

CARNEGIE COUNCIL *for Ethics in International Affairs*

The Second Arab Awakening and the Battle for Pluralism

Public Affairs, Global Ethics Forum TV Series

Marwan Muasher, Joanne J. Myers

Transcript

Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, director of Public Affairs program and on behalf of the Carnegie Council, it is a great pleasure to welcome our members, guests, and C-Span book TV—especially on this very cold morning here in NYC.

Our speaker is Marwan Muasher, a seasoned diplomat whose career has spanned the areas of diplomacy, development, civil society and communication. Currently he is vice president for studies at the [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) where he oversees research in Washington and Beirut on the Middle East.

He will be discussing his most recent book entitled *The Second Arab Awakening and the Battle for Pluralism*. You may be surprised to learn that this discussion is less about what's happened in the Middle East in the aftermath of the so-called [Arab Spring](#) and more about what is needed there now so that all citizens in the region will have a more promising future.

When the revolutionary waves of demonstrations and protests began in the Middle East, there was great hope that democracy would replace authoritarian regimes, but that's not exactly what happened. Back then, heads of state in [Tunisia](#), [Egypt](#), and [Libya](#) were [driven into exile](#), [put behind bars](#), or [lynched by a mob](#). The Yemeni leader was forced to [step aside](#) and today the Syrian regime is still [fighting](#) for its survival. Four years on, transitional governments are struggling to maintain popular support amid rising sectarianism, poverty and violent extremism.

Few would argue that the foundations of the old Arab order were sustainable. Still dictatorships cannot be transformed into functioning democracies overnight—particularly in a region that has never had practical experience with good governance, has never known tolerance, inclusiveness, or economic wellbeing.

In *The Second Arab Awakening*, Marwan reminds us that the first [Arab awakening](#)—about 100 years ago—was successful in getting rid of colonial rule, but failed at developing pluralistic societies that could function and endure. We all know there are no shortcuts to democracy—after all America's own [revolution](#) did not immediately produce an entire stable democracy; instead it delivered a violent [civil war](#).

As Marwan tells us, perhaps this time around, the Arab uprisings are simply part of a marathon that had already begun—one that will eventually accept diversity, tolerate dissent, and embrace different

sectarian strains.

To learn more please join me in giving a very warm welcome—it's needed today—to our guest Marwan Muasher. It a pleasure to welcome you to this program once again. Thank you for joining us.

Remarks

MARWAN MUASHER: Thank you very much, Joanne. It's always a pleasure to be at the Carnegie Council.

This book has a very simple message, *The Second Arab Awakening and the Battle for Pluralism*. It's so simple, this call for pluralism in the Middle East, that you would think it should be self-evident. Yet it is not. In the Arab uprisings that have started and are still ongoing three years later, the word "pluralism" does not appear anywhere in the lexicon of those who have revolted against old regimes. We've heard about social justice, dignity, but no one yet is talking seriously about a process that would put in place the foundations for a democratic, for a pluralistic system that would be sustained, stable, and prosperous.

I call it *The Second Arab Awakening* because, of course, as Joanne said, there was a first [Arab awakening](#), an intellectual movement that started in maybe the mid-19th century by intellectuals in many places in the Arab world that today are witnessing the same turmoil—in Lebanon, in Syria, in Egypt, in Tunisia. That movement, which was calling for the Arab world to get rid first of Ottoman rule, then of colonial rule, later found its way into popular movements all across the Arab world that called for independence and, in the end, were successful in achieving it.

The second Arab awakening started as popular movements around the Arab world. These movements have not yet been contextualized, if you will, into any kind of an intellectual framework. So today we know more about what the movements were against than what they are for. Nobody yet has done that in a very convincing manner.

Therefore, what we have seen so far with the second Arab awakening, in contrast with the first, which was a battle for independence that stopped there—the first Arab awakening's main shortcoming, in my opinion, is that it battled for independence against despotic rule and then stopped there. Once independence was achieved, no Arab government, secular or—well, they were not religious then—no Arab government, progressive or conservative, truly gave pluralism and democracy any attention. No effort was done to build and put in place the foundations for true democracy.

That is basically the message of the second Arab awakening. If the second Arab awakening is to be successful, it cannot just be a movement against despotic rule. It also has to be a movement for pluralism. Pluralism, in my opinion, must be the operating system that would help lay the foundations for a prosperous and inclusive Arab society.

My departure point, of course, is that the status quo was not sustainable in the Arab world. For those who today say, "We told you so. The old system was better. We should have stayed with the old regimes in the Arab world instead of carrying out these revolutions," well, the status quo was not sustainable. We did not have natural stability in the Arab world. That stability was artificially induced by autocratic governments that basically had a lid on society's aspirations for democracy and pluralistic rule. Once that lid was lifted, in the course of three short years, it is natural to see what we are seeing today.

Therefore, I think there is no movement in history, no transformational process, that took place in a short three years. We tend to forget that countries like Germany were a dictatorship until 1945. Spain and Portugal did not achieve democracy until the late 1970s, early 1980s. Countries of Eastern Europe did not achieve democracy—some of them, probably not until today—until 1989. And the list goes on.

In a region that, as Joanne said, did not experience a culture of democracy, no one should expect such democracy to really emerge in the course of three short years.

So my first message is to exercise patience. People were too fast to call it an Arab spring three years ago, and people are too fast today to call it an Arab inferno or an Arab winter. We are still witnessing the first page in a very long book along the way to democracy.

That does not ensure, of course, that all countries of the Arab world are going to end up with stable and prosperous cultures. It is also wrong to treat the Arab world as monolithic. We will see some countries succeed, we will see others fail, and we will see yet others struggle in the process.

But there are some trends that we can already see, some of them certainly negative, but amongst the negative developments in the Arab world today, there are also some positive trends that we can already discern that are being ignored as people are more focused on the negative developments in the Arab world today.

What concerns me most, negatively, at this stage is that, so far, in many countries that have undergone transitions, it is still a zero-sum game between the secular and the religious elements. In some countries, not all, particularly in Egypt, secular and religious forces are engaged in a winner-take-all battle, where, if the religious forces come to power, they behave in an exclusionist manner, as they have done in Egypt last year with the development of a constitution that did not enjoy consensus among all forces in society.

But we are also seeing secular forces, once they come to power, engage in the same exclusionist policies that they accused the Islamists of doing before them. And so far as the battle in the Arab world is seen as a battle between secular and religious elements, so far as it is seen as a zero-sum game, the sum will be zero, in my view. If both forces do not work, maybe not together, but at least work for the development of a pluralistic society in which they push for the right for themselves to operate, but for others to operate as well—unless they are able to do so, they will stay engaged in an exclusionist discourse, and what we will see is the replacement of one set of dictators by another, and no more than that.

There is a notable exception that no one talks about in the Arab world today that, in my view, has the potential of being a model that many other countries can use on their way to a smooth transition to democracy. That is Tunisia. Tunisia today has not been engaged in the same kinds of exclusionist policies that we have seen among other Arab countries in the region.

As we speak, Tunisians are probably voting today or maybe tomorrow—as we speak—on a new constitution, a constitution that has been arrived at by consensus, including all forces in society, religious and secular, a constitution so forward-looking that it is not just the best constitution in the Arab world, but probably among many other countries of the world, a constitution that upholds the right to free expression, the right to free belief or no belief—a first in the Arab world—full parity between men and women, full prevention of any force to deny any other force the right to operate, so a peaceful rotation of power at all times, etc., etc. They have had a coalition government for the last three years in which even if the Islamists won a plurality, they did not rule alone and were engaged

with others in governing the country, and no interference by the army.

That is a model, in my view, that holds a lot of promise for the rest of the Arab world.

If elections were to be held in Tunisia today, the Islamists would lose to a coalition of secular forces. It does not mean that they would vanish, but it would mean that they would lose their plurality that they have enjoyed over the last three years. It would be the first time in the Arab world of an Islamist government coming to power and leaving by the ballot box, not through military intervention. That is going to send huge waves across the Arab world, particularly in countries that have not undergone transition and have been preaching that if the Islamists come to power, they will never leave, and therefore they are the lesser of two evils.

The second very important lesson that we can discern from the Arab awakenings that have taken place so far is the loss of holiness that the Islamists have enjoyed for the last 50 or 60 years. Arab governments have basically prevented Islamists from coming to power artificially, artificially have banned them in most of the Arab world. As a result, when people were not satisfied with systems that did not have any systems of checks and balances, the Islamists were the only protest vote they could go to.

The Islamists, on their hand, were able to promise many issues to the general public without having to put these promises to the test, because they were outside the system and did not have to prove what they were promising.

In three short years after the Islamists came to power in Egypt and Tunisia, in three short years, the Islamists lost more support than Arab governments hoped they would through their exclusion over the last 50 or 60 years. Today "Islam is the solution," which was the popular notion of Islamists, means far less, not just in Egypt, but across the Arab world, than it has meant in the last 50 years.

That is my second point. The book also talks about this. I show polls, particularly in Egypt, that show that even though the Egyptian public—and, I would claim, the Arab public as well—is conservative and religious, the same public does not want its government to dictate to it how to be conservative and religious. The public wants its government to worry about the economy, basically. Seventy percent of Egyptians want their government to worry about the economy. Two percent want their government to worry about ideological issues.

That has been, of course, proven in Egypt, when the same public that brought the Islamists to power two years ago went to the street in large numbers to protest against their policies. If that is not a message for inclusion and pluralism, I don't know what is. And that is a message, I think, that also is extremely important to the rest of the Arab world.

Not everything, of course, is rosy. One very worrisome issue is the rise of sectarianism in the Arab world and sectarian politics, particularly in the [Mashriq](#), in the eastern part of the Arab world, in countries like Syria, Lebanon, Iraq—not yet Jordan, and I hope it stays away from it. These are all countries that were artificially created through the [Sykes-Picot Agreement](#) in 1916.

But more importantly, since 1916, none of these countries put any energy in developing a true sense of national identity—not a pan-Arab identity, but a Syrian identity, a Lebanese identity, an Iraqi identity—that would trump all the sub-identities, whether they are ethnic or religious. Today these countries are paying the price. [Lebanon](#) has paid the price [multiple times](#) over, [Iraq](#) is paying the price, and, of course, [Syria](#) is paying it most horrifically, because of that.

That is less of a problem in the [Maghreb](#). In Egypt, Egyptians have thought of themselves as such a long time before the modern nation-state was created. There are more homogeneous societies in Egypt and Tunisia, for example, than in the Mashriq, and that is why, in my view, such countries have a better chance of making it, maybe after they go through a few iterations in which forces will, as I said, attempt to rule exclusively and find out that that is not going to be a sustainable path towards prosperity and stability. In a place like Egypt, it might take 10, 15 years, but, in my view, after that period, Egypt stands a very good chance of making it to a stable and prosperous society.

That's not the case in Syria. I'm very worried about countries like Syria where the sectarian issue and radicalism really has meant that it might take decades before we arrive at a stable and a prosperous situation.

The book talks about what the Arab world needs to develop to move from awakening to pluralism. Awakening in itself is incomplete, as the Arab world itself has found out with the first one. What does it mean to move from awakening to pluralism? I talk about at least four elements that, in my view, are essential if we are to do that.

Politically, the Arab world must work for power sharing and a peaceful rotation of power among all political forces. Any country, particularly those that have not undergone transition, cannot talk of a serious political reform process if it does not include power sharing, if it does not include the strengthening of the judicial and legislative branches at the expense of the executive, so that we truly have a system of checks and balances, where abuses can be institutionally addressed and where no power can really dominate over any other—as is the case in the Arab world today.

Economically, the most important move, in my view, in the Arab world is to do away with the rentier system, the rentier economy, that has governed most of the Arab world. In oil-producing countries, a rentier system has meant that, with money literally growing on the ground, productivity was killed, people do not have to work for their style of life, and has meant a no-taxation/no-representation attitude. If we're not taxing you, don't hold us accountable.

In countries that are not oil-producing but are receiving benefits from oil-producing countries, like my own, a semi-rentier system, it has also meant the development of rentier layers around the regime that have benefited from the system, and instead of relying on a merit-based system, people, particularly the government elite, have relied on these rents coming from the outside.

If the Arab world is to deal with its huge unemployment problem, with its huge youth bulge challenge—70 percent of the Arab world is under 30 years of age—it has to find a new way, a merit-based system, to create jobs for these people. Productivity can never be increased unless you encourage creativity, innovation, unless you provide people with the skills necessary to compete in today's marketplace.

From a society point of view, inclusion. Inclusion—"diversity" has always been a bad word in Arab culture. The Arab world is diverse. It's extremely diverse. It is ethnically diverse; it is religiously diverse. Yet no one really celebrates this diversity. Diversity has been suppressed in the Arab world, whether it was political, cultural, or religious, in place of the common good. What it has meant is that people in Syria today think of themselves as Christians or Kurds or Alawites before they think of themselves as Syrian. It has meant that people in Bahrain also are engaged in sectarian fights, etc. Unless we adopt a system where diversity is truly, truly celebrated as a strength rather than a weakness, the Arab world is not going to face some good times.

That brings me to my fourth point—and I devote a whole chapter in the book about it—education. If

the Arab awakenings are to really mean stable societies, education and educational policies must be revisited in the Arab world, not in terms of building more schools or in terms of even putting computers in them, but in terms of the values that are taught to the young generation. If a pluralistic culture is to emerge, it has to have a foundation that can only come through education, where people learn about tolerance, learn about accepting other points of view, learn about truth being relative and not absolute, learn about critical thinking, are taught how to question, how to research, how to communicate. None of these, I maintain, are issues that are seriously addressed in the Arab world, and today, when people in the Arab world talk about educational reform, most of that reform goes to building schools or to the quantity of education and very seldom to anything about the quality of it.

I want to close by reading a paragraph from the book. It's a paragraph that I inserted at the end in anticipation of what many people will say of this call as probably a naïve call that has no connection with reality:

Some will read this book and regard its arguments as a naïve, almost romantic view of an Arab world that does not exist—a view that is totally detached from reality. They will point out the current tumultuous state of affairs and wonder how one can ever talk about diversity and tolerance when Syria is being dismantled before our own eyes. How can one dream of a democratic Arab world when countries such as Iraq and Lebanon are still organized along sectarian and not national lines? How can one speak of an awakening when the initial calls for dignity and good governance have turned into an Islamist takeover by forces whose idea of reform is to take all steps necessary to ensure their grip on power as they slowly oblige the whole of society to practice what only they believe?

Status quo forces in the Arab world will point to the past three years and say, 'We told you so.' They will argue that the turmoil that has characterized most of the transitions is evidence that their policies of imposed stability have worked better even if the political space is limited or closed. They will dismiss arguments that much of what we witness today is in fact a direct result of their own policies of suppressing the development of societies that respect diversity in all its forms and that empower people to exercise a true sense of citizenship.

I strongly believe, however, that history is our guiding light in what is transpiring in today's Arab awakenings. I write not out of a romantic connection to the region, but rather a firm conviction that the battle of ideas has at least finally started to unfold in the contemporary Arab world. It is a battle that will be won only by those who are ready to toil and sweat to get their point of view acknowledged.

In other words, gone, in my view, are the times when the lifestyles of secular forces, women, or any other force in society can be guaranteed by dictator regimes that might guarantee some of these lifestyles, but then go and abuse their population in a brutal way. From now on, if anybody wants to preserve their lifestyle, they have to work for it on the ground, as the Islamists have done for decades. Once again, there are no shortcuts to democracy.

This task of these third forces that I talk about, forces that frankly are yet to emerge in the Arab world in any organized manner—so far most of the secular forces that have emerged as alternatives, both to the status-quo forces in the Arab world as well as to the Islamist forces, have been maybe secular or liberal, but they have failed to be democratic. They have engaged in selective democratic positions, meaning that they believe in democracy only when the outcome is to their liking, and when the outcome is not to their liking, they are ready to join forces with the military or join forces with any other undemocratic forces to preserve their lifestyles.

This task is not for the fainthearted or those whom I consider to be the true romantics—individuals who are too quick to give up if democracy does not emerge overnight or if their lifestyles are not guaranteed without them rolling up their sleeves.

This is how I see the contribution of this book. My hope is that as it is read and re-read through the lens of time, maybe 20, 30, or 50 years down the line, and possibly after all other alternatives to diversity have been exhausted, it will inspire some to reject the prospect of waiting that long and encourage them to devote their energies to creating a pluralistic Arab world, now that the chance to do so is at least made possible through the historic process just unleashed.

Thank you.

Questions

QUESTION: Warren Hoge, International Peace Institute.

Marwan, your discussion of the Sykes-Picot countries, the countries that were created by European demographers, European chart makers, and then your further discussion about how we're watching the dismantling of countries like Iraq and Syria—it's possible to imagine them being dismantled three ways: a Sunni part, a Shia part, and a Kurdish part. Is it your point of view that it is in our—by "our" I mean the international community's—interest, in stability's interest, to maintain those European-drawn borders, to maintain Syria as it is right now, and create pluralism within it, to maintain Iraq, to maintain Lebanon? Or do you imagine different national boundaries?

MARWAN MUASHER: I think what is worse than Sykes-Picot is to try to dismantle it today, because in dismantling it, you are going to create countries that are ethnically pure, religiously pure. That runs totally against the message of this book. The message of this book is a call for pluralism and appreciation of diversity.

The Arab world, as I said, is an extremely diverse place. But the solution to that diversity is not through chopping up the Arab world into Sunni and Christian and Shiite enclaves that are going to be engaged in wars for the foreseeable future. I think the solution is to treat people as citizens in their countries, not as subjects, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or cultural backgrounds. That is possible. That has been done in many countries around the world, including in your own. But the solution is not to basically carve up the Arab world even further.

QUESTION: James Starkman.

Within the 70 percent demographic of the Arab world that's under 30, where does the religious culture that goes back over millennia intersect with the economic needs of that group? How would you extrapolate that trend into the future?

MARWAN MUASHER: As I said, the polls in the Arab world show that, regardless of whether people are secular or religious—in many countries of the Arab world the overwhelming population is rather conservative and religious—all Arabs, secular and religious, worry most about the economy and worry most about their governments being able to provide jobs for them.

There's another alarming statistic related to this: The unemployment rate in the Arab world is double the world's average. Of course, I'm talking about the Arab world as if it is monolithic, but by and large, the economic policies have not succeeded in addressing this issue.

In my own view, it is largely because we bring up generations of people that are not taught how to question authority. In doing so, both the secular and religious forces in the Arab world, who have been, of course, at odds with each other, have basically had an unwritten alliance to teach people that truths are absolute so that they don't question authority and so that we have docile societies.

Of course, the result has been exactly the opposite. People have been brought up without any skills that are needed to compete in today's marketplace and therefore become increasingly frustrated, unable to join the market force—that explains the unemployment rate of double the world's average—and in the end, go into the street, in the way that they did in Egypt, in Tunisia, and in other places.

Is that a lesson that is being internalized by countries, both those that have undergone transitions and those that have not? I don't think so. Those countries that have not undergone transitions think they are different.

Ironically, most of them are the monarchies of the Arab world. The rich monarchies still think they can avoid this through money, largely, or security means, as in the case of [Bahrain](#). The poor monarchies, [Jordan](#) and [Morocco](#), are trying to deal with this through what I still call either ad hoc or cosmetic reform processes that do not go as far as resulting in power sharing and in developing systems of checks and balances. I think they need to do that.

But unless this is done together with an education system that teaches people how to think critically and question authority, we are going to face the same situation in the Arab world today.

In Egypt and Tunisia today, people are, economically, calling for actually what I would say are anti-reform policies—increase of subsidies, increase of the state's interference in the economy—all the kinds of things that are simply not sustainable. But they do that because economic reform in the Arab world has assumed a negative connotation. In the last 20, 30 years, it was implemented without a parallel system of a political reform process that would ensure that when abuses happen—and abuses do happen in any economic transformation—to ensure that these abuses are institutionally addressed.

Today, countries like Egypt and Tunisia face a huge challenge, because they still have to carry the economic reform policies, but this time they have to convince a very skeptical population that this time they are going to be able to do that together with a political reform process.

QUESTION: Allen Young.

Many people argue that democracy in the West was successful because of the [Enlightenment](#) and the Enlightenment was successful because of the [Reformation](#) and what followed the Reformation, and understanding that you have to live and let live with other sects. There has never been a Reformation in the Islamic world. To what extent do you think that could be a serious problem in terms of trying to achieve the pluralism that you have been talking about?

MARWAN MUASHER: That is true, and that is why—I wouldn't say there has never been enlightenment. I think there were periods in Arab history—in Spain in the first maybe 100 years of the Islamic empire, Arab empire—where we have seen some enlightenment, not total enlightenment. But I do agree that the Arab world needs to be able to do so before we arrive at stable societies.

If the question implies that this is not possible with Islam—that's the big elephant in the room—if the question implies that this is not possible with the presence of Islam as a religion that some view is

not conducive to pluralism, then I would strongly disagree. And I would disagree, one, because there are successful examples of countries that are more or less democratic in the Islamic world—in Turkey, in Indonesia, in Malaysia—and two, because of Tunisia today. I cannot overstate the importance of Tunisia today, where—listen to this—a constitution that upholds the right of people not to believe at all in any religion is agreed to by the largest Islamic force in the country.

For those who say Islam is not compatible with democracy, I strongly disagree.

What I think needs to happen is that, regardless of Islam's or any Muslim's point of view, religious point of view, regarding issues, that has to be kept separate from individual as well as collective rights of all citizens. Tunisia has proved that it is able to do so. And if they can do it, there's no reason why others cannot do it at the same time.

This is not going to take place quickly or automatically. The Arab world, I think, most of the Arab world, will go through decades before they arrive at what you are saying.

My optimism comes from the fact that at least the battle for pluralism has started. From independence until 2011, that battle was suppressed by brute force. That battle for ideas was suppressed—unfortunately, by secular government. Today the battle is possible. Some will win it, some will lose it, and some will struggle.

JOANNE MYERS: How can you explain the phenomenon that's taking place in Tunisia and why it hasn't rippled over to the other countries?

MARWAN MUASHER: Several factors. The Tunisians are an educated society. They do have a thriving middle class. They do have an Islamic party that has actually been more forward-looking than any other Islamic party in the Arab world. They do have a tradition of the army not interfering in politics. They do have all these factors.

It's a small country, relatively homogeneous also. It doesn't have all the sectarian issues that other countries have. Yes, it is small, but has a lot of potential.

Interestingly, on that point, and to answer also your point, I asked [Ghannouchi](#), the leader of [En-Nahda](#), which is the largest, of course, political party in Tunisia until recently. Now the polls show, as I said, the [Nidaa Tounes](#), the secular opposition party, has more support than En-Nahda.

But I asked him about something which is very important to my understanding of how Islamic parties will operate in the political field. I said that in Islam there is a very famous, of course, very known principle that says no coercion in religion. That is, you do not force people to become Muslims. I said that principle, in my understanding, is a one-way street. In other words, as long as you are not a Muslim, there is no coercion. Once you become a Muslim and if you choose to opt out of the religion, then there is coercion. You're not allowed to do so by all Arab countries.

I said, "Does that principle apply politically? In other words, there's no coercion as long as you are outside of power, but once you are in power, then you might deny the right of all other forces to operate in the system."

Ghannouchi's answer, which is not the mainstream answer of Islamists, but it is what En-Nahda believes in and has practiced, was, "You are wrong on both counts. You are wrong theologically and you are wrong politically. Theologically, if somebody becomes a Muslim and he or she opts out, it is not up to us to judge that person. Politically, if the Communist Party wins the elections, we will have

to leave and give power to the Communist Party."

Again, that might not be and probably is not the mainstream argument. But it's a good beginning. It's a good beginning and can serve as a model for others to follow.

QUESTION: Richard Wright from United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

A few years ago, there was a very interesting empirical [study](#) by the World Bank that documented, I think pretty well, that the repetition of violence and civil wars in societies is more likely in the absence of strong institutions, particularly legal institutions or judicial institutions; i.e., rule of law.

What makes you think that, in the context of the second Arab transformation that you're talking about, it will be possible to create confidence by people in legal institutions? This is, I think, a pretty fundamental part of creating the stable and diverse societies that you're talking about.

MARWAN MUASHER: Rule of law is probably the first step. Once again, democracy is not going to flourish in the Arab world overnight. But taking the first step of building institutions that would ensure the rule of law is something that the Arab world must engage in.

Is it going to happen just out of the blue as you stated? No, it is not. It is not going to happen automatically. People are going to try other alternatives.

In Tunisia it is happening, in my view. In Egypt it is not yet, in my view also.

I think people will try other alternatives, particularly in a region that has not known democracy. Islamists in Egypt last year, when they came to power, behaved in a totally majoritarian way, tried to push a constitution that did not enjoy the consensus of all other forces. Now this is being mirrored today by the government in Egypt, which is also trying to behave in a majoritarian way.

My confidence is still with a [street](#) that might not know what democracy is, but that does know what it wants its government to do. It is not a street that is governed by ideology, in my view. It's a street that is showing that performance to the street is way more important than ideology. They don't, in other words, care whether their government is secular or religious. They care whether their government is able to deliver or not. They gave the religious forces a chance. It did not work, in their view.

Now, if the secular government in Egypt does not also deliver on economic matters, I don't think the street will stay as supportive as it is today. And we must admit, today the street in Egypt is very supportive, for example, of [Sisi](#), is very supportive of the government, and is very critical of the Islamists. But I think that support is going to be governed increasingly in the Arab world also by performance and not ideology.

QUESTION: David Musher.

You've written this book for the non-Arab audience. I wonder whether it might be more appropriate for the Arab audience. I wonder whether you might comment on that, please.

MARWAN MUASHER: I actually, no, did not write it for an Arab or a non-Arab audience. I wrote it for a general audience, to try to explain what is going on in the Arab world. One, this book will be translated into Arabic, as has my first book [[The Arab Center: The Promise of Moderation](#)]. Two, I write in Arabic. All of the ideas in this book come about also from my own writings in Arabic that are published in the Arab world.

But I agree that principally, whereas a non-Arab audience might find this book interesting or helpful in explaining what is going on, my own position is that I would like this book to be read by an Arab audience primarily. And I would like it to be a contribution, a small contribution, to developing an intellectual framework for what is going on in the Arab world, as I stated at the beginning. We cannot keep these as popular movements if they are not contextualized. I hope that this book will be a small contribution towards that objective in the Arab world.

QUESTION: Jean Ergas. I teach economics at NYU, and also finance.

My mother is from Cairo, and I used to quite often go on holiday. Many years ago, I remember, there were songs and there were arches in favor of [pan-Arabism](#). I think pan-Arabism at this point is the great conspicuous absence in the story. There is turmoil or change, as we used to call it, throughout a very large area, but everybody seems to be changing on their own, with their own strategy. Obviously they all have their own aims. That makes a lot of sense.

But this whole idea of pan-Arabism, that there is an Arab world and this Arab world may share a common set of ideals and they must work together—I'm not saying like a Common Market in Europe or the European Union, but something maybe approaching some sort of uniformity—seems not to be there. We no longer hear "[Al-Watan Al-Akbar](#)" ("The Greatest Homeland") being blared out everywhere, like I remember very well.

I was just wondering, will this make a comeback or are we seeing a segmentation and the end of this idea—or, as some might put it, an ideal?

MARWAN MUASHER: I think, sir, pan-Arabism, which was the dominant force in the Arab world, let's say, in the 1950s and 1960s, maybe 1940s also, died at the altar of [1967](#). Basically, pan-Arabism was a movement that found resonance with many Arabs, because it brought them dignity, because it brought about a sense of belonging to a larger nation that was attractive to many Arabs. Pan-Arabism, unfortunately, did not work towards pluralism and democracy. In fact, let's say [Nasser](#), who was the biggest personalization of the movement—Nasser's famous slogan was [Arabic phrase], "No voice can rise above that of liberation"—liberation of Palestine, that is.

When 1967 came and Arabs found out that neither liberation nor freedom was achieved, pan-Arabism basically died, at least as a political force. It was replaced by an Islamic ideology. If people could not subscribe to this, if pan-Arabism did not succeed in solving people's problems, then maybe Islam will.

In my own view—and this might be a bold prediction—Islam is not going to die as a political force. But Islam's appeal today is facing the same challenges that pan-Arabism faced in the 1960s, because, for the first time since political Islam came on the scene, it has now been given a chance to govern and it has been shown to be no worse or better than any other force. The holiness of political Islam is over.

So we have a big vacuum today, a vacuum that pan-Arabism and political Islam contributed to, but a vacuum that is not yet filled by third forces who are both secular and democratic. These two characterizations don't seem to go together in the Arab world. But I maintain that they have the potential of doing so.

I don't foresee a return to pan-Arabism. Maybe a different version, maybe an EU type. That's still too early to tell, whether we will progress along these lines. I think the specific problems of each country today are more formidable than to have people think about such pan-Arab aspirations. But in the

future, once countries are able to find stability, pan-Arabism in a modern form might very well be attempted.

QUESTION: Ron Berenbeim.

Just a quick comment and then a question. The various references to Sykes-Picot remind me that—and I speak with some experience in these matters—Oxford classics professors don't do good maps. And we live with the consequences of all that today.

But I want to ask you about one country that hasn't come up and perhaps some related countries in that part of the world, which is Saudi Arabia. It seems as though Saudi Arabia hasn't even fallen asleep, let alone awakened yet. They do nonetheless have a considerable capability for mischief, fueling sectarian conflict in Syria. They're not responsible alone for that, but they're certainly instrumental. With the possibility of any moderating influence of the United States, which now is on the verge of energy independence, what's going to happen to Saudi Arabia? What sort of impact are they going to have on the rest of the Arab world?

MARWAN MUASHER: Saudi Arabia has made it clear that, in general, with the exception of Syria, they are against what is going on in the Arab world. They don't see this as a historical transformation process. They see this as an Arab inferno, a revolutionary process that is going to really ruin the Arab world, etc.

They see the world, I think, in terms of two prisms, if you will, a Sunni-Shiite prism and a status quo-change prism. These are not always converging. In most of the Arab world, they see it in terms of status quo versus change, and they have attempted to slow down the process, if not reverse it altogether, through basically financial means. They have done so in their own country. They have done so in the Gulf. They are doing so with Egypt, where basically they have poured billions of dollars, not towards necessarily productive projects, but towards budget support. In my view, this will have a limit. They cannot keep on doing this forever.

In the case of Syria, they see this through a Sunni-Shia divide. They're worried about an Iraqi government which, in their view, is controlled by the Shia in the north. They're worried about Iran, of course, in the east. They see now the preservation of the Assad regime as completing that encirclement of Saudi Arabia and the region.

In my own view, the Saudis don't yet have a coherent policy or a vision of the future. In other words, they're for the Assad regime to leave, as many others are, including myself, but they have no vision of how to build an alternative. They do not want Egypt to fall in the hands of the Islamists, but they also don't have a vision of how the region is going to look like.

Ironically, the reformist element in Saudi Arabia today is led by the [king](#), who is at least 90 years old. Once that era is over, I think that you will see some tensions rising in Saudi Arabia because of these issues. Unemployment among the youth in Saudi Arabia is huge. It's about 30 percent. With all the money that the Saudis have, they still have to deal with serious problems.

JOANNE MYERS: Marwan, once again I have to thank you for being so thoughtful, so insightful. It is always wonderful to have you here.

Audio

Jordanian diplomat and scholar Marwan Muasher surveys the situation across the Arab world. He sees reasons for optimism in the long run, particularly in Tunisia, and makes a passionate call for

pluralism, which he says is essential for democracy and prosperity.

Video Clip

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TV Show

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