



Beyond the Headlines
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Author and Journalist

What's Next: Phase II of the Middle East Uprisings

Ambassador Joško Paro: So ladies and ladies and ladies and gentlemen. [*Laughter.*] It is my pleasure and also honor to be a host of this gathering. I welcome wholeheartedly the Women's Foreign Policy Group. Today we are going to have an exceptional—as always exceptional people, exceptional lecturers—at the time which cannot be more right to discuss the matters of the Middle East.

I must say that we are—all the diplomatic community has been hit with the news from Libya and I would also like to pay tribute to the sacrifice of our American colleagues. It is really something that sends waves of sorrow through the diplomatic ranks here. Today we had a couple of diplomatic events and that was commemorated on every occasion.

Well I think that Patricia is going to present your speaker but I must say that looking at the CV, first I must admit with shame that I haven't read any of those books that have so attractive titles but I promise I will. [*Laughter.*] Obviously we have a person who has a double career as an author and practioner of journalism, which means an engaged person, so we don't expect anything but [a] very, very interesting lecture and comments. So thank you very much. [*Applause.*]

Patricia Ellis: Well thank you so much, Ambassador. We really appreciate you opening up your beautiful embassy here to us and for your very, very warm hospitality—we're truly grateful. We've had a longstanding relationship with Croatia and we're very happy to be back, and actually I'm just back from Dubrovnik, which is truly a beautiful place.

Good evening and welcome to everyone, to our members, to our guests. I'm Patricia Ellis, President of Women's Foreign Policy Group. We promote women's voices and women's leadership on pressing international issues of the day and we're so glad that you could all join us for the first event of the fall season. Certainly it could not be more timely because of yesterday and today's events at the US consulate in Benghazi, and also the embassy in Cairo. Our hearts go out to the families of Ambassador Stevens and his staff that were killed in the terrible attack. Tonight we also want to explore all of the dramatic changes that are taking place on a daily basis in the Middle East, and we couldn't have a better guide to help us navigate this than Robin Wright.

She certainly is, as the Ambassador said, a well-known author and journalist, and foreign policy analyst. She's been on the news today—I know she was on NPR—maybe other things, but she is going off to be interviewed by CNN right after this and so we're really lucky to have her. Robin's bio is in the program book so I'm just going to give you a few highlights, but Robin has covered the region for four decades. She has covered 140 countries and worked for many publications, including *The Washington Post*, *The LA Times*, and also, as the Ambassador pointed out, she's an author of numerous, very insightful books on the Middle East. Most recently she edited a book called *The Islamists are Coming*. Last year she spoke to the Women's Foreign Policy Group about her book *Rock the Casbah*, which

was really fascinating, and she's currently a joint fellow at the US Institute of Peace and also the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars.

Before I turn it over to Robin, I just wanted to recognize our board member who's with us, Donna Constantinople. I want to welcome the ambassadors—we have the Ambassador of Bosnia right here and other diplomats. And just wanted to mention two upcoming and other timely events with two State Department officials. We're going to have an event next week with Esther Brimmer. She's the Assistant Secretary for International Organizations and she's going to be talking about US priorities at the UN with the opening of the General Assembly session, so that should be quite interesting. And then we're going to have on October 10th Anne Richard, who is Assistant Secretary for Refugees, Population, and Migration, and will be talking about Syria and refugees—and she will just have come back from participating in some meetings with the Turks. So, I think that should be extremely interesting.

It's now my privilege and pleasure to join my friend Robin Wright for a conversation on What's Next: Phase II of the Middle East Uprisings, and then we will follow it up by Q&A with the audience. So, thank you again for joining us. [*Applause.*]

Robin Wright: Can I just say, this is supposed to be a Q&A, but I want to thank the Ambassador as well for hosting us tonight. I was in Dubrovnik 41 years ago. It was one of the first assignments I had as a young reporter and I loved it. I can still see those images embossed in my head. So, fantastic.

Ellis: So, let's begin. We actually had a slightly different plan prior to yesterday, but let's begin with the attacks of yesterday in both Benghazi and in Cairo. What happened? What does it mean for Libya and Egypt? And what about for relations with the US?

Wright: First of all, I should say that Chris Stevens is a very close personal friend and had been for a quarter of a century. We always ended up in the same hell holes on earth. [*Laughter.*] Countries going through transition, difficult security challenges, and he did it with such gusto, enthusiasm, and true affection for the people on the ground. This was a man who knew the streets as well as the elites. He was tremendously impressive in really trying to reach out and, despite the security challenges in so many different parts of the world, he was willing to take on conventional wisdom and try to shape US foreign policy in the ways that the people on the ground appreciated it, not just the people on the Hill or the American public, and that is often one of the hardest assignments for a diplomat.

In terms of what happened, look, there is still a lot we don't know about the attacks in Benghazi. We know that the Salafis—the ultraconservatives in Egypt—were responsible for the attack in Cairo. They were responding to a very controversial film, 13 minutes of which ended up on YouTube, and shows some quite offensive speculation about the Prophet Mohammed and his personal activities. That's, you know—you can read about it in other stories. I find it so offensive that it's really hard to talk about in the same way Christians would feel if they saw Jesus or Jews with Moses or David or something doing those kinds of things in a video. And that to me reflects a certain kind of danger and that's the rise of the Salafis. I did an op-ed in *The New York Times* last month saying, don't fear all Islamists, fear the Salafis. The Salafis are those who are like Al-Qaeda in their philosophy, wanting to take back 21st century societies going through these democratic transitions to the 7th century and the following of the ways of life and the purity of the first three generations after the Prophet Mohammed.

What happened in Tripoli increasingly appears—and I say appears because we don't know—I mean we all have to be careful about freedom of association, that one thing doesn't automatically assume another. And it appears that this may have been a planned attack. That's what the White House said this afternoon, and it may have played off a spontaneous demonstration, but it does not look like it was spontaneous mob organized in Cairo.

There is also some speculation that this is related to the US assassination of al-Libi, who was an Al-Qaeda extremist based in Yemen, killed by drones. This was several months ago. Al-Qaeda usually will acknowledge after a brief period of time when they've lost someone. They hadn't this time. But al-Zawahiri had issued a statement yesterday saying that al-Libi actually had died and he also called on followers of Al-Qaeda to attack American targets. So, there's a lot of speculation about were these acts related? Was this an Al-Qaeda cell, Al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb that organized a planned attack that may have preceded 9/11? May not have been related necessarily to the film—who knows. So there's a lot we don't know and I would just caution, having covered so many of these crises over the years, that we really need to get the facts.

Now, what does it mean? The great challenge—let me put it a different way. I went back to Tunisia in March and I went to the street corner where the young fruit vendor had set himself on fire in December 2010, which literally ignited the uprisings. And I went to the same street corner where he peddled fruit and I said to the other fruit vendors on the street, "So what do you think?" This was a year—over 14 months later, and they said, "Well, we have a lot more freedom and far fewer jobs." And what we have to remember is that the fruit vendor set himself on fire because a government inspector had demanded a bribe from him and he supported his five siblings, his mother, and his ailing uncle. And when he refused to pay the bribe, which he had paid quite often, the inspector confiscated his fruit and his electronic scale. Now, it's hard to believe but that bribe was for seven dollars. And you know, you think of what the region is going through and how much it costs, whether it's NATO or the Saudis buying out their populations or whatever, but you know one seven dollar bribe started it off. It showed how combustible these societies were.

And the fact is that, a year and a half later—20 months later in some countries—that governments have not been able to address these basic issues. Not just of giving people the right to vote for whatever party, which was a secondary issue. It is addressing that sense of dignity and justice that all these people wanted. And the United States has been working very hard over the past—particularly—eight months, I guess, trying to get plans in place to provide aid and to get US companies involved in helping develop jobs. And one of the tragedies of the timing was not just that it happened on 9/11, a psychological moment for all Americans, but that it happened just two days after a delegation of 100 American executives from blue-chip companies had been in Cairo, talked to the president about investing. And they wanted to know two things: one was whether there would be the kind of economic reforms that would encourage investment, ensure that funds weren't lost to corruption and so forth, but also security, because the reality is that Cairo is a much more insecure city than it was under autocratic rule—hard reality. And they came away with pretty good feelings about Egypt.

And there is a sense that President Morsi has done a lot of the right things. He's worked with the Israelis in mopping up the Sinai, he went to Tehran but he got up and gave a speech condemning President Assad of Syria and calling for him to leave office. He's taken actions that are actually a lot of the things we would want him to do. He's talked about aid; not just \$3.2 billion, which was the original amount from the IMF, but \$4.8 [billion]. And he has stood up to the Salafis, who have said this involves interest or usury and said, "it's in the interests of the country." So he's taken a lot of the action that even though he is from the Muslim Brotherhood, a controversial organization, really reflect fairly well on this new government. And then this happens. And I think, tragically, he's made a terrible mistake because we have not seen language from him in 24 hours that condemns this, and that would deal with the emotional feelings, the raw feelings, that Americans have and some of those executives who have to go back and say is the investment worth it? Is this a risk that we're willing to take? And that this action in Egypt could undermine much more than US-Egypt relations. It could actually unravel a lot of the things the Egyptians are trying to do.

And let me explain, this was by a tiny minority. You have 85 million people in Egypt and we had 2000 in front of the embassy. That's a tiny segment of society and they didn't mobilize tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands like the uprising did originally. So the tragedy is—and it's mirrored in Libya

where Chris Stevens was doing very noble work in trying to get not financial help—but in knowing how to help Libya. Libya is an oil-rich country. They have the means to do a lot of the things they need to do but they don't know how to do it, whether it's rule of law, or developing institutions, women's groups, NGOs and so forth. And so he was spearheading a lot of the kinds of activities that help build new democracies, and so that's the tragedy long-term.

And needless to say there are a lot of us who know this region and who have seen these incidents before whether it's Ayatollah Khomeini condemning the satanic verses and Salman Rushdie condemning him to death—a drama—and I covered all of it—that lasted a decade before the Iranians pulled back that fatwa. It led to a fracture in relations—that were seen, because of this stupid film—and nobody really knows who's behind it because there's been all kinds of speculation—that it undermines something for a long time and may even spread.

Ellis: Can I follow up on a couple of your points? Number one, in terms of the Egyptian response versus the Libyan response, the Libyans got on television, they apologized, and all that. How do you see that affecting the response from the US, number one, and what's really at stake for Morsi? What are the pressures on him from so many corners that you think has been holding him back from saying something? Because he has his Brotherhood, he has so many different groups in this society and then I also...

Wright: I'm getting there. I'm at the point in life where I can't remember multiple questions. [*Laughter.*] So let me do those two. On the different responses, one of the things that Hillary Clinton said—for those of you who haven't seen her yet—pointed out, and I think President Obama did too in his statement—was that the Libyans got out there early, tried to fight with the Marines who were there to get the extremists, the Salafis, whoever was involved, to back off. And they went in and got Chris and took him to the hospital where they tried to revive him for 90 minutes—he suffered, he died of asphyxiation, being overwhelmed by fumes—and not knowing that he was the Ambassador. The President of Libya very quickly came out, condemning this action, contacting his American counterparts. And it's very striking—that you have this sense that Libyans have dealt with this crisis in a way that is dignified and reflects the contributions that Americans and the Europeans made in ousting Qaddafi, a man who I interviewed many times and who was as loopy as he seemed, and in contrast President Morsi hasn't and it's just mystifying why he hasn't.

Now, one of the problems for Morsi is that his biggest political challenge is not from—and Ronna has just come back, she can tell me if she disagrees—is less from the liberals and secularities and it's more from the Salafis. Remember the Muslim Brotherhood spent 84 years working its way up the ladder, going through different phases, renouncing violence in '69, in the 80's beginning to run for office under the cover of other parties, other individuals, in the mid-90's running for parliament more openly—it was the largest opposition party in Egypt, with 88 members of parliament under Hosni Mubarak. Whereas the Salafis literally were largely apolitical and were willing to accept a Muslim leader, even if he wasn't an autocrat, because he was a Muslim. In June last year, they decided they wanted to participate in politics and very quickly formed not one party, but several—one of course as the dominant player—and by January had won 25% of the seats in parliament when [the] Muslim Brotherhood won 47%. It was just stunning. That was the biggest surprise of the election: not how many the Muslim Brotherhood won, but how many the Salafis won.

So Morsi faces the pressure, particularly given that the flashpoint was this film and that Egypt is working on its new constitution and it's under pressure from the Salafis to introduce very rigid ideas, whether it's about women's rights, minority rights, the role of Shari'a, and he's taken some pretty bold positions. So I think—I mean, I'm not trying to excuse or explain or justify his total failure, abysmal failure, in failing to come out and say something, but I'm trying to offer context of the environment in which this is all playing out.

Ellis: So what can we learn from these two incidents about future US involvement and engagement in these countries and in the region, and what about the perception of the US at this time in the area?

Wright: The big debate that has defined relations, really since the 1979 revolution, is can Islam and democracy coexist? Can the West and the Islamic world bridge the deep divide? One of the things that's been so interesting over the last year and a half is to see the way that the debate had changed and that the bottom line emerging was that the future of Islam and democracy are really interdependent in this region. It used to be that people said Islam must reform before it can democratize. Now the debate is increasingly that, for many of these societies trying to democratize, they will have to go through Islam, and I'm happy to explain that in greater detail.

But the challenge of these incidents is that it leads a lot of people who don't know this part of the world and who have, for understandable reasons, deep suspicion—it leads them back to the old stale bottom line about the Islamic world: that it can't coexist with the West. That's the real danger to all of us. In both cases, you have such a tiny minority of people involved, really, and that's the striking thing about it. Whether it's the protest in Cairo or the incident in Benghazi, tiny numbers were involved, and that they didn't mobilize a lot more, instantly.

Ellis: Okay, so I'd like to turn to two other parts of the region very much in the news. One is Iran and the other is Syria. Just yesterday, Prime Minister Netanyahu told the United States that they're not going to be told when they can take military action. This is nothing new, but it came just at the same time that all this is happening and so I'm just wondering—diplomacy hasn't seemed to really work in terms of Iran. What is your thinking about military action and the timing and the implications of this?

Wright: You make such a good journalist; there are lots of questions in each one. [*Laughter.*] Look, the Ambassador knows better than anyone in this room that diplomacy is a process that takes a lot of time. When you're dealing with the longstanding tensions between Iran and the West, this is not something you flick a switch and you can get a deal that either side really buys into. And the election schedule in both countries has complicated this. The United States has clearly two candidates with different perspectives on Iran, although they're much more alike than it might seem on the surface. There's a lot more bluster on one side than the other, but they both basically say the same thing—similar things anyway—when it comes to what they do: that military options are on the table, that diplomacy hasn't completely failed but is running out of time and so forth. Anyway, because of our election the Iranians believe that, if the Obama administration actually did a deal, then it might just evaporate if Romney wins and there is no reason to engage in a compromise that might—that might get the rug pulled out from underneath them. So there is no interest, very little interest, in Iran in doing something before the election.

And Iran faces presidential elections next year and President Ahmadinejad is out. There are two-term limits, four years each—just as in the United States—in Iran, and the big question is, who is going to succeed him? And that plays out because there is actually a diversity of opinion, wide opinion in Iran, even among conservatives. There's a whole spectrum of different players, even among the conservatives and hard-liners. There are over two dozen parties there that are conservative or hard-line or factions in Iran.

Now, will there be a military strike before our election, by either Israel or the United States? If I were a betting woman—and I have to tell you that my father was a law professor who bet on everything except things you bet on. He bet on politics. [*Laughter.*] He just—never more than a quarter, and when he died my mother had to take his wallet out and he had a little pad of paper where he noted all these bets and my mother had to pay them off or collect in his memory—and so I, in that tradition, I always say, I ask people: if you had a quarter, what would you bet? I would bet 50 cents that we will not see a military strike before the election. I think the United States will use every bit of pressure it has to prevent it. Now, does that mean that there isn't a wildcard—some incident that triggers as it often happens—

whether, it is the Tet Offensive or—you know there are lots of flash points, things that are unpredictable: confrontation in the Gulf, revolutionary guards might want some kind of incident serve their hard-line preferences. Yeah, that's a possibility I never forget.

I've covered Iran, been to Iran almost every year since 1973. And I have covered all eight years of the Iran-Iraq War, and I remember being in Tehran when the US shot down the Iranian passenger jet, and I never would have expected that would lead the Iranians to end this war—really, it was astounding. So there are wildcards, and I often say to my friends in the State Department, I think it will be some wildcard that will actually lead to a deal and who knows what it is? That it's these unknowables, these triggers that get the Iranians to back down. It's just like in 2003; they did a deal with the United States on Afghanistan. The Iranian Ambassador to the UN being a critical player in helping forge a new government and getting the—this is more than you want to know—but the Northern Alliance involved in agreeing to let Karzai be the president and the Pashtuns to play a big role, and then of course, in part because they feared that the United States might engage, it was the invasion in the Iraq War, which was a flashpoint in terms of generating cooperation between Iran and the US on Afghanistan. And of course then, weeks later, the US used the language about an “axis of evil,” which, again, pulled the rug out underneath efforts.

So, I don't foresee—barring any unexpected incidents—an attack, but I think next year it gets very dicey. And my fear is that the prime minister of Israel, which is where you started, has—very cleverly actually—manipulated the issue in such a way that nobody's talking about settlements or Arab-Israeli peace. That the issue is Iran and that he's gotten the United States to accept responsibility for Iran not having a nuclear weapon, which means we assume the responsibility of military action. Now, on the issue of the nuclear program and just line me up and off I go so...

Ellis: No, please...

Wright: Feel free to stop me. The problem with military action is it's not a solution. It's a very short stop-gap measure that is unlikely to be able to stop a nuclear program, if there is a nuclear program. We know that there were weaponization efforts before 2003. The problem is, since then, everything has been by deduction. We assume if you're building a facility deep in a mountain for nuclear enrichment at a higher percentage than you need for nuclear energy that 'hmm', there might be something more involved, but we don't have the smoking gun, the same way we didn't have the smoking gun in Iraq, and I think we all have to be very careful. And both the Israelis and the United States don't believe that the Iranians haven't made the decision yet to make a weapon. That doesn't mean they're not doing the research and taking a lot of the preliminary steps. But even if we get to the point that we believe that that's what they're doing, feel that we have to act, we can't bomb knowledge. And the Iranians have reached the point that they know enough about a nuclear program that they could forge ahead, and the danger is that a military strike would convince them that, well now it's justified because this is the only way to defend ourselves.

The Iranians would argue that they haven't bombed—they haven't invaded anybody in 200 years, and I don't think their reason for developing a nuclear capability, which I think the Shah wanted, was for anything besides deterrence. They're a minority of Shiites, they're a minority ethnically in the region. Five of the nine nuclear powers are in their neighborhood. They're paranoid; their Gulf neighbors have not been hospitable. And one final point: my great fear is that it's not just the Israelis who want this, that the Saudis might quite like us to do something. But less because Iran might be a nuclear power than the fact that this Shiite dominated country across the Gulf is a threat to them. And it has more to do with the sectarian divide that goes back 14 centuries than it does the sheer security issue.

Ellis: Speaking of sectarian divides, we have Syria and everybody's worried. The situation still seems to keep getting worse, more and more people are getting killed, no resolution is in sight, diplomatic or otherwise, and so what's going on, what can we do, how can it end?

Wright: Look, Syria is more complicated than Iraq, which was pretty neat in terms of its geographic sectarian or ethnic divide. Kurds in the North, Sunnis in the middle, and Shiites in the South. Not that clean, but cleaner than Syria. With Syria you have so many different parties. You have 10 or 12%—probably 12%—Alawite Shiite offshoot that has ruled the country in the Assad father-and-son Dynasty for 40 years, you have 10 or 12% Christian population, you have 10%+ Kurdish population, you have Drews and other Christian groups as well. I mean, I've been in Damascus for Easter and I'm always amused that you go through the main streets and you see chocolate Easter bunnies and colored eggs in the window and the Muslims like it because there is Roman Catholic and Orthodox, and their holidays for Christmas and Easter are both 10 days apart, and so everybody in the country gets both weekends—and most people take the weekend in between—for holidays, so they love these Christian holidays. And so we forget that this really is a vibrant component of society.

Now the rule of thumb in a lot of countries—kind of across the board—is that if a dictator has 30% of support in a country that he can survive. He never needs a majority because he's an autocrat, but if you get 30% then—and Assad has had 30% in terms of the Alawites and a lot of the Christians who were nervous about what would happen to other minorities if the Alawites won, because they knew that the Alawites needed them—then you've got the Kurds, and others. And it's not even cleanly divided among the Sunni Muslims, who are the majority—60 or 70%—and they're divided among tribes. We forget the big tribal component in all of these countries is still very vibrant, whether it is in Iraq, Libya, Egypt, Syria. And so the Muslim brotherhood has two rival factions in Syria. And you also have the Muslim Brotherhood versus the Salafis. And Saudis have been supporting the Salafis and the [Inaudible] have been supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. So you have among the Sunnis themselves a whole array of divisions.

So the real danger, and the Russians actually have a point, and I hate to say that, but in that they say we don't want to go along with the West because we're worried about what comes next. And the fact is there is less certainty about what comes next in Syria than there has been in any other country. And we can't, with all the pressure and the resources we've used, getting the Europeans, even the Russians and Chinese involved in trying to say whether it's the Syria National Council or the Syrian Free Army—look, you've got to get together, you have to forge a common position, common goals, and so forth. And it lasts about two days before they start fighting with each other. And the problem with the Syrian Free Army is that it's not one army; we're talking about an array of militias, and this is something that we didn't factor in Libya when we saw that transition. Today there are 300 militias in Libya that emerged in a mere eight months. We're talking about 20 months in Syria. Libya had six and a half million people, Syria has 22 [million].

The challenge is in these post-conflict environments. Even if Assad goes, you have these rival militias who don't want to give up their arms because the new governments haven't figured out how to divide up the political or economic pie. And all of these guys think we need our arms to get a good piece of the pie, a little bit more pie than the next tribe or clan and the problem is they're not enough pieces of the pie to give everybody, so the dangers are enormous in Syria.

My father was one of the commanders who liberated the first American concentration camp during World War II. And I always felt very strongly because of him—he was also a law professor—about the issue of genocide. And here we were so engaged and trying to prevent genocide in Libya but we can't—after 25 or 26,000 people killed in Syria, we can't seem to figure out what to do. And the reality is that we can't get involved until the Syrians do some things for themselves. Colin Powell talked about the Pottery Barn rule—which Pottery Barn quickly came out and said actually it's not our rule—that, if you get involved in some way and something breaks, you've got to fix it, and the challenge of trying to fix Syria would be enormous. And in the United States, lots of Americans don't want to get engaged.

Look, how many people thought we'd be in Iraq for eight or nine years? After we ousted Saddam so quickly? Or in Afghanistan for 12 or 13 years after ousting the Taliban? The prospect of that kind of

commitment militarily, in terms of national treasure, is something I think Americans don't want to pay and so there are no good choices in Syria.

Ellis: On that note, let's open it up to the audience.

Question: Hi Robin, I actually crammed for this. I read your book over two days. [Laughter.]

Wright: Aw, yay! [not sure we need this exchange]

Question: I'm Stephanie Baric and I work with Counterpart International and I'm the director of their Yemen program. So I'm going to be very selfish and ask you questions that are related to Yemen.

Ellis: One question please.

Question: Well it's one question, it probably very much applies to Egypt as well. I think that on the one hand, while I was quite optimistic with the revolutions that took place in a number of countries—because I worked in Egypt and Palestine, and now Yemen—I think that what I'm genuinely concerned about now, seeing a lot of the developments in Yemen, specifically, is the government is still not effective at engaging those populations that have been traditionally excluded in decision making processes.

Wright: You're talking about the new governments?

Question: The new government, even the new government in transition. And so, while I don't necessarily buy into a lot of the political discourse around Islam and violence, what I am concerned about are populations, again, that have been marginally excluded from the political process and in Yemen's case we're talking about the rural poor. And the appeal that comes with some of the political extremism that is being promoted under the name of Islam. Again, although I don't necessarily agree with that, I still think it is going to be a huge issue and I am far less optimistic now seeing some of the developments around the transition processes. So if I could just hear your thoughts about that.

Question: Hi, I'm Marcia Wiss and I'm a partner in Hogan Lovells and I'm a law professor at Georgetown Law and also at SAIS [School of Advanced International Studies]. I read some of the initial reports today about who might have been behind the YouTube movie and I don't know if they're true—who knows what the facts will really show, but what *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* are saying is maybe an American may have come out of Hollywood, may have been supported by Jewish Americans, and I'm trying to connect the dots. And I don't see why anyone could think there could be a positive outcome to—I'm a Christian, but I would be offended if anybody's prophet or god were blasphemed—I don't see how anything positive could have come out of a movie like that. I believe in freedom of speech, you can say whatever you want to, but when you look at what the consequences are, what worries me, frankly, is some of the wildcard things you were talking about involving Iran.

Ellis: Can I just add one thing? When I was preparing for tonight, I read another article that suggested that Coptics in Egypt might have been involved in the production and they're having a demonstration showing their outrage in Cairo. Yes, the last question, yes.

Question: Hi, I'm Alison Beck, I'm the deputy director of the Federal Mediation Service and I have the privilege of doing international labor conflict resolution work in developing market economies. I was in Tunisia in May and one of the most important meetings—one of the most inspiring meetings I attended, since we're at the Women's Foreign Policy Group, was a meeting with about ten young women, business entrepreneurs, and they were spectacular. And of course the conversation quickly devolved to what's going to happen to us? And their fears about the Salafis in the government—or not in the

government but in Tunisia—and their fears about what their rights would be. They were amazing, and I think there has been a great sense of liberty among young women in Tunisia, so I'd appreciate your comments on that.

Wright: Three great questions. I love Yemen and I took my mother there on the eve of the civil war and I adore my mother. *[Laughter.]* And I've often said to people that it's the place on earth closest to understanding what it's like to live on another planet. Because everything about it, the pattern of human settlements—it's just this wonderfully delicious flavorful country. And I say that in part because all of the houses look like gingerbread. *[Laughter.]*

Look, you made some very important points, and a reason that we've seen this wave of change is because you have, for the first time, a majority of people in most countries—with the exception of Yemen—who are literate, and that includes women. And so that there have been the engines of change, the access to technology, in ways that have inspired, triggered, unleashed these forces. The problem with Yemen is you have this huge population—the densest population in the Arab world, the poorest population in the Arab world—without the education and, as you point out, the rural poor, who are vulnerable to exploitation by extremist ideas, superficial ideas, ignorance. Tell me if I've said this before because I've done so many shows today that I forget what I've said, but I once asked Ayatollah Khomeini's son after *The Satanic Verses*, “has anyone in your family actually read *The Satanic Verses*?” And he said “no,” but a fatwa came out that changed everything for such a long time and the danger is, whether it's this film or whatever, that rumors can get around or people come and offer free services for health and education or lack of corruption and that's what a lot of the Salafis will promise, or the extremists—you know, a sense of law that doesn't have to be bought. Maybe it's Islamic law, but it's not corrupt. And so that's why Yemen is so vulnerable.

And I think not enough attention has been paid to this wonderful little country, er, wonderful dense country that really, despite all the obstacles, is one of the four that's made the transition. You know, between the four leaders of Algeria—I'm sorry, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen, the four leaders had ruled a total of 129 years together, it's staggering—and that the Yemenis were among those who successfully forced President Saleh from power is really inspiring.

So, I share your concern and I think the problem is—one of the great dangers is that the new governments simply look at themselves as new elites. And the problem with Yemen is that you have a former prime minister—a former vice president who is now president. And so you have the old elites still in power and this is not a solution, whereas every place else you're seeing—erasing the main players. So, I agree with you and it concerns me a great deal.

On the YouTube movie—look, on the news cycle in the last 24 hours, has gone from blaming Coptic Christians to the Israeli-American real estate developer in southern California, who the Israelis now claim they have no trace of any Israeli ever with that name—who knows. The forensics on this film will be very interesting, finding out who really was responsible for this and what were their motives. And the Coptic Christians I think—you know, they're nervous enough about their own future and why show the Prophet doing something like that? And what's in it for anybody? I mean, who even thinks of this stuff? That there has to be something—and who knows whether it's a hate crime, whether he's in America and the United States can look at the issue as a hate crime. And there are a lot of things that are potential here to address this issue, but we need to know a lot more. It's like it's the early days and nobody ever knows the real story in the early days.

In terms of Tunisia and women—yeah, absolutely. And Tunisia is a place where the women have been—have traditionally had the most say. They're tremendously well-educated and have been players in government. But I will tell you everywhere that women don't do well in democratic transitions. In Eastern Europe—I think it was Romania where the women went from 40% to 3% after the democratic

transition, in terms of the percentages in parliament. And it happens—it happens almost everywhere so it's not like this is an isolated phenomenon. No offense to the men in this room but...

So the interesting thing is the International Republican Institute a year ago did a survey among Tunisians, and I thought the results were very interesting. They asked about a proposal to give 50% of all seats in the National Assembly to women, because the quotas are quite popular in the developing world and so forth. And the poll came back and said that 53% of Tunisians believed that was too high. But 41% said that was just right. I don't think we'd get 41% in the United States. [*Laughter.*] Look at the success of our ERA [Equal Rights Amendment], which was equal pay for equal work.

The two engines of change in the region are youth and women and they will find it very hard—it's going to be awful in Egypt, particularly for women who have tried and have repeatedly been squashed in their efforts. The Million Women Rally in March of last year—the Salafis, when they ran for parliament would not allow women to have their pictures on the ballot or on campaign posters; they had pictures of flowers. They say they won't do that next time but, whoopee, whoopee, you allow their picture? And the rule was they had to put 50% of the seats were allocated to women and they put the women in the bottom 50%, so needless to say, there were virtually none. Ironically, the Muslim Brotherhood has the largest percentage of women in parliament—or did, parliament has been dissolved.

In an era of literacy, you cannot put women down. You can't take away their knowledge. Look at the Iranians—I mean, the interesting thing is that, in both Saudi Arabia and Iran—the two most repressive societies for women in the Middle East—over 60% of population in universities is female. And that's changing everything. The first word I learn in every language is “slowly, slowly”. *Piano, piano, schwoi schwoi, lentement, lentement, yavash yavash*, you know, and it's true. Transitions take a long time.

As I often point out, I was in Africa in 1976 the day the Soweto uprising began, and I then went back when Nelson Mandela walked to freedom. And a generation after that, the majority of blacks are far worse off than they were under apartheid. The average lifespan in South Africa when Mandela walked to freedom was 60 years. Today it's 41. I mean it's tangible, and that has a lot to do with AIDS and so forth, but the government denied the AIDS phenomena and didn't provide. And in the former Soviet Union, you have a former KGB chief and communist in power who may be there until 2024. How long did it take us to get from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Act? And so change takes a long time and we—women will be players. They'll get there and so someday will we. [*Laughter.*]

Ellis: Okay, next three questions. Yes.

Sameh Alfonse: My name is Sameh Alfonse from the Arab League in DC. I think I am the first man to ask a question. [*Laughter.*]

Ellis: There are others waiting. [*Laughter.*]

Alfonse: I have a few comments and questions. About the Salafist thing—I think that there are different Salafists from every Arab country.

Wright: You mean in Egypt?

Alfonse: The Salafists in Egypt don't have the same ideology of the Salafists of Al-Qaeda, for instance. Like maybe they have some of the same bases but they are not as violent and aggressive. Another thing was, the Muslim Brotherhood, you were talking about with Morsi—I believe the official sect of the Muslim Brotherhood condemned the attack on the embassy.

Wright: I haven't seen that.

Alfonse: In the English site, not the Arabic site.

Wright: I haven't seen that. In fact, what happened was that Morsi condemned the film. He did not condemn the act, and that's what is so offensive.

Alfonse: Okay, I just saw right before I came.

Wright: Good, I'm delighted.

Alfonse: Actually it was on the English site, not the Arabic, which means it's external. They don't want to offend some other Muslims by condemning it, so it's for the English speakers only. The third thing was, do you think from your experience, how is the future of US-Arab relations? Do we need more dialogue? What's your personal insight about this?

Ellis: Thank you. Shelly?

Shelly Porges: Thanks Patricia. I'm Shelly Porges with the State Department and I run the Global Entrepreneurship Program, so thank you for commenting about Tunisia. We do have programs, as I think you know, Robin, throughout the Arab world as well as throughout the rest of the world. And one of the striking things that's different this time around, and not to say the long-view isn't the right view, is that with technology, the young people who really fomented a lot of these revolutions are seeing what some of the possibilities are in the rest of the world.

Wright: Sure.

Porges: And that's different, I think, than past revolutions as we reflect back on history and what we learn from history. And when we look at some of the thoughts that you've shared with us, which clearly are right, it's very much a top-down look, but looking at it from the bottom-up—I mean, the young people in Egypt were one example, were the ones who really brought it about, not the Muslim Brotherhood. Are they going to stand for being suppressed again? Are the women going to stand?

And I just want to give you a small insight from our world of entrepreneurship, because I do actually think that they're connected and how the revolutionary summoning of their courage and facing of their fears that I think didn't exist before. Last fall in Alexandria, Egypt, we posted a start-up weekend and 2,100 young people in Alexandria, Egypt applied to this start-up weekend. It's basically a three-day business plan competition, plus learning how to start a business. And this is a global movement start-up weekend. It was the largest anywhere in the world. In the United States, the largest ever was about 400. 800 people participated and over 200 were women, without any special outreach to women, and I think that some of the phenomenon—what we hear, what we reported—was top-down reporting but what we need to look at is what's going on bottom-up.

Wright: No kidding!

Porges: And what—what I think these young people are saying to us is, you know, things have changed, this is not going to—history is not a precursor for the future. I mean, yes, there's things to learn from historical revolution. So what do you think about that—how long can Morsi last if he doesn't address some of the needs of young people?

Wright: Okay, different Salafis—yes, the Islamic spectrum is huge. And it has, you know, this many just among Islamists. And in the last—earlier in April I edited this volume about Islamists and we identified over 50 Islamist parties in only 14 of the 22 Arab countries. So, when you talk about Salafis, they differ even within a country. One of the problems amongst the Salafis in Egypt is that they couldn't form a

coalition—they were fighting among themselves. So, we have to be very careful when we talk about Islamists—who they are, and also not—because most Americans think that an attack by Islamists in front of the embassy must be the Muslim Brotherhood and therefore, Morsi's a bad guy, when in fact, I suspect they're pretty horrified because the Salafis are a threat to them as well.

In terms of the future of US-Arab relations, you know, one can only hope that—no American president deals with the Arab-Israeli conflict except in the second term, with the exception of Carter—but that was largely because of Anwar Sadat—he took the initiative, he went to Israel, spoke at the Knesset and so forth. He was ready. And this is not trying to be political or weigh in on who anyone should vote for or support, but I suspect if Romney was elected, he's not going to try to do as much because this is his first term and there's that second term to have to run again. But Obama, partly because we may get a Republican Congress, may look at foreign policy as the area where he could make a difference during his second term.

It is clear that we always go back to that old thing that we haven't talked about today—and nobody's talking about—that is the Arab-Israeli conflict. That's the core thing, and we don't speak with credibility unless we are doing something about it, and we haven't done something about it now for quite a long time. And it's been clear for a year that they weren't going to do anything before the election. One can only hope that something happens afterwards, but that is the only way you're really going to deal with restoring US-Arab relations in a way. Otherwise we're going to be taking actions that are dependent on our oil interests, that depend on securing Israel, that deal on Iran's nuclear program, and it's all piecemeal. The only broad-brush issue that we can really use to change the fundamentals of everything is through solving that issue.

In terms of technology as a tool—sure, but I also covered the Iranian revolution in 1979 and that was a revolution that Ayatollah Khomeini fueled through the fax machine and the audio cassette. That modernity has been critical, communications capabilities have been critical in—for the last four decades, really—in bringing about change. Not only in the Middle East—whether it's ending military dictatorships in Latin America, apartheid in South Africa, the demise of communism in Eastern Europe. So, it's not just now. The combination of education, people who knew how to read so that they could get on the internet, it's that pivotal—if you only had still tiny elites educated, the fact that they had access to the internet would never fuel enough for change, but it was this confluence of factors that really played the difference.

And in terms of the youth, look, the problem is—I remember I grew up in the anti-war movement in this country and it was a generation who, whether on university campuses or through demonstrations in Washington, played a pivotal role, but they were not ones who could reshape society. And it takes a generation to get people into the system in ways that they are elected officials who can make decisions, allocate budgets, and do those things that approve the money that your government agency wants to use to bring about business, seminars and teaching people how to become entrepreneurs and do start-ups. And that's a long process, and that's why there's this illusion about—well, people-power has changed everything, it's just painfully long.

But one of the things I want to say about the—and this deals with the question of Egypt—40 years ago, young women didn't wear hijab. Today over 80% of women in Egypt wear hijab, and it may be higher than that. And I have discussed this with many of my Egyptian friends and they will tell you that doesn't mean they vote for the Muslim Brotherhood. I have a very good friend who actually ran for parliament, she is hijab-wearing, and she let me use a quote from my book where she said “to hell with the Muslim Brotherhood.” She voted only for secular parties, liberal parties, pro-democracy parties, and she ran with the Justice Party, which is one of the new parties started by those who were involved in Tahrir Square. She put on hijab because she felt that created the space—that she could then be more involved in society and could, whether or not there was harassment or people accepted her as credible, legitimate, or whatever—that it created this space for her to act in a way she couldn't be if she didn't.

And I at first thought—I began to understand that—and this goes back to what I said earlier about that you have to democratize through Islam, that there is this cultural legitimacy that you don't Westernize first, you don't reform in a Western separation of church and state way, I think. In that part of the world it will often come through Islamic channels—not completely—but that will be an important factor in all of this. So, the young are going to stand up, continue to stand up in different ways, and they're hoping right now to figure out, if we can't get out on the streets and change things, how do we do it? We don't have the resources, the networks, the experience to do it. They'll learn, but it takes time.

Ellis: Okay, well we have time for a few more questions and please, they have to be very brief.

Question: My name is David Kairallah. I'm a lawyer and I teach law with Marcia at Georgetown and SAIS. My question is—I'm going to focus on Syria, although it can apply to the entire Arab scene—in Syria, our government has taken a stand from the very beginning against this regime and called it illegitimate. And with time, we saw outsiders drifting toward supporting a militarized uprising. When the regime said "lay off your arms against amnesty," our Secretary of State said, "no, don't believe, continue on fighting" and now we find ourselves with Al-Qaeda and the derivatives of Al-Qaeda—because they are declared now as the most powerful people on the ground. The same Al-Qaeda that we declared as the ultimate in terrorism—and we have no interests whatsoever in boosting their status in the eyes of those who admire them—now we see ourselves, in a sense, rehabilitating Al-Qaeda by having them become the liberator of Syria or the precursor of reform in Syria and the Arab world. And they are helped by the closest of our allies, whether it's Saudi Arabia or Qatar or Turkey or whatever, and I wonder what could be, in the long-run—how much could we think through this policy, if we did, and what would be, in the long-run, the boost that Al-Qaeda and the derivatives, whether it's [*Inaudible*], of Al-Qaeda would get out of any settlement eventually in Syria?

Wright: I'd quibble with your assertion that Al-Qaeda represents the majority of the rebels. There are...

Question: I said the most effective. I didn't say the most...

Wright: Oh, okay, the most effective. Well, again, what's effective? I mean this is a little hard to quantify, and I'm not sure that's true either.

Question: Robert Fisk said that.

Wright: Robert Fisk? I've known Robert Fisk for many years and the truth is I once dated him. [*Laughter.*] Nice guy, but look—they're willing to take some of the most radical actions, suicide bombs and so forth, but I think that the whole US effort, even though it's still pretty small, has been to try and ensure that weapons going into Syria don't fall into Al-Qaeda hands. That's always hard to guarantee, particularly when you're not on the ground. But I think this assumption that if Assad goes that Al-Qaeda is going to claim some legitimate part of it—one of the other things that's kind of interesting is that one of the rebel groups has taken action against some of the Al-Qaeda folks—fought them off and killed some of them. These are not groups that all speak with one voice that are all part of the same phenomena.

Al-Qaeda has clearly tried to exploit what's happening inside Syria to make gains in a way that it did once in Iraq. One of the most important things to happen in the last decade was the fact that the Sunnis in Anbar province, on their own, turned against Al-Qaeda because Al-Qaeda had killed their relatives, taken over their businesses, and basically made life so uncertain, so insecure, that everyone was in some way affected, and that was what eventually led the surge to work, and without this first having happened the surge would have never worked—the US deployment of additional troops.

I'm very worried about the extremists having a new presence, an effective presence, in Syria. I don't know that we've reached the point yet where we can say they're so significant that they're going to be a

determinant in the post-Assad government, and it well may be, and a lot depends on how long Assad stays in power. I mean we're talking about so many hypotheticals that it's really hard to reflect on it, but my sense is that Syrians have seen what happened in Iraq and don't want that repeated, but as long as the enemy of my enemy is my friend—and they're all fighting Assad—they will be in opposition together. The danger is that this united opposition is going to fracture, in good ways against some of the extremist factions, maybe, but in bad ways against each other.

So, I'm not quite there yet in being as pessimistic as you are. You may be right, but the fact is we don't know enough about the sheer numbers. We have a lot of anecdotal information, but the real problem with Syria, in trying to find out what the truth is, is that the Assads have a monopoly on information.

Ellis: Last question here and then the final question to the Ambassador.

Question: Marjorie Scott. I work in an organization that welcomes diplomats and I would just like to seek your advice. I was supposed to go to Tripoli with the Ambassador [*Inaudible*] agreed to speak at Muammar Qaddafi's daughter's foundation on human rights for women. I set up an Arabic conversation group in this organization to which I belong, which I mentioned. I guess I'm seeking your advice—what else can I do other than outreach like this? When I went to the University of Arizona, they didn't have Arabic as a language—they had French and Spanish and English. And it just seems like, if we try to set an example that we're proud of whoever we are and go for it—what else would you suggest?

Ambassador Paro: What do you think about stability at all? Are there any in transferring the experience from the democratic transition of Eastern Europe to the Arab world? And then in relation to that, what do you think about the transferability of the Turkish secular Islam democracy, or some compared with the Turkish...

Wright: Is Turkey a role model?

Ambassador Paro: Some kind of Islamic Christian democracy. Is it at all transferable, given the completely different historic background of different countries?

Wright: In terms of what we do, I'm not sure if I fully understand the question, you're asking my advice about whether or not you should go to Tripoli. As a law professor's daughter, I don't give anyone advice because I don't want that liability. [*Laughter.*] I don't tell people if they should go to Paris and...

Question: I just want some of your expert ideas—instead of talking about what's happening—about what we can do to make a change.

Wright: Yeah. One of the problems for the United States at this juncture, particularly at the end of two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is that a lot of people are suspect about American intentions. And I've said to many of my friends in the State Department, "this is a moment to back off." They feel that they are reclaiming control of their lives, not just during the Mubarak era or in the Qaddafi era, but dating back 200 years to Napoleon's intervention in Egypt—that this is a moment that the colonial era is finally ending.

And, in part because we didn't do well in Iraq, there is today greater unemployment, insecurity, less electricity, right across the board—more rape, more crime—that we are not very good at nation-building, and we often tell people to do things that mirrored what we did or we know how to do rather than what will work in their societies. And that, with the exception of economic issues, where we can play a role in helping create jobs or providing aid, I always think, what are we doing giving \$1.3 billion to the Egyptian military and \$250 million to—you know, whatever it is, they're playing around with numbers now—to Egyptian—and it's mostly for pro-democracy programs, not even for economic

development. So, I mean there's a little bit of everything in there. Those are the things that—we are well-intentioned, but this is a moment where we need to step back.

And Chris Stevens was actually very thoughtful about that. He kept telling everybody at the State Department and all his friends, we need to listen to the Libyans to figure out what it is they want and not try to—whether it's sell them our supplies or follow our models—that we need to be sensitive to what they want. And I think that was very good advice.

In terms of the Ambassador's very thoughtful questions, look, it is true that the Eastern European experience is very useful, not just in writing new constitutions but dealing with some of the ethnic issues. Now, not everything has worked completely well in Eastern Europe. You've got these—as you know better than most people—issues in the old Yugoslavia that still haven't been fully ironed out or that are sources of tension still. But it is true that...

Ambassador Paro: They've all been ironed out. [*Laughter.*]

Wright: But it is true that—I think the Eastern Europeans have a lot to offer. South Africans too, the Brazilians—that there are a lot of developing countries that would do well in saying, okay, these are the things that, a generation later, we wish we would have done 20 years earlier.

In terms of Turkey, that is really interesting because Turkey is a country that has made an important transition. You have a government in power that's ever more popular—three rounds of elections and ever more—and has done better than any of its European counterparts economically. I often laugh and think the Turks must be laughing all the way to the bank because they don't have to bail out the Greeks. [*Laughter.*] Good thing they're not in the European Union.

Also, the government has done more to bring Turkey into code with—on human rights, death penalties, all kinds of things—than any of the secular, pro-western parties did. So, they've done—now look, it's far from perfect. They have their own issues, whether it's the arresting of journalists or the generals. But the fact is you look at Egypt and Egypt in two days forced the head of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces out of power at a time where you've got 84 generals in Turkey languishing in jail for plotting against the government. Turkey is a very interesting role model; it sends a signal to the outside world...

Ellis: And economically, too.

Wright: That's what I just said, their 8% GDP—absolutely. It's a wonderful model in many ways, and I would argue that—this is a conversation I actually had with a friend of mine who's a senior official at the State Department—when you look at the four most interesting developing countries they are China, Brazil, India and Turkey, and that we kind of know the course that is being charted in China, Brazil and India. They've been around long enough, their reforms have been going on long enough—that the most dynamic player in the world today in the developing world is Turkey.

Ambassador Paro: And they're Islamic [*Inaudible.*]

Wright: That's right—the most important country in the Islamic world, a role model and a country that we take for granted. We don't fully appreciate how important a player it is right now. And when you think about—that this was a government that came in and said we're going to have no problems with any government in the region, that the prime minister of Turkey once went on vacation with the Assad family, that he tried to help the Iranians along with the Brazilians on a nuclear deal—has turned around and is leading the campaign against Assad. And has been a major force in squeezing the Iranians into hosting meetings where the Europeans are saying to the Iranians, you got to compromise or else.

So, I think the Turks are really important players that we all need to watch, in part because of their role in the Middle East, but the bigger role that they're playing in the world.

Ellis: Well, we've come to the end of a fantastic program. I want to thank Robin so much for sharing all her incredible insights and knowledge and I want to thank the Ambassador once again for having us at the embassy, for hosting this wonderful event. [*Applause.*]