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Transcript Q&A

One Year On: The Challenges of Democratic Transition in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings

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Dr Maha Azzam:

Let me, before I open the floor to questions, just ask you Yezid about the, in a sense, one of the major challenges you posit regarding the political economy. It seems that in the political realm, if we can create in any way a clear definition, a division between the two, we can speak much more a revolutionary situation or a change: free assemblies, accountability, hopefully greater respect for the rule of law, hopefully greater respect for human rights, the list is enormous and the challenge is just as enormous. But when it comes to one of the demands of the protestors, which is social justice, its seems that that is the caveat, that is the real problem, you're going to have the re-emergence of these elites that you spoke about at beginning, or perhaps new elites controlling the situation. In a sense, even if you have a copy of Turkey, where you have the medium and small businessmen emerge in Egypt through the Islamist parties and so on, and others, in terms of the economics of these countries, and the poverty levels of the majority, are we going to see any real change, or are we going to see assemblies and parliaments, and ultimately improvement in terms of less corruption, but an on-going economic situation that really serves the rich and not the vast majority of the poor?

Yezid Sayigh:

I'm sure that the outcome will vary enormously from case to case. Egypt is a country where obviously the rates of poverty and obviously illiteracy are enormously high, and it would seem to be a case that would follow the sort of, the more pessimistic scenario. Certainly, well, the most recent Gallup polls for instance suggest – I can't assess their accuracy – but suggest that a very large majority of Egyptians have confidence in the armed forces, for instance, despite everything that has happened, and think that continuing protests are a bad thing. The armed forces clearly play to this, emphasising nationalism, their victory in 1973, what they give the people in terms of housing at their expense, the army builds houses, it gives away food packages, it opens bakeries and butchers in poorer areas, there is this whole game. Although probably the subsidies that the army directly or indirectly receives along with a large part of the supposedly privatised, state-owned enterprises actually account for something like 80% of total subsidies in Egypt, which are an immense burden on the budget.

And, so, the reality is you could actually help people a whole lot more if you actually cut out a lot of the subsidies that is then allowing people like the armed forces, and like the Paris [incoherent] offering cheap goods to everyone at, you know, better cost, when in fact what they are doing is

disguising the massive cost to the budget. What I'm... and, despite that, I think that if the new parliament – this, of course, depends on what I ended with, the ability of political parties such as the Muslim brotherhood and liberal parties to align with each other on certain issues, and here I'm thinking of finding ways to breaking up the bottle necks in how business operates in Egypt, how economic decisions are made by people in political power and these things can be separated out. If there is a conscious attempt and a sustained attempt to alter this, then maybe you start to get the sort of virtuous circle that we saw.

But it did take a long time in Turkey, of course, I mean, you could even argue if the army hadn't stepped in, in 1980 and sort of put right-wing and left-wing militants in prison, and sorted out the labour unions, and totally changed things. I mean, ironically, they had no intention of bringing the current outcome to pass, but that is what happened. It is difficult for us to assess these historical processes, all I'm really saying is that Egypt has a chance.

What I think for me is the most interesting case and could be the most positive case one is Syria, where, as I think I mentioned earlier, unlike Libya or Iraq with oil – where I think oil has distorted how the political economy works, and empowered the state, and created the state as a prize to capture to capture – Syria has very modest oil resources, as you, as I'm sure you all know, therefore it has a much more productive economy, based on a mixture of light manufacturing and agriculture and services. For a number of different reasons to do with regime maintenance, starting in the 1970s, Hafez al-Assad started liberalisation policies that, led, by the past decade already, if not in fact by the 1990s, to the private sector accounting for more than half of the economy, well before Egypt had done the same, and, in a sense, in a less oligarchic way, despite the existence of oligarchs in Syria, clearly. But there is a pretty big, strong, thriving private sector in Syria with very extensive business networks in Europe and elsewhere thanks to the years of expropriation of the 1960s, which pushed many people abroad, made them succeed in the West, and then they reinvested in Syria. And there has been a process partly due to accession to WTO over the past decade or so that I've seen where Syrians, and Lebanese, Jordanians, Palestinians and some people from the GCC area, have taken much more to investing in each other's economies and doing business in each other's countries than we maybe appreciate.

So, what I'm saying is that clearly there is going to be massive loss and damage to the Syrian economy until things are resolved, but its ability to bounce back, buoyed by the existence of the private sector; by already having

a lot of laws in place that are designed to cater to two sort of sectors, you know, people who depend on the state, but also people who depend on private initiative; the close relationship with Turkey which is really important, I think, and a good model, and will grow again; mixed relations, maybe, with Lebanon; Lebanon, of course, I think will lose out.

But I really, mainly just wanted to say, I think Syria may turn out to be the best example of where there is enormous potential for a more familiar free-market type process to emerge. What that means for social welfare, I don't know, it sort of depends also on which types of parties come to power, what sort of compromises they have to make with each other. There may be other types of consequences there that are not so happy.

Dr Maha Azzam:

Well, let's take some questions from the floor. If you could please stand up, give your name and affiliation, and wait for the microphones. The gentleman in the front.

Question 1:

Could you talk a little about what impact, if any, the Arab uprisings are having on Iran, and vice versa?

Yezid Sayigh:

Okay. Well, I'll answer very briefly because I don't really know. I mean, I'm sure that Iranians... I have read that there was a lot of Iranian interest in the Arab uprisings for all sorts of reasons that the regime didn't like, which is, you know, that 'we can do it'. And it was ironic, of course, that the Iranian government and the president were on the one hand trying to claim credit that this was the real proof of the Islamic, of Khomeini's line etc., that this was correct, but, of course, suddenly things went wrong when the same thing started happening in Syria. But I doubt that I am saying anything that you haven't read in the same sources I have read, that is about as much as I can say with any... before I do something foolish.

Dr Maha Azzam:

There's a gentleman in the second row, I think. No? All right, we'll go back.

Question 2:

Good evening. I want to know your point of view on trade unions, first of all. They seem to have had a very important role in the uprisings themselves, and in preparing the uprisings. Do you see a political role for them in the future?

And, a second question, if I may, on the regional forces that could effect the issue. Not necessarily state forces, more regional civil society all the way up to the Arab League – could it play a similar role to the African Union, for instance, in bolstering democratic transition in the region?

Yezid Sayigh:

I think it is really important to bring labour movements back into the picture, because certainly the Egyptian revolution is unlikely to have happened, or to have happened the way it did, had there not been years of activism, strikes and increasing militancy, or, at least let's say *autonomy* among labour, refusing to contain themselves within the official recognised trade union or federation. And, one of the critical factors in the final days of Mubarak was the moment when hundreds of strikes, or at least dozens of them, I think in one particular day, were launched across the country, and it was that perspective that workers were going to take the revolution to the economy and start closing down factories that probably deepened the conviction among the armed forces that Mubarak was going to have to go. They weren't necessarily a critical factor, partly because the trade unions in most of these countries had been dominated, repressed, co-opted.

An interesting case is that of Tunisia, where union had been co-opted up to a point by the Ben Ali regime, but where it had also maintained a certain, basic level of independence, and sort of basic self-respect, shall we say, which allowed it quite quickly to start responding to events and then to try and re-align itself.

So, I think the picture has varied a lot from place to place. I don't know much about the Syrian case, I imagine that the official unions of this and that and the other are lined up rhetorically behind the regime. But what is really interesting about this is how and whether labour and other trades are organising and unionising in the wake of the revolutions. Certainly in Egypt there are many new organisations, and I'm sure there will be in the other cases. How effective they will be, whether they will unite and be a powerful force or not, whether they will simply enter into new types of bargaining, all separately with the authorities, and once each one is satisfied with its own

little gains it will forget the wider movement, this will probably all happen in one place or another.

It is striking that one of the things that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt did – I forget if this was March or June – was they introduced a pretty restrictive labour law, which bans strikes and other forms of unrest harmful to the economy, which is a clearly regressive, retroactive move. So, you know, that also could be a part of the picture in the future. And we don't know yet whether Islamist parties in the Moroccan government, or in Tunisia, or in the future in Egypt, will prove to be more sensitive to demands – social welfare-type demands and the demands of labour – or take a more corporatist attitude that is 'everyone has to do their bit for the natural good', which is, again, of course, a revival of many old legacies.

Dr Maha Azzam:

Second row in the centre please, and then right at the back.

Question 3:

Amid all these uncertainties, to what extent does foreign policy intrude, and condition what may happen, in particular in the Palestinian-Israeli dispute, with Muslim, or Islamic governments coming to power? Do the Palestinians think, or hope maybe, that there will be more alignment with their cause?

Yezid Sayigh:

Thanks. I think the foreign policy implications are also a bit ambiguous, and less dramatic than you might think, even on Palestine. My sense is that Palestine is stuck where it is for a good long time, and that initial hopes among Palestinians, whether in the West Bank or Gaza or elsewhere, that Egypt, in particular, was going to transform its foreign policy now that Mubarak has gone as he was seen as far too amenable to American demands and pressures, I don't think this is being born out. It was immediately evident to me, and it was what I expected, that the immediate authorities, the interim authorities, and by that I mean the supreme council, had no intention of changing the status quo on the border of Israel with Gaza, for a variety of reasons of their own, the Egyptian army is certainly not going to allow anything that will prejudice US foreign military assistance, which as you all know is \$1.3 billion a year. And beyond that I think Palestine, for most audiences, remains, as it always was, an important, emotive, symbolic thing

that can be used to express dissatisfaction and discontent with other issues that are closer to home. But I don't expect a wave of transformed foreign policies from Morocco to Iraq that will bring all this to bear.

That said, my assumption also is that the one party that will benefit will be the Hamas government in Gaza, because although the Egyptians have been slow, and probably will try and avoid opening up the Gaza border completely to trade, they have relaxed it a lot for the movement of people, and the smuggling economy through the tunnels is booming. And, so, this is the status quo that, sort of, I think will remain for a long while to come. But, this already gives a lifeline to the Hamas government, and just a few weeks ago the Hamas prime minister, Ismail Haniyeh, went on a tour to Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, and I forget which Gulf country, and clearly is seeking to place himself and his government a little bit more on the world stage, or at least the regional stage. And we may well have a quasi-state in Gaza for, you know, the next ten years while the West Bank comes under increasing Israeli pressure and colonization.

Dr Maha Azzam:

Centre back, I think there was someone there, if you still want to ask a question. No? Then the gentleman here, just behind you with the beard.

Question 4:

I was just wondering, and I wanted to ask, whether this transitional phase can actually lead to the Muslim nations developing a pan-Islamist tendency again, and maybe working towards a unified leadership in the former shape of a caliphate?

Dr Maha Azzam:

Yes shall we take...another two or three...I think in that corner by the door. Yes, right at the back, and then the gentleman in front of him.

Question 5:

I was very interested in, well, everything you said, Yezid, but particularly I would like to come back to the economic side of it, managing expectations and so on. It seems to be thinking of my time when I was there, trying to engage with Ben Ali's government on liberalisation and greater transparency

that investment was actually quite a good way of squaring the circle, if you could. And the same remains true, I think, today. You need the jobs, you need the foreign investments, but without the foreign investors thinking they are going to have some reasonable rule of law, you're not going to get that. Now does that give us some clues as to what the outside world, particularly Europe, can do to help? And I underline 'do to help', rather than impose. And the other question I had for you is...

Dr Maha Azzam:

No, I think...I've got so many on my list, I'm so sorry. Alright, and the gentleman who has been waiting for a while just in front of him, in the glasses.

Question 6:

Very interesting, Yezid, thank you. Could I ask you to address one big question that I'm quite troubled by? Why do you think that the Arab monarchies – Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia – have managed more successfully than the republics do, to weather the storms of the Arab spring?

Dr Maha Azzam:

Shall we take those first?

Yezid Sayigh:

Okay. Well, on the first, I see... I mean, a very short answer really, though one could go on maybe for longer, but on the Islamic, common Islamic policy, the caliphate etc., I see no reason to expect any such thing today any more than twenty years ago or in the 1960s or the 1940s. I mean, there are issues and causes that concern many people around Muslim societies; I have yet to see any real convincing evidence that that ever translates into the commitment of the resources needed to produce joint, you know, foreign policies, even on trade policies.

I mean, look at the difficulties faced within the EU to agree joint policies between countries who have far more similarity in terms of their basic norms, and declared values, and constitutional systems, and economies, and so on. When you compare that with Islamic societies that are so vastly more different in terms of their same, you know, political, security, legal,

administrative and economic structures, and I don't quite see why we need to expect seek that out or why it is, sort of, necessary.

On foreign investors and what they can do to help. I am sure they could do a lot, they can also do harm. But the critical question is what national governments and parliaments do to transform how economic decision-making and business decisions are made in their countries. Otherwise, you can have no end of foreign investment and of aid, which doesn't transform or help transform political and social realities in the given country – on the contrary it helps maintain the status quo and deepen it – and that is exactly what we saw in most of these countries. I mean, it was entirely possible for authoritarian systems such as Ben Ali's or Mubarak's to liberalise and globalise by a certain measure, you know, the share of exports to the economy, within the economy. And we take at these little indicators, and we think 'ah'. And certain laws are put on the books, but then if you look at median wages, median income, you look at how contracts are awarded within the public sector, from the public sector, or any such measure, then you get a very different picture.

And it was entirely possible. I mean, I've spoken to people working with foreign companies, who find it tremendously easy to operate in Egypt, they get their license in no time, they come in and out, etc. How many Arab companies, say a Lebanese bank, or a Syrian company, or a Jordanian chemical factory, would be able to do the same thing in Egypt, and would have the confidence it could do the same thing in Egypt? I don't know of any. That tells you something; that has to tell you something. So, I'm just trying to place the focus where it needs to be, in my view, which is that it is up to the new governments and the new parliaments to take these issues and work on them immediately and start transforming for their own business community, and if it doesn't work for them, no one can help them. And no amount of aid or grants, let alone investment can change that.

I think, the question on monarchies. You will probably get a much more complete answer from the paper that was recently published by two of my colleagues, Marina Ottaway and Marwan Muasher, a Carnegie paper specifically on how the monarchies have weathered the storm. Now, one difference is, of course, that most of the monarchies are in the Gulf and they have been cushioned by oil wells and gas wells and so on, so that obviously helps a lot. Jordan and Morocco, I think, are very different types of monarchies in many different ways, although it is interesting that the GCC has been exploring membership in the GCC for Jordan and Morocco. But, it is not clear, I mean the Jordanian monarchy has managed to weather things better.

It hasn't had the sort of, some of the polarising socio-economic trends as Syria or Egypt. It has others.

I mean, one thing that I think is very important in Jordan is the fact that you've got a massive state bureaucracy, I mean, armed forces, internal police, but also the civil service. I mean, the armed services alone and the police account for 200,000 people. There are 160,000 military retirees, let alone police retirees, so we're talking about 400,000 to 500,000 people with their families who get, maybe very basic salaries and pensions, but it keeps them above abject poverty – a sort of genteel poverty, in Victorian terms, with a few bonuses here, a few bonuses there. So Jordan survives, in part, the monarchy survives because it can maintain a critical social constituency above the 40% of the population that have gone down to or below the poverty line as a result of neo-liberal economic reforms. As long as it can keep people – who are also poor, I mean, Jordanian towns in the south are not wealthy thanks to being loyal to the king, they are definitely under-developed and they deserve much more – but, they have basic job security, every family has at least one person somewhere in the civil sector, in the state sector, probably more than one, at least one in the armed forces or the police, and so on and so forth, that then translates into their presence in local government, in parliament, in the ministries, whatever. That is partly how the monarchy of Jordan has survived anyway.

So, there are a number of different devices, I don't think there is one single model, but issues of legitimacy, I think, have come into this; the fact that republican systems and presidents have become so monarchic in nature, while pretending to base their claim and their legitimacy on other or republican or nationalist values. Whereas the monarchies, in that sense, have structures that maintain a different type of legitimacy. Whether this can hold in the future, whether Saudi Arabia can deal with the levels of unemployment and poverty it actually has but disguises, and continue to throw billions of dollars at its problem.

I mean, if you just look at the commitments Saudi Arabia already has and the ones it took on last year to head off any unrest, plus its attempt to try and help out neighbouring Arab countries to prevent other unrest. If you measure that trend against the fact that domestic oil consumption in Saudi Arabia is rising, which means a gradually lessening amount left over for export, and for revenue, they are clearly on a very worrying trend. They are not there yet, and they have been pushing off the hard choices for year after year, every time the oil prices rise, they say that 'we can push this off for another year or two', but they're getting there.

Dr Maha Azzam:

Let's take one more round, and then see how we go. The gentleman in the centre there, and then the lady in the corner.

Question 7:

How near or how far is Egypt from repatriating the money stolen by the Mubarak family?

Dr Maha Azzam:

Thank you, and in the corner over there, please.

Question 8:

Assuming that the revolutionaries and the new political parties can't dismantle the legacies of crony capitalism and elite patronage overnight, I was just wondering if you could talk a bit more about the kind of political trade-offs that they might have to make in the near term?

Yezid Sayigh:

'They', sorry, being generally, or?

Question Eight:

Revolutionaries and the new political parties. I'm thinking particularly in Egypt.

Dr Maha Azzam:

And the gentleman at the front, I think you had a question? Alright, I think we'll take one more then.

Question 9:

There seems to be a presumption that we are dealing here with Muslim nations, Muslim states alone, and yet I think what we should recognise is a liberal democracy not only depends on the rule of law, but it also respects the rights of minorities. There are at least three states I can think of immediately in the region – Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria – where there are very substantial

Christian minorities, for example, and yet we are hearing talk quite often now about Sharia law being introduced in Egypt. How is this whole system going to work out, when we bear in mind what is going on this moment in Nigeria, are we not heading... is there not a danger that we are heading for some serious friction?

Yezid Sayigh:

Well, on repatriating Mubarak money, I have no idea. I don't think anyone actually knows how much money he really has because what you hear and read out there is pure speculation, and then someone throws out a figure, and someone else picks it up, and then it gets expanded on. I mean, how many figures have we read about the extent of the military economy, or the share of the military's hold in the Egyptian economy? I have seen everything from 5% to 40%. Have I seen any reasoning to back any of that up, let alone evidence? None. Now, there are a few experts who know what they are talking about, but these statistics are often meaningless. The number of billions that your ordinary Egyptian taxi driver expects to be brought back from Switzerland, you know, do we have any evidence that any of that really exists? Not because I think Mubarak and his family didn't indulge.

But, as for the prospects, well, first of all, let's see how his trial goes. I mean, the way that his trial has been set up is very worrying, not simply because it looks like the army, for instance, might want to make it possible for him to get away, and to live out his life in the international medical centre, but also because the prosecution case is appallingly put together, and there has been no attempt to create a genuine case that actually digs in the files and looks up hard evidence. It is sort of rhetorical. If past experience is anything to go by, I am not hopeful. How much of [Ferdinand] Marcos' money ever made it back to the Philippines? Mobutu [Sese Seko, from the Democratic Republic of Congo]? King Hassan [II] of Morocco? I don't know...well, okay, Hassan died a natural death at least, I mean, no one asked for the money, or not yet. But I doubt the money ever got back, so why should we expect it here? And probably, we would find, even if we had a full accounting, is not as much as you would expect... not enough to change Egypt's fortunes.

The real change in Egypt's fortunes are to, first of all, to have some transparent data. One of the hardest thing to do in Arab countries, pretty much all Arab countries, some worse than others, is to have hard economic data that is dependable and that is dependable over time, and that is in the same units, as it were, of measure. Do we really know whether Egyptian

state-owned, or partly state-owned, or partly privatised banks have any remaining bad debt? I wouldn't be surprised if there was, but we don't know, and we have no way of knowing. I very much doubt that military industries are actually as efficient as they pretend to be, or many of the parastatals are. Not because they are publically owned enterprises, that doesn't necessarily make them inefficient, but we just don't know. And there is probably an immense amount of money that could be made, or saved, or recuperated within they system because, as I mentioned earlier much of the subsidies, the whole subsidies benefits actually the wealthier classes in. Much as tax breaks in the US, or subsidies in many affluent countries tend to disproportionately benefit those who already have a lot of money, and rarely do they benefit the poor. So that is where to look, I think.

The question on trade-offs versus cronyism; I think the trade-offs are more about how to trade-off the transition... the transfer power from the armed forces to the civilian authorities. If you start trading-off with cronyism, I mean I'm not sure... [Incoherent voice in crowd]... No they're not, what I mean is... I'm not clear, I can't think of... I'm not an economist, I'm trying to learn more about political economy, but I mean, cronyism is about a structure, an informal structure of power, and that translates itself into privileged access to funds, or contracts, or resources, and opportunities and so on. And, as long as there is any part of that, then I think that it is going to replicate itself and expand itself.

Well, the immediate worry, in any case, I think, is more about... the real trade-off right now facing us is whether the political parties of Egypt stand firm and negotiate a meaningful exit for the armed forces that actually brings the armed forces meaningfully under civilian authority and oversight, that brings the defence budget, the military economy, and other sources of funds they have got – discretionary sources, etc. – under civilian authority and parliamentary scrutiny, unambiguously. And, secondly, if there are issues of foreign policy or whatever that need to be sorted out, you know, war powers, for instance, that the army is afraid that you've got a president who suddenly declares war on Israel, well, that is a fair concern. In the US they have dealt with it historically, by making sure that the president, after Vietnam, had to declare war within a certain time period, and this had to be approved by congress: war powers. I mean, there are ways of dealing with those sorts of concerns.

The key issue is whether the armed forces should retain the various exclusions and exceptions they have from accountability to civilian government before the law, whether they continue to enjoy immunities and

exceptions, as well as exclusive, undisciplinary control over their assets, and funds, and so on. All of which is highly problematic, and if that is part of the compromise, if they get to retain these things, I think we won't have a healthy transition in Egypt to deeper democracy. What we may have then – to come to the other part of the question – is governments that continue to lack the real power to transform the nature of the political economy, that transform how wealth is created, and generated, and used in Egypt, that gets some sort of improvement in the distribution of wealth without necessarily re-introducing old-style redistributive policies. If you have a future government that is burdened officially with the responsibility to provide these solutions but isn't empowered to provide these solutions, which is what we saw over the last year, when none of the three interim cabinets under the armed forces had the slightest ability to resolve anything, they were doomed to fail, that could happen again in a slightly modified way. That is the critical trade-off right now.

Now, if the new parties that come to power, and especially, I guess, the Freedom and Justice Party or the Muslim Brotherhood, if they replicate any part of the old-style economic decision-making structure then I am fearful that they are going to undermine their own ability to transform social welfare, social justice, and create investment opportunities, and they are going to become more vulnerable to the armed forces, and more dependent on anyone who comes along with money.

Finally, on rights of minorities, I think that is a hugely important issue, and that, of course, democratisation is all about, not simply majority rule, it is also about the protection of minority rights. And not necessarily as separate things, but just that people have the right to be in the minority. That, because the majority does decide something, doesn't entitle it to impose everything it wants on the minority. Because then, if certain majority-minority relationships are structural – i.e. in a country like Lebanon, where which community, which sectarian community you belong to counts – then you are always going to be a loser if you happen to be in a community that happens to have fewer members. Like, let's say, the Druze community. And you are always going to be a winner if belong to the majority community, and if the political system is structured around that membership, as is partly now the case in Iraq, as well.

So, clearly, that is a critical, massively important issue. Whether the rise of Islamism is the only threat to that, I'm not sure. In Lebanon, it is interesting that the Maronite patriarch, the new one, [Becharar] Boutros al-Rahi, came out with statements that were understood, and I think rightly so, as basically saying we don't want – not simply we don't want to get involved in Syria, but that – opposing change in Syria, precisely because he sees it as bad for the

Christians of Lebanon, and not only for the Christians in Syria. Now, there is a problem there because on the one hand you can understand the fear. There is immense fear among Christians in Lebanon, I mean, absolute fear, and not just over the last year; the fear has been deepening for years. But, equally siding with Bashar al-Assad if going to be problematic. It is fundamentally... there is a deep moral dilemma there.

Egypt is an interesting case, because there are still among the youth movement, among the Muslim Brotherhood youth, in particular, but also, even among the Salafis and others who have come out time and again and insisted that we are one hand. They still want to be able to say that Sharia is the principle source of legislation; but, almost all Arab countries – but, I think except for Tunisia – have had that for decades as part of their constitution, I don't know about Lebanon, I guess. And, what I'm saying is, that, in and of itself, is not the critical thing, the question is, what about the rest of the laws, and how they are applied, and who gets to interpret them, and what protections there are built into the system to ensure that there is no excess in either direction?

Let us not forget that for decades, secular people, or so-called secular people of all stripes did not have to fight for their rights to prefer their forms of dress, or whatever, because they were in power, or people who were reasonably similar to them were in power. It is about time, maybe, that secular people, or even liberal people, have to stand up and fight for democracy too. I mean, in a way, I see it as not simply fighting for rights against an autocrat, but also the right to be an opposition is also something to fight for. I mean, I would want... I claim the right, if I were a Palestinian living in Gaza for instance, or West Bank, it is my right to have a duly elected government. And if that government is Islamist and does things I don't like, I should learn to have to fight for myself within the law as part of a democratic process. I mean, that is as much a right as the right to be in power.

So, the concerns are very real, and they are important./ I am just saying we also have to start learning that these countries are now going to something that didn't have before, you know, contestation, peaceful contestation, which may sometimes need to be, you know, managed, as people start to get a bit nasty here and there. Everyone has to learn about contestation, both about tolerating it, but also about presenting it. And what the young people are doing in Tahrir Square is fantastic. Whether they also learn what the limits are to their activism as well, in order to create this sort of space is also important.

And I just think it is wonderful to be at that point, that is why I ended on that point, that we are for the first time in decades talking about these new political forces, and asking what they are going to do next, and whether they will be tolerant or not, or pluralist or not, this wasn't even a question a year or two ago in Tunisia, or in Egypt, or in Syria, and barely in Iraq – sadly – nowadays. It is great that we are even asking the question.

Dr Maha Azzam:

Well, on that note, thank you very much, I'm going to have to draw the meeting to a close. And, apologies to all those people waiting to ask questions. But, thank you very much, Yezid, for guiding us through these enormous challenges, and allowing us to think more deeply about the issues. I think we are going to be revisiting this again, but thank you very much for joining us today.

[Applause]

One Year On: Challenges of the Democratic Transition in the Wake of the Arab Uprising. Website. Spencer, C. Tunisia's Nobel Peace Prize Should Be Europe's Wake-Up Call. 2015. In-text: (Spencer, 2015). Your Bibliography: Spencer, C. (2015). Tunisia's Nobel Peace Prize Should Be Europe's Wake-Up Call. [online] Chatham House. Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/tunisia-s-nobel-peace-prize-should-be-europe-s-wake-call> [Accessed 3 May 2017].

Journal. Stepan, A. Tunisia's Transition and the Twin Tolerations. 2012 - Journal of Democracy. In-text: (Stepan, 2012). Your Bibliography: Stepan, A. Tunisia's Transition and the Twin Tolerations. 2012. Journal of Democracy. The FPRI's Project on Democratic Transitions has produced several articles of related interest over the years, published with FPRI's journal Orbis and other scholarly journals. Readers of this volume on democratic transitions may also be interested in the select PDT publications below: The Arab Uprisings of 2011: Ibn Khaldun Encounters Civil Society. 50 By Theodore Friend (July 2011). Currently, he serves as a Senior Fellow and Director of the Project on Democratic Transitions at FPRI. The contrary view, to which we at the Project on Democratic Transitions generally subscribe, is that both the challenges and the keys to success in building effective democracies and market economies are parallel in important ways from one country to another.