Among the timely questions that may be addressed in the 2014 Camden Conference:

- What new game-plan and alternative policies do we need to overcome market failures?
- What new technologies may aid in the process?
- What are the impacts of global warming on food production, and how might they affect political stability?
- What innovations in organic and commercial agriculture, respectively, hold promise to produce enough food to feed the planet?
- Do we have the ability to provide enough water for homes and farms and avoid conflict over water resources in the coming decades?
- What particular challenges do climate change, world food prices, poverty, and land-grabbing pose for food security in Africa?
- What can the US do to assure the multilateral cooperation needed to establish policies to resolve these challenges?

Check the Camden Conference website for updates on speakers, programs, community events, and registration.
The Middle East: What Next?

Moderated by Nicholas Burns

The successive uprisings of popular discontent known as the Arab Awakening, or the Arab Spring, have dominated the headlines since 2010. Longtime rulers have been toppled, and the battle rages on in Syria. The transition toward more democratic, progressive, stable governments has begun, but the process is proving to be messy and slow. The 2013 Camden Conference wrestled with the issues raised by these challenges, such as the ongoing role of social media in public debate and protest; the emerging status of women; the impact of the rise of elected Islamic factions in governing roles; the growing tension between Israel and Iran; and the prospects for Iran/US relations, especially regarding the Iran nuclear program.

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This year’s Camden Conference was dedicated to Jim Matlack, Program Committee Chairman for the last seven years, in gratitude for his thoughtful leadership and hard work in developing topics and recruiting speakers for seven engaging Conferences.
Robin Wright opened the 26th Camden Conference with “both the good news and the bad news,” as she laid out first the fundamentals that led to the current upheavals in the Middle East, then the factors that she sees as positive in this upheaval, and last the trends that will influence how it ends.

“The epic convulsion in the Middle East is the most important story of the early twenty-first century,” according to Wright. “It is part and parcel of the extraordinary transition we have seen worldwide over the last quarter-century with the demise of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, with the end of apartheid and minority rule in Africa, and the collapse of military rule in Latin America... It is tough now, but let’s remember why [the transition] happened. Those fundamentals have not changed, and they will shape what happens next.”

“Proportionately we have the largest baby boom in the world in the Middle East—two-thirds of the population of the area is under the age of 30 and over one-half of those young people are literate. They can read and write. They can get beyond their neighborhood, their city, their country. Life is no longer just about subsistence, it is about having a life.” Add to this growing literacy the tools of technology. “Not only do they have Twitter and Facebook and YouTube—today there are over 500 independent satellite television stations bringing them different programs and different views. They have a sense of diversity. ‘Islam’ literally means submission. But today there is enormous diversity in interpreting Islamic beliefs and a sense of what rights are for women as well as men. In the two most repressive countries in the area—Saudi Arabia and Iran—over 60 percent of the university student body is female. That has to change things,” Wright emphasized.

But change is “going to take a lot of time over a lot of space in a lot of different ways.” Positive change will come “when Muslims turn against the odious ideologies of bin Laden and other surrogate or allied factions.”

Wright sees the culture of change as critical to positive political change, and she sees it happening—the good news. “The ideas of folk music, poetry, plays provided the voice for something different in the Vietnam era. When we see pictures of Tahrir Square and the protests in Tunisia, we have to understand that the culture of change is still there and it is the glue that defines what comes next.”

Wright went on to lay out five aspects of that culture of change that “define and excite the people of the region.” Music is one—“rap has become the rhythm of resistance across the region.” In Tunisia a young rapper challenged the government with a Facebook video. As people took to the streets to support the fruit vendor who set himself afire, they sang this rapper’s song.

The creation of new role models is the second aspect. A father in Kuwait wrote comic books containing 99 superheroes for his children. Each character represents one of the positive attributes of God in Islam, each is from one of the 99 countries with Muslim populations, and half are men and half are women. The comic books he created have been translated into 12 languages.

New Muslim comedians created the third trend. Muslims

ROBIN WRIGHT is a journalist, author, and foreign policy expert. She has been a foreign correspondent in the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. She most recently covered US foreign policy for the Washington Post. She is a Joint Fellow at the US Institute of Peace and the Woodrow Wilson International Center.
introduced to stand-up comedy in the US have taken the form back to their home countries to challenge extremism and dictators. Theater has a role in changing culture as well. “New plays take the idea of Jihad back to its roots, emphasizing how to be a good Muslim, not to wage war but to teach the basic lessons.”

Wright’s last positive trend is what is happening to women, who are in the forefront of the battle for change. She told the story of a young Egyptian woman who became an activist against female genital mutilation at age eight, after her own circumcision. Then she went on to work on wider human rights issues; start the first Arab human rights film festival; and, most recently, run for Parliament.

The fundamentals and the culture of change feed the 10 trends or conditions that Wright believes will shape the next decade:

▶ The old order is gone but the new order has yet to take shape. We have focused on who is elected, but the constitutions will define what comes next.

▶ In every country in transition, people are worse off economically. The flashpoint for the initial uprisings was economic, not political. The unrest down the road may relate more to that first (economic) flashpoint than to democracy.

▶ Too many parties and individuals run for office; few are organized or have the resources or knowledge to govern. Most important, “there is not enough sense of the common good. It is all about entitlement in democracy rather than responsibility.”

▶ There is a huge divergence of ideas in the Islamic world that is both healthy and dangerous. “Salafi is the most important word I can send you home with tonight. They are the ultra-conservatives. Their ideologies are often very rigid. [They are] what worries me most.”

▶ Armed factions that will not give up their guns are responsible for much of the violence in the region. In Libya, some are cooperating with the government, but others are not willing to give up their guns and militia until they know what the new order will be, and until they know they have a big enough piece of the pie. The pie will not be big enough.

▶ Tribes are re-emerging as a defining force in the region. People are voting along tribal lines. Tribes will be very important in Syria.

▶ Demographic realities—of young, too often unemployed populations with older elected officials or dictators—mix with the economic and political realities and the militias to create a combustible situation.

▶ Corruption is rampant. “The dirty little secret of the democratic revolution is how it has been corrupted.” For example, only a fraction of the humanitarian aid intended for Aleppo actually arrives there.

▶ Women are faring poorly even though they are on the front lines. At issue are economic opportunities, basic security, and the Salafi threat of taking away from them the opportunities they are fighting for.

“The map of the Middle East may well change, whether through massive decentralization or secession. It is possible that, depending on how this transition plays out—how volatile it is, how deep tribalization goes, and how deep ethnic and sectarian lines are drawn inside borders—that we may see that map fundamentally change.”

Returning to a more positive note, Wright concluded with this thought: “We have to remember, when we talk about what is next, that we can’t think only about those awful pictures on television. We have to remember that a broader trend is under way… The next decade is going to be turbulent; it is going to be a wild ride; we will long for the days of the simplicity of dictators. This is a global phenomenon not limited to the Middle East, it has bigger context, but at the end of the day it also has a good bit of hope.”

Reported by Judy Stein

Wright: There is not one answer for the whole region. We can’t direct any more. We will constantly be responding to events on the ground. We are often putting out fires and we don’t have enough time to figure out how to keep the fires from igniting.

But we can do small pieces. For example, we can train the media on what is a free press. We can train the courts and the police on how to have a free trial, on what is fair evidence.

Q: What are the opportunities for education in North Africa? Are the people equipped for a democracy?
Wright: In Libya there is 88 percent literacy. The problem is what they know. A lot of education is rote learning. They haven’t been taught to criticize. The real issue is re-education. That said, the younger generation is far better prepared for transition than their parents were. The idea of participation is instinctive.

Q: What should the US government do in response to the continuing changes?
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But we can do small pieces. For example, we can train the media on what is a free press. We can train the courts and the police on how to have a free trial, on what is fair evidence.

Q: How can students today be engaged?
Wright: We tend to think about what we can do for Muslims over there when we should be thinking about what we can do over here. One of the big challenges in the United States is recognizing our new Muslim identity, as Islam becomes the second largest religion here. We think of Islam in terms of extremism instead of the positive things that are happening, and we need not to automatically respond negatively. More students can learn Arabic, study about Islam, and learn about the region.

Q: What are the opportunities for education in North Africa? Are the people equipped for a democracy?
Wright: In Libya there is 88 percent literacy. The problem is what they know. A lot of education is rote learning. They haven’t been taught to criticize. The real issue is re-education. That said, the younger generation is far better prepared for transition than their parents were. The idea of participation is instinctive.
Right from the outset, Marwan Muasher made it clear that neither the euphoria in the heady days after the fall of Hosni Mubarak, nor the pessimism that has replaced it, are accurate or useful ways to begin to evaluate the events transforming the countries swept up in the still-rising tide of change in the Middle East.

“The world seems to have gone in a span of two short years from calling it an Arab Spring, and having these romantic dreams that the toppling of leaders is going to somehow instantaneously result in democratic transitions, to now probably calling it an Arab Inferno, an Arab Winter,” he said.

Muasher cautioned that the belief that democracy can be created overnight is as unrealistic as the fear that the region has been lost to liberal democracies forever is shortsighted. Both characterizations are equally simplistic. The road being traveled is obstacle-ridden, and the journey along it will be tough and long. “This is a process that is going to be measured in decades, not in months and not in years,” Muasher explained.

The Arab Awakening has not surprised the Jordanian diplomat, who observed that until two years ago the Arab countries were in a state of what he called “artificially induced stability”—a stability that was much more fragile than we may have perceived. “[The old regimes] told their people that bread must come before freedom and stomachs must be filled before ballot boxes can be... This was what all Arab regimes preached to their people.”

By not allowing what Muasher calls “political space,” these regimes ruled without real opposition and suppressed any that attempted to fill that role. But without real reforms, such a status quo was ultimately not sustainable, and in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and still ongoing in Syria, people finally took matters into their own hands.

Muasher believes time may be running out for the remaining monarchies in the region as well, both the oil-rich ones in the Gulf States, as well as those in Jordan and Morocco. To stop or delay the process of change in their countries, rulers have used their wealth to buy off dissent, and it has worked for now.

In Jordan and Morocco the monarchies are attempting to get out in front of their people and show them that reform from above can work. But Muasher says that without a serious and sustained reform process that will lead to the sharing of power, these two countries may be next to see popular uprisings.

MARWAN MUASHER is a Jordanian diplomat who currently serves as Vice President for Studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC. He is a former Ambassador of Jordan to Israel and to the United States, and a former Foreign Minister of Jordan. He was also the Senior Vice President for External Affairs at the World Bank. He is currently writing a book on the Arab Awakening.
very difficult for the new leaders who have replaced them to accept the message of the Awakening—that power will have to be shared from now on. Still, Muasher sees hopeful trends as well as some vital promises that must be kept.

A battle of ideas is being waged in the new political space that has been opened, and for the first time in a century in the Arab world, diversity and pluralism are part of the discussion. The outcome of this battle of ideas is crucial to the process and progress of the Awakening, says Muasher, for if it becomes just a winner-take-all competition between secularism and Islamism, he fears the victors will merely be the new dictators of the Arab world. “This must be a battle for pluralism, where both secular elements and the religious elements as well fight for the right of everybody to be included and no one to be excluded.”

So far the battle has been between secular and religious elements josting to dominate the political scene. Muasher hopes the younger generation will grasp the stakes and participate in the pursuit of real change that can create the networks and organizations necessary to grow and sustain openness and diversity, and to find the viable alternatives that are neither elitist nor theocratic.

Muasher points out that the initial proliferation of many dozens of parties running for election in Egypt, for example, is consistent with a pattern that has historically occurred in emerging democracies. Many of the parties will disappear from the scene quickly, but for now they serve a necessary function.

He notes, “The secular and religious holiness of parties is over... Criticism of their leaders was tantamount to being sacrilegious... That halo around secular parties as well as Islamists is over... It is now fair game to criticize them—right, left, and center.”

From now on accountability will need to be in play, he says—a government’s success or failure will have to be judged by the average citizen. In the past, economic reform was not tethered to political reform, but Muasher hopes that approach won’t work anymore. An imperative expectation of the Awakening is that a new system of checks and balances will be forged to combat the rampant corruption that has historically siphoned off economic gains to the few.

Muasher envisions a quid pro quo between governments’ desire to act in economic matters and corresponding moves toward political reform in order for people to accept their government’s legitimacy from now on. For such checks and balances to become authentic and effective, Muasher again clearly thinks it will take a new generation to shoulder the responsibility for making it happen.

“So far in the Arab world, in my view, commitment to true democracy from both the Islamist and secular forces is at best lip service. People talk about democratic norms but they don’t practice it... The old generation does not seem able or ready to embrace true democratic norms, whether from the Islamist or secular forces.”

Suppression is no longer going to be an acceptable tool, and rhetoric will no longer work as a camouflage for inaction. Promises without genuine reform will not fool anyone anymore, according to Muasher.

Muasher was particularly emphatic about the role of Islam and its possible undesirable ascendency as the endgame of the Awakening. He says, “Islam as the solution does not deliver jobs, does not deliver investment, as people in Egypt are witnessing today... Support for Islamists has gone up and down based on performance...and in my view, we have seen the peak of support of Islamists around the Arab world.” In the short term, this idea may not appear to be true, he adds, but within a few election cycles in Egypt he believes it will begin to be the case. Egypt is a society with a long and great history and a homogenous population; the nation will endure and survive this process of transition, and be the better for it.

Muasher also sees a new reality for the role of the United States in the Middle East, one that is more limited and the result of both new and old realities. He pointed out that America’s military power has been weakened as a result of the Iraq War, its economic clout has been damaged by the global financial crisis, and its inability or unwillingness to find a solution to the Arab/Israeli conflict has made it less relevant to the region moving forward.

America should now stay out of the way, is Muasher’s candid advice. He adds that the US has not done well when it has attempted to pick winners and losers, so it should let the Arab world pick its own. He cautions that change in the region will not be monolithic. For countries such as Syria and Libya, it will take much longer and may not succeed.

Hand-in-hand with increasing the likelihood of good outcomes is the need to establish or rebuild the institutions that foster democracy. Muasher sees education as a major component of this effort and essential to creating a citizenry capable of critical thinking, inquiry, and tolerance. He added that liberal education is the key to the development of pluralistic societies and must begin immediately in the Arab world, but to his disappointment, so far it has not. As an example of where the acceptance of ideas and diversity has succeeded in the region, Muasher pointed to Lebanon, a weak and fractured state politically that flourishes nevertheless because it has a society with more personal freedoms than any other Arab state.

Time and patience also are required now. The events that have taken place so far on the streets and their aftermath are only opening acts in a drama that will play out in the years ahead. Muasher issued a final warning about what could derail the promise of a real transformation, while expressing his own determination to stay the course.

“We cannot afford to lose another 100 years by making this a battle between Islamic and secular elements. This Awakening must not be just about toppling dictators but about pluralism... I’m very excited about what is going on. I’m very excited that a process of change has started, and I, as an Arab individual, am willing to see all the turmoil that goes along with this process. Because I realize this is a necessary phase that we have to go through.”

Reported by Peter Imber and Jo Dondis
It is easy to forget after the last two years of the exhausting, dizzying roller coaster that Egyptian politics has become,” Professor Marc Lynch told his audience, “what it felt like on January 25, 2011.” The 18 days between January 25 and February 11, when Hosni Mubarak finally stepped down, Lynch described as one of the most riveting periods in his long experience working in the region—one of those times “that turned the experience of …a generation of scholars, activists, policy makers, journalists, and others, completely on its head.”

As we consider Egypt’s “litany of problems and issues,” Lynch said, it is important for us not to lose sight of January 25. After a decade of images of extremism and violence, what Americans saw in Tahrir Square that day might have been the first time that young Arabs, Egyptians, and Muslims were portrayed so positively. Americans saw attractive young Arabs, Egyptians, and Muslims yearning for the same things that we yearn for, acting in ways that we act, fighting for their freedom in ways that we could identify with and understand. These images enabled us to identify with the people we saw, and we must preserve that sense of identification as we think through what the changes over the past two years in Egypt mean, not only for Egyptians but for ourselves.

January 25, Lynch asserted, did not happen out of nowhere. Rather, it was the culmination of at least 10 years of rising mobilization and social transformation. At various times, many small protests were held, targeting foreign issues like Israel’s war with the Palestinians, and later the US occupation of Iraq. Because these early actions were directed outward, the government tolerated them.

However, in 2003 to 2004, a group of perhaps a few thousand activists—writers, bloggers, journalists, and others—coalesced, saying, “This isn’t enough for us.” They turned their energies into what became known as the Kefaya Movement (kefaya means “enough”). This group self-consciously used new media technologies and small, temporary political openings to get their message out to their fellow citizens.

They seized on the succession of Hosni Mubarak’s son to the presidency as a symbol of what was wrong with Egyptian politics, and they went out into the streets and demonstrated. Five years prior, these activists would have been viewed as nuts holding up signs. They would have been arrested and hauled off to dungeons. But these activists had learned from their predecessors’ mistakes. They made sure that Al Jazeera photographers were there to film; they took pictures and immediately uploaded them to their blogs. Western journalists were reading these blogs and watching Al Jazeera, and suddenly the activists were punching way above their weight.

Kefaya was a relatively small, cross-sectional coalition. They were not a mass movement in any way. But they laid the foundations for a spirit of activism, for a culture of activism, for a cascading wave of protests involving almost every sector of society during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

This history demonstrates, Lynch said, that January 25 was not a sudden awakening. But on January 25, for the first time, different groups of activists came together and were able to convince the common people to join them in huge numbers. Had there been only 10,000 protesters, Mubarak’s security forces would have defeated them easily. But instead of tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets. Over the space of three days, they defeated the police in hand-to-hand combat, and seized and held Tahrir Square.
Marc Lynch

Why were the protestors suddenly able to connect with the masses? Because they had been watching the events in Tunisia (the ouster of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali). They suddenly believed victory was possible, and they came out in that moment of enthusiasm. Before the Tunisian revolution, winning against the Mubarak government had been almost unimaginable. But when President Ben Ali fell, people suddenly thought that they might actually succeed. Protesting was worth the risk of torture and imprisonment because it might work.

That sense of possibility created a moment of profound inspiration, but that moment that has long since passed, Lynch said. It has given way to a long process of polarization, fragmentation, institutional collapse, and an extraordinarily poorly managed period of transition.

Lynch told his audience to maintain what he called “analytical humility” as we observe the rise of Islamic politics. “These events took the best of us by surprise,” he said. Then he set forth a number of points to consider as he analyzed Egypt’s past two years and made some predictions about the future.

► The mobilization in the streets of Egypt is not going to go away, Lynch predicted. It has become a structural reality in Egyptian politics. Social media and modern technology allow for the organization of street protests. Additionally, Egypt’s political structures continue to leave mobilization as the people’s only option for effecting change. In other words, people have both the means and the reasons to protest. Mobilization cuts two ways, Lynch warned. It is a powerful positive: it puts a check on untrammeled executive power; it spotlights human rights abuses such as rape, torture, and the complete absence of accountability for security forces. But it also contributes to Egypt being ungovernable, because the political machinery is constantly overwhelmed by crowds taking to the streets. Mobilization contributes to institutional breakdown and paralysis in the Egyptian government. Furthermore, street protests have become a substitute for competition in elections that protesters believe they can’t win. People aren’t doing the work to organize, fund, and run campaigns to get candidates elected to office—they are protesting instead. These realities are not going to go away, even when Egypt becomes a fully institutionalized democracy.

► The rise of the Islamists, electorally, politically, and socially, is worrisome. There are elements of truth and untruth to the narrative that Hosni Mubarak’s removal simply paved the way for a radical Islamist takeover. Few should have been surprised to see the Muslim Brotherhood do well in post-January 25 elections. The Brotherhood has worked hard to win elections and has become a force in Egyptian politics. They had an organizational advantage going into the post-January 25 period, and they worked that advantage. Some evidence suggests that the Brotherhood is an unstoppable, evil force—but some evidence also suggests that they are incompetent. In this respect, democracy has done what it is supposed to do. In power, the Brotherhood has been exposed as unable to do the things we were afraid they were going to do.

► It is difficult to clearly name the opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis. Many Egyptians are deeply frustrated with the inability of the Islamists’ opponents to form a coherent political alternative. Had members of the old political elite and the new activists been able to come together and support a single candidate, they could have gained some political traction against the Muslim Brotherhood. But they have failed to organize their political voices, which come from a wide range of factions, and so the fundamentalists continue to win elections.

► Egypt’s political environment has been served poorly by the recent flux and uncertainty. Lynch likened current Egyptian politics to Calvinball (the game in the comic strip Calvin and Hobbes), where there are no rules. He reminded us that without rules, without a constitution, without established electoral districts and design, nothing can be accomplished. Until recently, nothing defined the powers of the president or the legislature. This institutional uncertainty has led to deep, unprecedented polarization in every aspect of Egyptian society.

► The consequences of polarization are truly disturbing. People are attacking each other on the street; what Lynch described as a “naked, brutal, cultural war” is taking place at every level. It is fed by what was celebrated at the time of the revolution—the media, especially social media, that send every rumor into hyperspace, regardless of whether the rumor is true or not.

► The disruption caused by this polarization is made worse by the mind-boggling collapse of the Egyptian economy, Lynch concluded. Add to this the ongoing violence against women, including the gang rapes of women in Tahrir Square, and we have a sense of the raw state of Egypt today. Right now the Muslim Brotherhood is winning elections, which is evidence that they’re being democratic. But just as importantly, they’re not acting in what we would consider a maturely democratic, pluralistic way. That failure has created a sense of deep political malaise since the glory days immediately following January 25.

In summary, it is entirely rational, Professor Lynch said, to be both profoundly depressed and optimistic about Egypt’s future. Egypt’s transition has been “one of the stupidest in history.” At every possible moment when a political actor in Egypt could make a decision, it was the wrong one. The Muslim Brotherhood is destroying itself. That is temporarily bad for Egypt. But in the long run, their destruction is for the good, and Egypt will stabilize. The country has muddled through the past two years, but the years since the revolution are a blink of an eye compared to Egypt’s 5,000-year past.

► Reported by Kathryn King
Professor Joshua Landis divided his talk into a discussion of three broad questions: why has the Syrian civil war lasted so long and become so bloody, what might the endgame look like, and what is the likely US role?

He reminded the audience that Syria is what he termed a “minoritarian” state, one that includes a broad mixture of various ethnic and religious groups. While its population is approximately 70 percent Sunni Muslim, about 12 percent are a cohesive group of Alawites, an off-shoot of Shia Islam; another 10 percent are a similarly cohesive tribe of ethnic Kurds; the rest are a mixture of Christians and Druze, with a small scattering of other sects. Quoting a colleague, Landis said Syria is similar to the other Arab states in the Levant, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq: “...they are like Noah’s Ark, with two of everything.”

Syria’s borders, also like those of its Arab neighbors, are constructs reflecting its colonial heritage. The fact that the minority Alawites have ruled for over 40 years is similarly a result of Syria’s colonial past. The Alawites’ original domain included the sliver of land along the Mediterranean and the vast mountain redoubts above it; their arable land was small.

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and because they lived far from the major cities of Damascus and Aleppo, they were the poorest and most isolated of Syria’s Arab minorities. When the French took over after the Ottoman collapse on the heels of World War I, the Sunnis and Christians predominated in the cities and controlled the best land, so in order to support themselves, their poorer Alawite cousins signed up for the French-controlled colonial army.

As a result, by the mid-1950s, less than a decade after the French had decamped, two-thirds of the noncommissioned officers in the Syrian military were Alawite—more than five times their representation in the population. In 1966, after some 20 years of endless military coups, an Alawite general came out on top. Four years later, Hafez al-Assad, the father of the current president, took power, then consolidated his control by assuring that all key security positions in the military and intelligence agencies were held by his relatives and others from the Alawite community.

In Egypt, it was possible to overthrow the government by ousting President Mubarak (only a relatively small number of top government officials were so entangled with him that their destiny was tied to his). But in Syria, Landis pointed out, “It’s a zero-sum game for the Alawites.” If Assad goes, the power, wealth, and influence that the two-and-a-half million members of the Alawite community have accumulated over the last four decades would go with him. Further, as the war has grown bloodier, the likelihood that Alawites would be the object of targeted revenge has grown. Finally, since virtually all key generals and a considerable portion of the military are Alawite, the government is committed to fighting to the end.

So where is the civil war heading? How will it ever end? There are several possible “endgame models,” Landis suggested. The first is the Turkish model, a reference to the ethnic cleansing of Armenians and other Christians from Anatolia as the Ottoman Empire collapsed, resulting in an ethnically solidified Turkey. Ethnic cleansing, at least of the Alawites, is indeed a possibility for Syria. The Iraq model Landis outlined presupposes an invasion by a foreign country. But neither the US nor Turkey, the two likely candidates, has any interest in pursuing such an outcome, so that model is an unlikely one. The Lebanese model, which involves a coalition government of its three principal minorities, is not a particularly viable model even in Lebanon, where Christians, Sunnis, and Shites each make up approximately one-third of the population. In Syria, such a sharing arrangement would be a nonstarter for the victorious Sunnis, who make up more than two-thirds of the population.

Assad’s strategy so far has been to initiate ever more aggressive military action against the insurgents. With 500,000 Alawites of military age, even with an increasing defection by Sunni government soldiers, Assad has considerable forces at his disposal for the foreseeable future. At the same time, the rebel forces opposing his rule are composed of literally hundreds of different militias operating independently. Since the beginning of the uprising two years ago, Assad has constantly warned that his overthrow would lead to a Sunni-controlled government enforcing Shariah law. Initially he was able to maintain the support, or at least the neutrality, of the more secular middle- and upper-class Sunnis who had no interest in a strict Muslim government. But in the last year, as the fight for Aleppo and now Damascus has intensified, large segments of the middle class have been directly affected by the government’s military response and have increasingly started siding with the rebels.

Two events could lead to Assad’s defeat: Iran’s withdrawal of its significant military support, or the consolidation of the myriad rebel militias into a unified force. Regardless of what happens, Assad is unlikely to negotiate until the balance of power has shifted against him more than it has so far—and by that time, it could be too late. Many opposition members do not want to see any elements of Syria’s hated security apparatus survive into a post-Assad Syria. As the rebels gain strength, Assad can be expected to adopt a scorched-earth policy, eventually retreating with his remaining forces to the Alawite homeland in the mountains above the Mediterranean coast. Like Hezbollah in Lebanon, he would try to remain a major force in Syria, with continuing support from Iran and its protegé Hezbollah.

Under this scenario, Syria conceivably could split into several autonomous regions, with the Alawites establishing their own zone of influence in Syria’s west, prompting the Kurds to formalize their territorial control along Syria’s northeast border with Turkey and Iran. Such a result would of course be a recipe for continuing instability, both in a post-Assad Syria as well as in southeastern Turkey, where the Kurds have long sought autonomy. In the event that Assad and his forces are overwhelmed militarily, and Islamist militias advance into the Alawite Mountains, Landis suggested, the Alawite population might retreat en masse across the Lebanese border, which would have an even more destabilizing effect on that already fragile country.

The Obama administration has made it clear it has no intention of putting boots on the ground in Syria. But without an eventual US role, Landis believes one or the other of the above two scenarios is likely.

During the Q&A period, a listener asked if the US could influence the outcome of the war in a way that would advance its own interests by destroying Assad’s air force. Landis responded that as the rebel military forces are increasingly Islamic, short of the US embracing the Muslim Brotherhood, it’s impossible for the US “to pick a winner.” Knowledge of this factor has led some in the Obama administration to conclude that the best outcome the US can hope for is that the war is “cauterized,” or kept from overflowing beyond Syria’s borders.

Landis re-emphasized in his conclusion that Obama will not intervene militarily in Syria. The US focus in the Arab world is increasingly on Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, which means that from a US perspective, Syria, like Iraq, is largely on its own.

“Reported by Mac Deford
P rofessor Gregory Gause posited that the best way to understand the geopolitical situation in the Middle East is to understand the cold war being fought between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Gause identified what he termed the “crescent of weakness,” a collection of weak governments (specifically, Syria, the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq) that won’t or can’t check the more disparate factions within their own borders. In the end, these disparate factions not only allow foreign intervention, “they invite foreign powers to intervene in order to get an advantage over their local government.” Because Iran shares ideologies with Shia groups in these weak countries, Gause explained, “the Iranians, when we get to 2010, have bested Saudi Arabia, their main rival in the region, in nearly every one of the arenas which they’ve contested.”

There have always been weak states in the Arab world, but the current story begins with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which created a playing field where other people could intervene. The Iranians, being in the best position to do so, took immediate advantage of it. In the 2009 Iraqi elections, Gause felt that Maliki had little choice in accepting help from Iran. “I don’t think any national leader wants to be a puppet of a foreign power...but he needed Iranian support to win re-election.” As evidence of Iran’s successes, Gause cited not only the 2009 election of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, but also Hezbollah’s continued success in Lebanon, and growing Shia and Islamist influence in Bahrain, Yemen, and Palestine.

As Iran’s influence grew in Iraq, “the Saudis saw it as a major threat and began to get worried.” However, all their efforts to block Iran—in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories—were not successful. Continuing the trend, Hosni Mubarak’s loss of power in Egypt and his replacement by Islamist-dominated elected government gave further evidence of Saudi defeat, in that the movement was now regarded more as an Islamist Spring than an Arab Spring. These developments were not surprising to the Iranians, who proclaimed the uprisings to be “a continuation of an Islamic revolution that [they] began.”

But Saudi Arabia pushed back where it could. Taking us to the Pearl Roundabout in Bahrain, Gause illustrated the Saudi over-reaction to what were peaceful protests against Bahrain’s monarchical rule in the face of overwhelming popular support for a Shia candidate. “The Saudis were...not going to allow a monarchy to fall and...were certainly not going to allow a Shia majority to take control.”

Then “Syria blew, [and] it is now the test of Saudi Arabia’s ability to roll back Iranian influence in the region.” Turkey had a strong interest in allying itself with Saudi Arabia, largely because of the border it shares with Syria, and the costs it would incur if a massive exodus of refugees entered their territory. However, the Turks are not completely on board with

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what they see as Saudi Arabia’s interest in preventing an Islamist uprising in Syria. The potential exists for the cold war to become hot, “and the Turks don’t want to get sucked in.” However, as Gause said, “The shared border is an element that can’t be ignored.”

As an aside, Professor Gause offered a brief history of the Alawite sect. They are a heretical and sectarian off-shoot of Shia with pagan and Christian beliefs, operating inside Syria. Their ideas were fomented in isolation and their beliefs have grown “…inbred and weird,” but they represent 12 percent of the population.

In summation, Gause stated that “the new Middle East cold war is history repeating itself.” He reminded us of the old Middle East cold war, presided over chiefly by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser during the 1950s and 1960s, when the US and the Soviet Union tried to manipulate the governments in the area. “State weaknesses invited foreign powers to intervene,” Gause said. The influence wielded by Nasser reached the disparate factions in neighboring countries through the then-nascent technology of transistor radios, demonstrating that past is prologue when it comes to understanding and appreciating the role of technology and social media.

For better understanding of this cold-war cycle, Gause recommended two books, neither published recently. The first book, *The Arab Cold War*, by Malcolm Kerr, “tells the story of the first regional cold war, which is very similar to this one,” and Patrick Seal’s *The Struggle for Syria*, “talks about Syrian politics from 1948 to1958, when Syria was the main arena in which the first cold war was fought out.”

“The names have changed, but the dynamics are very similar. And…because the dynamics are so similar, we can learn not only about what’s happening now, but we can learn maybe not to be so afraid of it. Because if Gamal Abdel Nasser, the most popular man in the Arab world, could not dominate this region, I’m not sure the Iranians could dominate it today.”

Reported by Dwight Blue
deterred. Any notion that a nuclear Iran can be deterred—in the same way that the Soviet Union was deterred over six decades of the Cold War—is based on a dangerously irrelevant analogy."

Feldman then explained the opposing view, that while a nuclear Iran is a very serious threat, it is not an existential threat. This side believes that Israel is very powerful and has a response to every contingency. This view, taken by Israel’s defense minister, Ehud Barak, believes that Israel’s nuclear option will deter Iran, and that Iran is not suicidal and will not risk its own annihilation just to destroy Israel.

After exploring the Iran nuclear debate and the different Israeli viewpoints, Feldman moved into a discussion of where Iran stands in the progress toward producing a nuclear weapon. He noted that there are three primary questions about Iran’s nuclear program:

**How close are they?** He points out that proponents of a strike say Iran’s enrichment program is moving very fast and also becoming more immune to a military strike. However, opponents of a strike believe Iran’s problems have consistently been underestimated.

**Will we know that a decision has been made to weaponize (convert nuclear capabilities to actual weapons)?** Feldman again noted here that there are two schools of thought. He stated that some in the American and Israeli defense communities believe that we will know if the Supreme Leader makes the decision to weaponize. Other people are more skeptical, and believe that intelligence will be the key, because the conversion of nuclear material to weapons can be more easily concealed.

**Is there time?** The combination of the previous two questions leads to this operational question. Is there time for exercising other measures, such as sanctions, which take time to have effect?

After reviewing the key questions in the nuclear debate, Feldman went on to describe three questions in considering a military strike to prevent a nuclear Iran.

What would be the regional consequences of a military strike? Opponents are concerned that a strike would ignite a regional war and incite Iran’s allies. "Proponents argue that fears of regional repercussions are overrated and unwarranted," Feldman said. "Most Arab states would be happy to see Iran’s nuclear program arrested, no matter what their public position and rhetoric is."

What needs to be done on other fronts to reduce the cost of a military strike? There is a strong school of thought in Israel that if Israel has no alternative but to strike Iran’s nuclear facilities, then "certainly you have to take some measures...to move the peace process with the Palestinians forward."

How important are the objections of the Obama administration to an Israeli military strike? This topic has been the focus of the debate in the last year. Feldman said, "Opponents of a strike argue that US/Israel defense cooperation has reached an unprecedented level...and it would be insane for Israel to jeopardize this relationship for the sake of buying time." Proponents of a strike reply that there are

"...some occasions when a nation’s survival is at stake, and the call for action needs to be taken, even at the risk [to] relations with its closest ally."

So where are we now? Feldman said that in the next six to nine months, Iran’s nuclear project will reach another crescendo. Iran will have made further progress, reducing time it takes to convert nuclear capability to actual weapons. Israel’s defense communities, which have previously been flexible in order to reduce risks to relations with the US, are going to be increasingly nervous. Also, he said that it is likely that the Obama administration will make a last effort to find a diplomatic solution. "If Iran engages, this would raise other issues which will require close coordination between the US and Israel." For example, what levels of enrichment would be tolerated and what verification and monitoring would have to be put in place?

Professor Feldman summed up his presentation by repeating that this topic is "...the toughest issue I’ve had to deal with in my first 35 years of professional life." He also reminded us that we should be very skeptical if anyone says they have the solution. Looking at what makes Iran unique as far as Israel is concerned, he reflected that on May 15, 1948, when Israel was established, Arab states invaded Palestine in an effort to prevent Israel from coming about. "The Arab world has come around to accepting Israel as maybe an unfortunate [fact], but as a fact of life in the Middle East...Iran remains the odd man out. It’s the only country in the region that still aspires for Israel’s destruction. So there is a material, qualitative difference between Iran and all Israel’s other neighbors."

Looking to the next speaker, Feldman said, "Hossein Mousavian is a real Iranian patriot...immensely professional and immensely reasonable... He and I could negotiate out of this problem...but unfortunately we’re not dealing with Hossein Mousavian. We are dealing with Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader, who speak of Israel as the Satan and as something that needs to be destroyed." His final point, "not a happy story," was that "we have to remember that all of this in Israel is seen through the prism of people who experienced only 67 years ago—not hundreds of years ago, only 67 years ago—the worst genocide in [our] history. They don’t have the luxury of not taking the kind of rhetoric that we hear from Iranian leaders—not from Hossein Mousavian—seriously. And the idea that the people who talk about Israel’s destruction will one day possess nuclear weapons is terrifying. So if you think this is complicated, the answer is no. It’s very, very complicated."

**Reported by Jeff Howland**

SHAII FELDMAN directs the Crown Center for Middle East Studies and is Professor of Politics at Brandeis University. He is also a Senior Fellow and member of the Board of Directors of Harvard University’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, where he is cochair of the Crown-Belfer Middle East Project. He is also an Associate Fellow of the Royal United Services Institute in London.
Former Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian presented a historical narrative on nuclear issues between the United States and Iran. His remarks focused on the Iranian understanding of history and reality, leading to mistrust of the US and its intentions on nuclear programs in Iran. Stating that “nobody claims that Iran has a nuclear bomb,” he said it is a fact that US intelligence itself could not confirm Iran had a nuclear bomb in 2011. In addition, Iranian leaders have made no decision on making a nuclear bomb. Yet the United States, even knowing that Iran does not have a bomb, continues to make Iran’s nuclear program its number-one issue in dealing with the country.

Iranians do not understand why their nuclear power program became the number-one issue. What Iranians see is that the five powers that are negotiating with Iran on nuclear programs have more than 20,000 bombs among them, and yet it is Iran that is viewed as the threat to international peace and security. Iranians don’t understand the logic, because they see that the US has relationships with Pakistan and other countries that have nuclear capacity, and yet the five powers have a mistrustful relationship with Iran, which has no bomb and has committed to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). He acknowledged that the agenda is stuck on Iran’s intentions, and the fear by the West of those intentions. According to Ambassador Mousavian, this tremendous doubt permeates all efforts to find a respectful resolution with Iran’s nuclear program.

Mousavian shared his own experience by telling the history of Iran’s nuclear program. He stated that the foundation of Iran’s nuclear program was laid during the period from 1957 to 1979. He said it was the US that laid this foundation, and it was the US that supported the building of the first Iranian nuclear plant. In addition, the US arranged for Iran to develop 23 nuclear power plants by 1994. During the period from 1957 to 1979, Germany signed an $8-billion contract to build Iranian plants, and France signed a contract for $1.2 billion to produce fuel in France through a consortium with Iran. Mousavian stressed that the blame should not be placed on the Islamic government for having a nuclear program, but on the efforts prior to the revolution, including technology shared by the US. He stated that if the Shah were alive today, he feels Iran would have multiple nuclear sites and enrichment sites. He explained that only one plant was near completion at that time, and it needed to be completed to provide isotopes for patients with cancer.

After the revolution, the US and the West decided to cease commercial relations with Iran. Germany terminated their contract with Iran, and the reason was the objection of the US. France immediately cancelled the enrichment program that was to produce fuel in France for Iran, even though Iran had already paid $1.2 billion to France. All efforts stopped because France would not let them have the fuel needed for...

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their only civilian reactor. He emphasized that Iran had no option other than to make the fuel itself. They went for self-sufficiency, because no one was prepared to give them fuel.

Another issue that widened mistrust was the invasion of Iran by Iraq. All Western powers supported Iraq and sanctioned Iran. At least 1 million Iranians were killed or injured in that war, including members of Mousavian’s own family. Iranians view themselves as victims of Iraq. The war, an attack by another Arab country, came at great cost to Iran. Such an aggression was seen as a clear message to bring regime change to Iran. Iraq had the support of other Arab countries and clearly the war was an effort to disintegrate Iran. Weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons, were used against Iran. Mousavian said that the US provided the materials for Iraq’s chemical weapons. He asked the audience, “Why is Iran being accused of using chemical weapons when they are the victims of mass destruction?” Iranian religious leaders forbade the use of weapons of mass destruction to counter Iraq.

Mousavian said he was involved in numerous discussions with Germany in efforts to complete their one power plant. Iran at that time would have accepted supervision and would have been ready to pay for supervisors. He informed the audience that Article 4 of the NPT, which requires all members to cooperate and share information with other nations on technology, is closed to Iran. He reiterated that Iran went to the black market for fuel only because they had no choice if they were to supply their facility in Bushehr. He said their only intention after the revolution was to finish the plant and get fuel from France, but they were forced to a position of self-sufficiency. They felt secrecy was reasonable because of Western sanctions. The US has continued to oppose any enrichment efforts by Iran.

Today, the former Ambassador stated, Iranians continue to want Iran’s rights under the NPT to be recognized and respected, and for all nuclear-related sanctions against Iran to end. If the US and the West would accept those two requirements, overall issues could be resolved in two to three years. He encouraged the US not to miss the opportunity, because Iran will develop further nuclear capabilities through their own efforts, when given no other choice. Mousavian emphasized that the West is applying 95 percent of their efforts to sanctions and only 5 percent to diplomacy. It was Iran that proposed enrichment at 5 percent, not the West.

Although after President Obama took office, he promised engagement with Iran, the United States has since ratified strenuous international sanctions against the country. Mousavian stated that Iran would agree to implement additional protocols, including intrusive inspections; to stop enrichment at 20 percent and even at the lower 5 percent level Iran had earlier recommended; to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) requiring access beyond the protocols; to implement the NPT Safeguards Agreement and specified Subsidiary Arrangements; and to limit the stockpile. But he feels Obama is pursuing a covert economic and intelligence war against Iran.

Iran wants a normal relationship based on mutual respect. Iran considers the US to be using threats as a tactic. Iran is open to having negotiations without threats and coercion. Mousavian acknowledged that Iran has taken hostile actions against the US. He hopes for a period of time in negotiations in which the US stops threatening and humiliating a nation with a long and respected history. He pleads for the US to include issues in the negotiations other than nuclear weapons, starting with common-ground issues and working with a comprehensive package. He mentioned Afghanistan as a common issue the two nations could discuss.

 Reported by Linda Crawford

Q&A

The Q&A session began with a spirited and sometimes highly adversarial exchange between moderator Nick Burns and Hossein Mousavian, each of whom has worked on the Iran nuclear issue for their respective governments. Broadly, Mousavian said that Iran is prepared to negotiate as long as their rights as a member of the NPT are respected. Burns countered that the UN Security Council resolution issuing sanctions against Iran is supported by most nations because the Iranian government continues to lie about their nuclear program. Their confrontation became the talk of the Conference and stimulated discussion for weeks to follow. To hear the full content of their remarks, go to www.camdenconference.org/2013-conference/2013-conference-camcasts/ and begin listening at 31 minutes and 40 seconds. Some questions from the audience, and Mousavian’s responses, appear below. Burns often took issue with the responses; for his counterpoints, go to the web site.

Q: President Ahmadinejad consistently refers to the Jewish state as the Little Satan or the Zionist Entity, but you call it Israel. Is this a change in Iran’s policy toward Israel?

Mousavian: I have no sympathy with Ahmadinejad’s statements denying the Holocaust or wiping Israel off the map. I am against such rhetoric.

Q: Are there underlying geopolitical issues, such as commerce or energy, that cause the US to be so adversarial toward Iran?

Mousavian: The US and Iran need to respect each other’s interests in the region. In Afghanistan, both the US and Iran are supporting Karzai, and in Iraq, we are both supporting Maliki. There is room for us to cooperate to fight terrorism, if we respect each other’s interests in Iraq. Regarding energy, we could also agree on a regional cooperation system in the Persian Gulf, like the Gulf Cooperation Council, that would have good relations with the West, and that would provide security and stability.
Barbara Ibrahim began by explaining that through her work at the American University in Cairo, focused on the activity of young Arab activist and non-activist students across the Arab world, she began to sense something different going on with this generation of young Egyptians. “They were not waiting for adults to invite them to join gray-haired people, NGOs, or activist groups.” They were starting their own communities, service organizations, and activist organizations, and they were much less fearful politically than the older generation. Ibrahim said that these young people were suggesting to us that there was going to be a rupture or break with the past, and “...we didn’t realize the significance of this until the Arab Spring revolution began across North Africa.”

Ibrahim said she watched YouTube and the mobilization effort taking place around the January 25 demonstration in Cairo, and she saw an invitation on Facebook to attend the event, with 70,000 responses from people who said they would be there. She said she thought to herself, “I’d better get on my flak jacket and get down there and see what is going to happen.”

She subsequently chose to “hedge my bet” the morning of January 25 and instead attend a meeting in a hotel that faced Tahrir Square. Ibrahim said the meeting attendees—
Barbara Ibraham

Barbara Ibraham is Founding Director of the John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement at the American University in Cairo. Before that, she served for 14 years as the regional director for West Asia and North Africa for the Population Council. Her publications are in the fields of women’s employment, youth transitions to adulthood, gender and health, and Arab philanthropy.

donors, local experts, university professors—were disdainful of her effort to encourage them to look for points of entry to this activism, leverage points within the universities. When she said, “It is only a matter of time before there is going to be real change,” they responded, “Yeah, right, not in our lifetime. Look out the window; there was supposed to be a demonstration today. Nobody has showed up yet.”

But then, Ibrahim said, around 3:00 pm, through double-plated glass, they could hear the sound of marchers coming across Qasr al-Nil Bridge. They could not see the beginning or the end of the crowd.

With this account as background, Ibrahim explained that the focus of her talk was to explore and question some of the observations that “…women participated fully in the demonstration, in the civil disobedience that brought the revolution, but that they have lost ground subsequently and that the main reason for that has been the rise of Islamic discourses and trends of power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and elsewhere.” To consider whether these observations are true or not, Ibrahim suggested that we need to explore what was happening with the women’s movement before the revolution, what happened during those 18 days, and what has transpired afterward.

Ibrahim showed a video clip of a college-age woman who had filmed a video of herself, calling upon her fellow Egyptians to come down with her, to join her in making a change. Ibrahim said this video went wildly viral. But a year later, the young woman and some of her activist cohorts came to Ibrahim saying that “…they had lost out—that they did not know how to run for parliament, to talk with ambassadors, to walk into the offices of governors.” Ibrahim said they wanted the University’s Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement to help them.

Ibrahim then pointed out that the young woman in the video was not just a citizen calling out to fellow citizens, but a young woman using highly gendered language to call out and motivate her listeners—urging to men to be men. “If you are a man, come with me. I’m a girl, but I’m going to be there. Come and protect me.” Ibrahim said that although this young woman is hip, a part of the Internet generation, she understands the gendered nature of her society and knows what levers to push.

Ibrahim told of another example three years earlier where working-class, poorly educated women successfully conducted a sleep-in at a factory, bringing their children along with blankets and stoves. They taunted the men to be men, to defend their rights to be paid overtime and to collect bonuses that had been unpaid for over 10 years.

She also cited two other campaigns led by women, “No Military Trials” and “Military Are Liars”, that have produced positive results. But since the revolution, there also have been some abortive and ineffective organizing efforts.

Ibrahim said that while this past and current activity shows that women are brave and women are active, there is a problem. “Those patriarchal ideals, habits of mind, gendered understandings of what my role and your role are, are very deeply embedded in Egyptian and other Arab societies. And they will not be overthrown because of 18 days in a square.”

Ibrahim recalled that during those 18 days, the squares had a utopian character to them. Men stood by women, and veiled women and unveiled women stood by each other. It was a time when being Christian or Muslim could be forgotten, a time free of the military pitting of sect against sect.

But as soon as Mubarak stepped down, the public spaces began filling with pleasure-seekers. The problem of sexual violence began. She cited an incident within the first month where a small women’s protest group entered the square. Within an hour, young Egyptian men, mostly with beards, took the women’s placards and threw them to the ground. They taunted them to return to their kitchens, shouting, “You have no place in the new Egypt.” Ibrahim said that it was clear to everyone that this incident was not men against women, but rather a conflict between the Islamic and more secular factions.

Ibrahim discussed how citizen participation in the electoral process has been very strong. She observed that the previous organizing activity of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist Nour Party has given them a distinct advantage in the democratic process, and that it will take time for those without such a long history of organization to gain representation.

Ibrahim said that citizen journalism and social media have made historic abuse of citizens much more transparent and will continue to drive leaders to change their ways. She said the young men committing mass gang rapes have probably been paid by unidentified groups to engage in this activity, and it is not an indication of the breakdown of Egyptian society. Recent protests in 20 different cities around the world are pressuring the Egyptian government to step forward and put a stop to such violence.

Looking to the future, Ibrahim cited an example in Morocco called the February 20 movement, “…where young men and women have set a goal of parity of men and women in the fight for social justice, economic justice, and the fight for the kind of society they want to see in Morocco.”

Ibrahim concluded by reflecting, “After all, if I take you back to the 18 days and what made it a success, it was exactly that blurring of the lines of diversity in Egyptian society, where everyone stood side by side, everyone made common cause, and they began that first step toward that dream of the Egyptian society they want to see.”

Reported by Kathrin Seitz and Richard Anderson
Ambassador Pope began with a brief summary of his understanding of the main points of the speakers who had preceded him. He praised Robin Wright and Barbara Ibrahim for their emphasis on the Arabs as people and individuals and not as stereotypes. He credited Ambassador Muasher for providing a “clear, distinct Arab voice” in his summation of the present state of mind of the Arab world. Pope agreed with Joshua Landis’ pessimistic outlook for Syria and for American policy there. He also lauded Gregory Gause’s appraisal of the ongoing “cold war” between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and Shai Feldman’s statement that the “fates of the US and Israel are inextricably entwined,” both now and in the future.

Pope praised the presentation of Hossein Mousavian, pointing out that the Iranian Ambassador had well performed his job of giving us the other side of the US/Iran dispute. His subsequent debate with Nick Burns had shown clearly the “degree to which it’s often impossible to agree on the same facts, let alone on the course ahead.” Pope then mentioned that in a recent book, Mousavian had complained that he and his fellow Iranian diplomats often had had to work overseas without clear understandings of what their home government wanted them to do. “Such a thing,” Pope said, tongue well in cheek, “could never happen in the United States.” (The audience erupted in rueful laughter.)

Pope went on to the two main issues he wished to discuss, the first being the “disturbing transformation of our national security bureaucracy” and, second, an examination of the meaning of the “vexing word, diplomacy” and the goals behind its practice. He said he planned to address these points in the context of his recent experience in Libya. He then turned to the Conference’s graphic on the big screen behind him and commented on its portrayal of faceless, ominous menace. He lamented that this depiction of the Middle East as an “exotic and violent other,” where “they hate us,” was a perception that now seems to permeate the character of America’s presence in the Middle East and North Africa.

Pope contrasted the stereotype of these images to Robin Wright’s urging us to understand the Middle East through the needs and aspirations of its peoples. It seemed to Pope that our views on these matters stem from a decade of US nation-building wars in the region, the resulting expenditure of “blood and treasure,” and other costs that will afflict America for at least another generation. “We fought with borrowed money; our economy was undermined; and our future freedom of action was compromised, including in the Middle East. We will be paying the opportunity cost of these adventures for generations to come.”

This failed nation-building has also “transformed and militarized our national security apparatus,” Pope said. Citing the freedom of movement and access to local people that US diplomats once enjoyed in their foreign postings, he described the new reality of our diplomats hunkered down in fortress embassies “from Istanbul to Cairo and from Rabat to Baghdad.” When he arrived in Libya to replace the slain US ambassador there, Pope said he found the situation to be “even worse than I thought.” Of a contingent of 150 people, one-third were Marines; the staff had become accustomed to fortress living in their prior postings; and “we had anti-tank weapons stored in our empty swimming pool.”

During the recent second anniversary of the revolt against
Gadaffi, Pope lamented that, while the British ambassador was mixing in with the joyous throngs in the streets of Tripoli, the US diplomatic contingent was "hunkered down" in a bunker 15 miles away.

Pope cited this paranoia as part of the justification for a growing militarization of US foreign policy, a transformation visible in many recent developments, such as:

- The breakdown of the buffers between the activities of the CIA and the FBI, a change fraught with dangers.
- The increasing closeness of the "alliance between the CIA and the military" (as a part of which ‘covert action’ is no longer a dirty word) and "four-fold expansion in the last decade of the Special Operations Command." (Also known as USSOCOM, this is a combined armed forces unit headquartered in Tampa, Florida, tasked with carrying out covert and clandestine operations. It is the fastest-growing part of the armed forces, with a budget of around $10 billion and with units in over 100 foreign countries.)
- The likelihood that, in the wake of the Benghazi incident, AFRICOM, the USSOCOM in Africa, will acquire its own force of intervention.
- The initial comments of the new Secretary of State, John Kerry, who has talked more about supporting commerce than practicing diplomacy.

Having described this militarization of US foreign relations and the devaluing (and defunding) of US diplomacy, Pope turned his attention to the current meaning in America of that "hoary word, diplomacy." After describing briefly the origin of diplomats and embassies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as means for ongoing dialogue, or "permanent negotiation," he praised the institutions as an "extraordinary development" and crucial vehicles for the "management of relations between sovereign states."

In this increasingly globalized world, Pope said, the management of the relationships between states "will be more important than ever," and the US, like all nations, will "need skilled and trained people to do it well." However, he warned that the number of trained and experienced US Foreign Service officers is insufficient for our nation’s needs. As result, many of the most crucial US diplomatic tasks today are being done by retired officers who, like Pope himself, are asked to come back to help out. What would we think, he asked, if the Secretary of Defense turned to retired generals and admirals to fight the nation's wars because he didn’t trust the colonels and captains to do so? It's a small wonder that officials from other agencies are constantly choosing to ignore the State Department to deal with foreign governments.

For Pope, "the Arab Awakening cries out for an active American diplomatic role." It will require a new relationship, where we treat the "Arab states and populations as equals and partners, not clients or targets." In Libya, he said, there was a hunger for such a relationship with us. Pope doubted the ability of US military institutions to provide that new relationship. He believes that President Obama’s decision to push aggressively on Iran regarding their nuclear ambitions has left him with "reduced margin for maneuver in his second term." Furthermore, he felt that too many of Obama’s hopeful plans for a new day in the Middle East had been undermined by the unexpected events that torpedoed so many optimistic proposals, such as those of the neocons. The US, Pope said, now has limited means for influencing events in places like Bahrain, Morocco, the Persian Gulf, and Arabia, not to mention Palestine.

Most troubling to Pope was the recent reform effort at the State Department, in the form of a 242-page document called the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR). This document advanced two disquieting concepts: first, that "sovereign states are of declining importance [and] diplomacy is increasingly irrelevant;" and the second, that "the proper business of our diplomats is to be handmaiden to the military in nation-building, rather than the conduct of foreign policy."

In a final story to illustrate the misguided nature of our paranoia and our perception that everyone hates us, Pope cited his meeting with a visiting delegation of young, 20-something Libyans at the US Embassy in Tripoli not long after the murder of Chris Stevens. He told them he was sorry for all the security they had had to go through to come into the “fortress.” But he was touched when a girl in the group, “wearing a hijab, the conservative head covering, looked me in the eye and said very directly, ‘No. We are sorry.’”

Reported by Charlie Graham

Q&A

Q: How do we reverse the downgrading of the diplomatic service as an instrument of foreign policy?

Pope: It’s interesting that we are hearing more and more Defense officials, such as Secretary Gates, advocate more use of diplomacy. I’m encouraged that most senior military officers now realize the importance of political solutions for the problems they are being asked to resolve. But the weakness of many civilian institutions has led to a somewhat reluctant military takeover. The State Department itself is somewhat at fault in this, emphasizing response to events rather than the development of long-range strategies. I’m afraid our national attitude about diplomacy is somewhat muddled.

Q: Is there a role for American students in improving this situation?

Pope: The State Department is recruiting more candidates for the Foreign Service Officer career track, but giving them fewer opportunities at the top level of policy-making. The big problem is the challenges to such a career posed by all the issues I’ve discussed here today. It’s an honorable profession, but if I had a daughter who was interested in joining the Foreign Service, I would warn her to go in with her eyes open.

Q (asked by a woman of Iranian origin): Wouldn’t it help if Americans heard more from foreign people about their challenges and about the good will that they actually feel toward America?

Pope: It would, but there you have the problem cited by Barbara Ibrahim of our government’s unwillingness to give visas to citizens from many of the countries we have been discussing.
**Final Panel: Q&A**

The Conference traditionally concludes with a discussion panel that takes questions from the audience and engages the speakers with one another. Sunday’s panel, moderated by Nick Burns, included Greg Gause, Marc Lynch, Barbara Ibrahim, Marwan Muasher, Josh Landis, Larry Pope, and Hossein Mousavian.

**Q:** What is the position, policy, and relevance of Russia in the Middle East?

**Landis:** Both Russia and China drew a line at Syria. They thought Assad might survive. US policy really is about Iran. They want Syria to fall in order to hurt Iran. Russia has other interests. They are propping up Assad in order to prevent regime change. Through Syria they have a front line on the Israel/Palestine conflict, and they can maneuver on that. They have a big port in Syria. If Syria falls, they will have nothing left. Even if Assad retreats to an enclave on the coast, they still will have influence. If they abandon him, they will not be a player.

**Mousavian:** Russia feels a sense of humiliation after the fall of the Soviet Union. Now is the time to regain status. The US has failed in Iraq and Afghanistan and is diverting its attention to East Asia. The US will become energy-independent. Russia and China have a grand strategy to fill the vacuum.

**Gause:** Russia is an energy-exporting state. Right now there is no real competition. If new sources of energy develop and demand falls or prices fall, it will place Russia in conflict with energy exporters and will increase competition for market share. That will be the dynamic we will be talking about down the line.

**Q:** Can we or should we utilize the diverse American Muslim society in helping with the difficult transition to democracy?

**Ibrahim:** The Muslims in the US might be a bridge. We have work to do here in reaching out to that community. Maybe this is a good time to start a dialogue.

**Lynch:** I have been frustrated about the way the war of ideas has been waged in the last decade. Implicit in it is the juxtaposition of the US as secular and liberal and the Muslim world as consumed by religion. My experience is that the US is deeply religious. The genius of the US is that we have reconciled strong religion with a constitution that allows the separation of church and state. That doesn’t mean there is no church. The church is strong, and that is a wonderful thing. The message that we craft should recognize that and not pretend we are something that we are not. I think it was a missed opportunity in the early days when we could only think about combating radicalism and we saw Islam as a source of radicalism.

**Muasher:** In this country Islam is seen as monolithic. Most people lump Al Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Salafism all together. The Muslim Brotherhood might have views we disagree with, but they have been peaceful for decades, and they represent the overwhelming majority of political Islam in many countries.

**Q:** How are the sanctions affecting the people of Iran, in terms of food, medicine, construction, and trade?

**Mousavian:** One word—greatly. The banks cannot transfer any money. The government cannot import basic commodities. I hope this will be something the P5+1 (the group of countries that joined in the diplomatic efforts with Iran regarding nuclear issues) would consider—not to harm the ordinary people.

**Burns:** A student asked me, don’t we have an ethical responsibility not to hurt people? I negotiated three of the UN Security Council Sanctions Resolutions for the US on Iran for the Bush administration. Our first priority was to negotiate with Iran. In the absence of negotiations, what are our options? There is no question that sanctions hurt innocent people, but our objective is to convince the government that they are better off negotiating. That has been a calculation in the past two administrations.

**Pope:** Sanctions are a blunt instrument. They are an action short of war, but they do damage the people. When you are trying to influence the actions of a foreign state you have a limited toolbox, and sanctions are part of that toolbox.
Lynch: I spent a lot of time working on the sanctions issue during the long struggle with the war in Iraq, and the ethical issues were profound. The sanctions seemed to be divorced from any strategic outcome. The question is, do they work? The overwhelming evidence is that the answer is no. They almost never achieve the desired effect.

Q: The elephant in the room is the issue of oil, not only for the oil-rich countries, but also for the poor countries that receive aid from them. How are their economies going also for the poor countries that receive aid? The overwhelming evidence is that the answer is no. They almost never achieve the desired effect.

Muasher: Oil has been both a blessing and a curse in Arab society, in both oil-rich and oil-poor countries. In oil-producing countries, oil has basically killed productivity. People don’t have to work if they can find money on the ground. Oil has created a sort of welfare state, but it has also produced repressive states politically. People don’t have to pay taxes; no taxation, no representation. In oil-consuming countries it has been creating patronage systems. Oil is traded in return for favors and loyalty. It allows these states to spend money beyond their means. In a country like Jordan, 40 percent of the work force works for the government. Unless countries have the will to increase productivity, this situation is unsustainable. The same is true in the rich countries. Even in Saudi Arabia unemployment is very high. This can’t go on.

Gause: It can’t go on forever, but it can go on for a while. The issue is not depletion. There is plenty of oil in the region, and with technological changes they are finding more. The question is population. Low-population states like Kuwait or Qatar have no reason to change. In high-population countries like Iran and Algeria, these are serious and immediate issues. Saudi Arabia is somewhere in between. The problem is domestic consumption. The Saudis are burning all their oil to run their air conditioners. They have among the lowest prices in the world. Consumption is encouraged, not managed. In 30 years, they will have no oil to export. It is a real challenge for exporting nations.

Mousavian: Before the revolution Iran imported almost everything from the West. After the revolution, due to sanctions, Iran became an independent nation producing its own industrial products and conventional arms. There is one remaining problem: the Iranian budget is too dependent on oil. One school of thought says this is a golden opportunity for Iran. Let them sanction oil; then we will build a new economic system not dependent on oil. Then Iran would be completely secure. This effort might be counterproductive for the West.

Q: What will be the economic impact of the turbulence in the Middle East on Europe?

Landis: Migration is one of the greatest impacts. Several years ago during the Bush administration, when Bush was squeezing Syria, the German ambassador in Damascus said to me that Germany’s greatest fear was that he would succeed. We already are inundated with Muslim immigrants, he said. If Syria explodes, hundreds and thousands of Muslims will want to get to Europe. They will find a way through Turkey. This phenomenon is driven by sanctions. America is contributing to the impoverishment of many countries through sanctions. In some ways it is an un-American thing to do. Our basic philosophy has been to support the middle class; through getting wealthier they will become more democratic, and they will change regimes. If sanctions don’t accomplish their goals immediately, people are impoverished and locked into poverty for years. It takes the whole region backwards and puts a lot of pressure on Europe. In Iraq, a third of a million people died because of the sanctions.

Muasher: Europe is in no position today to pour money into the Middle East to try to push economic and political reform, in order to stem immigration, as it did with the Barcelona Process in the mid-1990s. That effort didn’t work because the countries did not cooperate and conditions for aid were too mild.

Lynch: Tunisian economists say yes, we need foreign aid, but what we really want is more open markets and investment and the opportunity for our labor to migrate more freely. In Europe the emphasis has been on aid, which is easier, but it is a mismatch.

Q (to Nick Burns): Yesterday you referred to Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist groups. Give me your definition of terrorism.

Burns: The indiscriminate use of violence to achieve a political purpose is one definition. As I look at the history of our government involvement in the Middle East over the past 25 years, what I see particularly from Hezbollah is repeated attacks; assassination of our citizens; and repeated attacks on our military, including our Marine barracks in Beirut and our embassy in Beirut in January of 1984. I look at this as terrorism; yeah, I do.

Mousavian: It is true that the US considers Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorists groups, but the majority of countries worldwide do not. Iran does not. Even US allies like Saudi Arabia do not. Everybody knows 90 percent of Hezbollah’s support comes from US allies in the region, the Arab countries. One hundred twenty countries of the allied movement do not consider them terrorists. Even the Europeans do not. Hezbollah are in the parliament of Lebanon. Do you consider Lebanon a terrorist country? The perspective in the Middle East is completely different. The people love Hezbollah because they are fighting for the integrity of Lebanon. They love Hamas because they are fighting for the Palestinians.

Ibrahim: An Egyptian student once asked me, “Do you think if the United States of America had just two square miles of its territory occupied for more than 40 years, with no recourse from the international community, that a resistance movement would not form and that they would not someday resort to violence?”
Q: The heart of the Middle East is Palestine, but we haven’t talked about it. Is Palestine not included because Palestine is irrelevant, or because it is such a tough nut to crack that we might as well put it aside and deal with the other subjects first?

Burns: You are right. This is a tough conference to put together. There are so many different issues. I think what happened in the Israeli elections on January 22 was a surprise—a second-place vote for a moderate party dedicated to negotiations with the Palestinians. It will force Netanyahu to think again. If Tzipi Livni comes back as the negotiator there is at least a glimmer of hope. And Secretary Kerry has been speaking about his hopes to reignite the negotiations.

Muasher: I spent most of my professional career trying to bring about peace between the Arabs and Israelis. I was the first ambassador from my country (Jordan) to Israel. I think the United States is going to face an awfully difficult time in the Middle East to regain even part of the credibility that was lost before the Arab Awakening. If it argues to the Arab public today that if you are an Egyptian or Tunisian or Libyan or Moroccan or Yemeni or Syrian yearning for freedom, we are with you, but if you are Palestinian and yearning for freedom, it’s complicated. That is not an argument that will resonate anywhere in the Arab world, let alone with the Palestinians. On the conflict itself I am actually rather pessimistic. I think the two sides have come to a point where they are not able to sit together. The US is the only catalyst that can bring the two sides together, and they seem to have decided that the chances for success are too small to make it worthwhile. I am not optimistic that the second Obama administration is going to make a serious effort. I hope to God I am wrong. In my view a serious effort is not to launch another process. That has lost all credibility in the Middle East. We can’t have two people arguing over a pizza while one of them is eating it. The process doesn’t work when the status quo is changing day by day. Arabs look at the Oslo peace process and the Madrid process as a 20-year-old process which has not produced a result. During that time the number of settlers has increased from 250,000 to over 500,000 since 1993. About 200,000 of them are in East Jerusalem and 80,000 in the heartland of the West Bank. Even if an agreement were signed today it would be nearly impossible to implement it in a way that would separate the two peoples. If they were to be kept together, the security would be a nightmare. If there is no two-state solution within two months—not two years—then I think the window has closed for a very long time, a decade or two. Even with the new coalition, I am not convinced that Netanyahu is ready ideologically to make the necessary concessions to create a viable Palestinian state. In the meantime the number of Arabs and Jews under Israeli control is nearly equal at six million. It can’t be postponed much longer.

Q: As I listened to the exchange between Burns and Mousavian yesterday, I wanted to believe you both. But I couldn’t figure out the facts, and so I couldn’t trust. How do we create a sense of trust among us again?

Mousavian: It is a very bad situation today, with many miscalculations, misunderstandings, misperceptions. We should look forward, and confidence-building is the only way. I’m skeptical that our two governments can recognize their past mistakes and open a new door. For the moment, realistically, the best way forward may be for both governments to open relations people-to-people. Iranians and Americans are not hostile to each other. Perhaps after a decade of tourism, humanitarian and academic relations, facilitating visas, the people can change the course of the hostilities.

Burns: That’s the first time Hossein and I have agreed this weekend. Neither government has committed to full citizen exchange; there are barriers to visas on both sides. What you heard last night between us is real life. I think we have to get into direct negotiations, not multilateral ones, and the initial conversations will be like the one we had last night. There is a huge chasm between our two historical narratives. But we have to keep bringing people together to talk to prevent war. The kind of exchange we had yesterday is far preferable to war.

Reported by Dave Jackson
The Camden Conference—established in 1987—provides the opportunity for renowned experts and interested individuals to share knowledge and concerns on issues of global importance. Each year, a topic is selected and a series of related events are held in Maine communities from Damariscotta to Bar Harbor—culminating in the weekend Conference in February in Camden. The Conference is simultaneously streamed to audiences in Belfast, Rockland, and Ellsworth.

Community Events include lectures, short courses, and symposia; group discussions of selected books, articles, and news reports; and films, art exhibits, and other cultural occasions. All events are open to the public and most are free of charge. They are led by scholars and other well-informed area residents.

Speakers at the three-day Conference come from government, business, the media, academia, and international organizations. Each speaker addresses a facet of the year’s topic, answers questions from the audience, and participates in an exchange of ideas. The speakers generally spend the entire weekend in Camden, challenging each other both publicly and informally.

In previous years, The Camden Conference has examined such topics as “The US in a 21st Century World,” “The Environment and Foreign Policy,” and “Religion as a Force in World Affairs.” In some years, the focus has been on specific geopolitical areas such as China; Europe; and Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. Next year’s Conference will consider “The Global Politics of Food and Water.”

The Camden Conference is a nonpartisan, federally tax-exempt, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation. The Board of Directors includes residents of 10 midcoast towns, all of whom volunteer their time and talent to organize the Conference and related programs.

Financial support for The Camden Conference comes from attendance fees; memberships; individual gifts; and grants from institutions, foundations, and corporations.

EDITING: Dorothea Graham, Camden
DESIGN: Carol Gillette, Communication Graphics, Belfast
PHOTOGRAPHY: Sarah Szvijkos, Damn Rabbit Studios, Rockland
PRINTING: Camden Printing, Camden

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The Global Politics of Food and Water

Global food and water shortages are rapidly emerging as the most critical crisis of our time. Rising food prices, shrinking water availability, climate change, and relentless population growth are converging to force this issue onto the world agenda.

Shortages of food and water are already destabilizing societies and governments, and creating hundreds of refugees. Jim Yong Kim, president of the World Bank, recently gave a sobering warning about the risk of conflicts over natural resources. If the forecast of a four-degree global increase above the historical average temperature proves to be accurate, he said, “There will be water and food fights everywhere.”

Kim called for action to create a carbon market, eliminate fossil-fuel subsidies, and “green” the world’s largest cities. He noted that the 2012 droughts in the US, which pushed up the price of wheat and maize, had led to the world’s poor eating less. For the first time, he said, extreme weather that affects food production had been connected to climate change brought on by human activity.

Among the timely questions that may be addressed in the 2014 Camden Conference:

➤ What new game-plan and alternative policies do we need to overcome market failures?
➤ What new technologies may aid in the process?
➤ What are the impacts of global warming on food production, and how might they affect political stability?
➤ What innovations in organic and commercial agriculture, respectively, hold promise to produce enough food to feed the planet?
➤ Do we have the ability to provide enough water for homes and farms and avoid conflict over water resources in the coming decades?
➤ What particular challenges do climate change, world food prices, poverty, and land-grabbing pose for food security in Africa?
➤ What can the US do to assure the multilateral cooperation needed to establish policies to resolve these challenges?

Check the Camden Conference website for updates on speakers, programs, community events, and registration.