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MORNING KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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DR. ALTERMAN: General Pratt, Dr. Tarzi, thank you very much for bringing me down. It's a real pleasure to be back at Marine Corps University.

In the summer of 1983, I worked at a Friendly's Ice Cream shop in Poughkeepsie, New York, and I still remember a lot of the customers. There was the guy who drove up in the shiny green Corvette and had to go most of the way through a two-inch stack of $100 bills until he could find some singles to pay for his ice cream. And there was the really scary looking dude—skinny, with stringy hair, and I realized he only had half his teeth because he gave this big, broad smile when his bill came to $6.66.

(LAUGHTER)

But what I remember the most is I loved the Little League teams. Most people hated dealing with Little League teams, but I loved the Little League teams because the kids would be so excited and their eyes would get big, and they'd say, "oh, he has to get a double because -- because he hit a double!" And it was so much fun.

But as I look back, in the summer, it's kind of bittersweet, because it turned out I was an accomplice to murder. You see, every year, when ice cream consumption goes up, murder rates go up. And when ice cream consumption goes down, murder rates go down. So there's this correlation between people eating the ice cream I served and killing somebody.

And you could say, "Well, no, that's not really the way it works. What happens is it gets hot, and people are outside, and they get grumpy, and they get into fights, and that's why the murder rate goes up. It's not caused by the ice cream."

But there's part of me that worries that I was responsible for -- for somebody dying because I was serving that ice cream.

And the only thing that -- that puts my mind at ease is at least I don't eat margarine...

(LAUGHTER)

...because it turns out there's a 99.3 percent correlation between margarine consumption and divorces in the state of Maine between 2000 and 2010.

(LAUGHTER)

So what are we looking at? We're looking at a problem of correlation, and we're looking at a problem of causation. What we're talking about today in this seminar is, I think, a twofold problem. The first is the connection between democratization and human rights in foreign countries and U.S. national security interests, and the second is what impact U.S. policy has on the actions of others, if it has any impact at all. That's what I want to talk about.

There are a whole separate set of issues related to democratization in U.S. foreign policy that have to do with the morality of supporting authoritarian regimes. And I think that's a whole different discussion which other people are more qualified to have. What I want to talk about is this problem of correlation and causation and what it means for our interests.

I want to start with an important premise, and that is you can't afford but to have a human rights policy. I mean, you have one by omission or co-mission, in part it's because of law, both domestic and international. But it's also a consequence of the fact that if you take an action, or if you don't take an action, that has implications. You can support the status quo, you can undermine the status quo, or you can try to evolve the status quo. Whatever the United States does has consequences directly or indirectly.

And it's true on the practical level, either people have resources, they don't have resources; they have training, they don't have training. Politically, if we support somebody, that sends a political sign. It sends a political signal from us. It's reflected as a political signal over there. Sometimes it's reflected as a little bit of a skewed political signal. It turns out that in countries we consider ourselves close to, we're spectacularly unpopular. According to Pew, in Jordan, the United States has a 14 percent approval rating. This is a country we give a billion dollars a year to for 6 million people. In Egypt, we're at 10 percent. For all the people who said, well, you know, this is -- this is just because of George W. Bush. Approval ratings were actually higher in the Bush administration than they are right now. So what kinds of messages we send by supporting, by not supporting—sometimes goes through a filter that's hard to appreciate. But there's no question that when it comes to what's happening around the world, external ties are political capital that people either try to use to their benefit or try to attack their enemies for.

Historically, human rights started off as a weapon against governments and then evolved into a way to restrain Western governments. During the Cold War, human rights was an important prism through which the United States criticized the Soviet Union. Dan Brumberg is here; I saw him walk in. Where's Dan? There's Dan. Hi, Dan.

BRUMBERG: Good morning.

ALTERMAN: I'm just about to mention your dad. Dan's dad, Abraham Brumberg, founded The Problems of Communism, which was -- right?

BRUMBERG: No more problems and no more Communism.

ALTERMAN: Right.

(LAUGHTER)

Which was published by the U.S. Information Agency as a way to use the absence of freedom in the Soviet Union as a way to undermine Communism, meet the U.S. strategic goals around the world. It wasn't just the United States that used human rights as a lever to accomplish strategic goals. The Helsinki Commission in 1975 created human rights as a legitimate issue of discourse between the West and the Soviet Union and, according to European views, helped undermine Soviet Communism. It emboldened and legitimized East Bloc dissent.

But at the same time, these Cold War imperatives drove the United States and its allies to have a whole series of relationships with authoritarian governments in the developing world. And in the 1970s, concern grew that anti-Communism had led the United States to associate with murderous regimes.

The Vietnam War and ties to the government of South Vietnam were just a part of the problem. There's also Pinochet's Chile, the Shah's Iran, Mobutu's Zaire and apartheid South Africa, all relationships with regimes that were anti-democratic, violated human rights in the interest of anti-Communism. And it wasn't just the United States that had these relationships, but the U.S.' role as the leader of the free world meant that what -- how the U.S. treated these issues had a special kind of salience.

So there's a fundamental question that arose, I think, throughout the 1970s. Does a human rights focus undermine U.S. national security or does it advance it? The fact is the post-colonial world that we inherited the leadership of after World War II was a lot messier place than we ever thought it would be. We thought the problem was colonialism, and because Americans are anti-colonial, we're former colonials, we rebelled against a colonial system, we were going to fix this problem. And it turned out that as we went through the 1950s and 1960s and 1970s, it turned out to be much harder to fix the problems. It turned out there were a whole series of threats we hadn't dealt with, in part because of this Cold War context, the people playing us off against the Soviets, but in part also because a lot of these countries had very weak foundations to build on.

I think there's a quite serious and legitimate question of whether the absence of democracy, the absence of human rights, is that an indicator of negative conditions or is a cause of negative conditions? And is freedom and prosperity an indicator of democracy or is a product of democracy? Is it the dependent or is it the independent variable in political science terms?

I think this question created a very useful tension in the United States that shaped U.S. ties with the world. Anti-communism was important, but anti-communism also had to be constrained. It had to be balanced against something.

With the end of the Cold War, the balance gave way. It became harder to argue for condoning abuses. What was the higher strategic goal we would be meeting by supporting abusive governments? Also, there was this perception with the end of the Cold War, the rise of communications technology, and remember Francis Fukuyama's essay, "The End of History?" – the perception was that this whole thing was over, that we had won, and freedom was going to come. It was just a question of time.

September 11th changed a lot of things, and one thing it did was it systematically marginalized a lot of the kinds of people you're going to hear from today. Middle East experts were creamed because they said, “You guys didn't predict September 11th. You were supposed to be paying attention. Here's a tremendous strategic threat that changed everything, and you guys were asleep at the switch.” It also

marginalized diplomats who had been working with governments - in many cases, working closely with the very governments whose citizens were involved in the 9/11 attacks. And it also created a new attitude toward authoritarianism, seeing it not just as regrettable, but seeing authoritarianism as a direct threat to U.S. national security.

The former director of Central Intelligence, Jim Woolsey, told a UCLA audience in 2003, "As we move toward a new Middle East over the years and I think over the decades to come, we will make a lot of people very nervous." And then singling out Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and the Saudi royal family, he said, "We want you nervous. We want you to realize that now for the fourth time in a hundred years, this country and its allies are on the march and that we're on the side of those whom you, the Mubaraks, the Saudi royal family most fear. We're on the side of your own people."

This is an argument not just for the correlation of human rights and democratization and moderation, it's about causation. The absence of human rights creates national security threats. It's a different kind of argument than we had seen before.

I think, in many ways, if you look broadly, the Bush administration came to see after 9/11 human rights and democratization as a tool with which they would undermine radicalization in the Arab world. That is to say, it was instrumentalized, it became an instrument, became the tool. Democratization was in service of a goal.

It's a frame that saw victory as possible. We had to win. Democracy was going to be part of that win. And I think in many ways, it was a remarkably Cold War kind of frame that that was the old enemy and this is the new enemy, and we defeated the old enemy, and now we'll defeat the new enemy, and it's going to collapse the in same kind of way. The metaphor was, "We're going to drain the swamp." We're going to drain the swamp. It didn't quite start out exactly that instrumentally. When the president gave the commencement address at West Point -- no booing please -- in 2002, he said, "The 20th century ended with a single surviving model of human progress based on the non-negotiable demands of human dignity, the rule of law, the limits of power of the state, respect for women and private property and free speech and equal justice and religious tolerance." Not quite instrumentalizing, making an observation about how the world worked.

But then a year later, speaking at the National Endowment for Democracy, in the wake of Operation Iraqi Freedom, it became much more instrumental. Speaking then, the president said, "Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe because, in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty. As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment and violence ready for export. And with the spread of weapons that could bring catastrophic harm to our country and to our friends, it would be reckless to accept the status quo. Therefore, the United States has adopted a new strategy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East. This strategy requires the same persistence and energy and idealism we've shown before, and it will yield the same results. As in Europe, as in Asia, as in every region of the world, the advance of freedom leads to peace."

This didn't come in the immediate months after 9/11. In the months after 9/11 we were still in the conceptual phase. This was the operational piece. Tthis was after we were fighting in Iraq. This is actually after, arguably, we won in Iraq. And then it continued and it became more and more practical. Speaking at the Library of Congress three months later, Bush said, "We seek the advance of democracy

for the most practical of reasons, because democracies do not support terrorists or threaten the world with weapons of mass murder. We will succeed," and here's the self-confidence, "because when given a choice, people everywhere, from all walks of life, from all religions, prefer freedom to violence and terror. We will succeed because human beings are not made by the Almighty God to live in tyranny."

And then, I think bringing the operational and the conceptual together in his second inaugural address, he said, "We're led by events and common sense to one conclusion, the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands."

That's a pretty remarkable intellectual journey from "we know we're right" to "we have to make this change over there to keep us safe over here." And there was a whole strategy that worked through it. But the problem the Bush administration increasingly had was that rolling up terrorist groups increasingly required the cooperation of authoritarian governments. Partly it's because you need intelligence and policing, and who has intelligence and policing? Governments have intelligence and policing. But it's also partly because if you want to delegitimize a radical theology, the institutions that help you do that in the Middle East are state-affiliated institutions.

And so if you're trying to roll this back, you need to work with governments, not against governments. And I think if you looked at the Bush administration strategy over, I would say six years -- as it sort of took until 2002, 2003 to take shape -- I think had four problems.

One is the Bush administration hoped that the fall of Saddam Hussein was the most important event in an effort to turn back the tide against extremism, but probably the most important event was a series of bombings in May and November of 2003 in Saudi Arabia that convinced the Saudi royal family that extremism was an internal domestic problem to Saudi Arabia and not an external problem. And it was the inside threat that I think mobilized a whole series of Middle Eastern governments, led by the Saudis on the ideological side, on the intelligence side, on the policing side, on the cooperation side to mobilize.

Second, I think the Bush administration increasingly became unclear what actions by the U.S. government prompts the desired actions by target states. The fact is, when it comes to democratization policy, the decisions that a government makes are really complicated. They're complex, they change. You're dealing with individuals thinking about their own futures. And I think the Bush administration had thought that there would be a more consistent way to apply this and found that oftentimes people acted in confounding ways, not the ways they expected.

There's also a domestic political problem, which is if you keep talking about how you're pushing forward democracy in the Middle East and it's going to make things better, but the appearance is kind of worse. I mean, Iraq is messy, as we'll talk about in a little bit. Hamas wins elections in Palestine. Is that a good idea? Egypt is not going anywhere especially good. Lebanon seems to get more and more complicated. They all had these moments of hope which gave way to very messy realities. And it's hard for a president to continually build the case for support for something that's just messy.

And I think the final thing is Americans didn't feel a lot safer because of this. I mean, if the point is this is going to make you safer, where's the evidence that Americans were safer? Scrutiny at airports still increased. It still felt like Americans were living in a security state. Americans didn't feel better off, so it became hard to sustain this over time.

And it seems to me that with this sort of lack of a clear win, or lack of clear progress, the Bush administration came to see the necessity of working with governments. In its last two years, the Bush was more modest about the role of democratization strategies as they fit into the broader strategy than it was in 2003 or 2004.

The Obama administration, I think, began largely where the Bush administration left off: focusing on governments more than populations and seeking credit as much for what the president chose not to do as what he did. But the president had no less confidence in his formula. That is to say, he accepted the idea that moving governments toward greater democratization would enhance U.S. national security. He differed from the Bush administration on the means, and he seemed to believe early on that if you had an attitude of respect and approached dialogue with governments, that that would give you much better results than a loud, declaratory policy.

I think on the self-confidence side, he said in his first inaugural address, “To those who cling to power through corruption, deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history.” That's a theme that comes through the Obama administration's speechwriting, “the wrong side of history.”

But with that, it's moderated by his approach of respect. He said also in that inaugural address, “Earlier generations understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use. Our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the temper and qualities of humility and restraint.”

This was meant to convey a very different tone. Recall that when the president was speaking directly to the Muslim world, he actually gave two speeches. The first speech was in April 2009 in Istanbul. He said, “I want to be clear that America's relationship with Muslim world cannot and will not just be based upon opposition to terrorism. We seek broader engagement based on mutual interest and mutual respect. We will listen carefully. We'll bridge misunderstandings and we will seek common ground. We will be respectful even if we do not agree.”

I think he has tried to contrast himself with the Bush administration's approach. And his approach to governments, I think, was must softer in that Cairo speech -- this famous speech to the Muslim world on June 4, 2009. He said, “Governments that protect these rights are ultimately more stable, successful and secure. Suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away. America respects the right of all peaceful and law-abiding voices to be heard around the world, even when we disagree with them. And we will welcome all elected peaceful governments, provided they govern with respect for all their people.”

I think this is a different notion of freedom than the Bush administration put forward, a notion of freedom that really is based more on process than outcomes. It's not so much about the destination; it's about being engaged, and it's a process of change.

And before the Arab Spring, it seemed that the Obama administration was trying to persuade governments to lighten up rather than encourage people to rise up. The latter, I think, was a tone we often heard from the Bush administration. It was based on a premise of respect for sovereignty, but it drew the same connection between tyranny and threats to U.S. national security.

I think also the Obama approach seemed to stress language more than programs. In many ways, this was about changing the tone, not about having a big, sparkly new initiative. We didn't see the Millennium Challenge Corporation come out of the Obama administration. That was a Bush administration initiative. There was sense that the biggest problem was we seemed to be alienating people with our tone, and that was what the President was seeking to address.

The surprise of the Arab Spring, which snuck up on everybody, led to a sudden leap in U.S. support for protestors. The subsequent resurgence of governments after the first months of instability has left the administration in a very awkward position. And I think the Obama administration must find a very strange paradox that it is much less popular in the Middle East than the Bush administration was at the height of its unpopularity in the Middle East.

In their view, they were supporting the Arab Spring. They had words of support. They wonder why they don't get credit for that. In fact, it's harder to measure outcomes for the Obama administration because its objectives were not as clear as the Bush administration objectives. But also, it seems clear to me that as we look right now, respect for human rights and democratization in the Middle East are lower than they were when President Obama came to office in 2009.

I think where the Obama administration's increasingly gone on human rights and democratization it's put into this bucket of Countering Violent Extremism. That leaves it clearly instrumentalized. It's a tool -- violent extremism is something we're opposing. This is a tool to fight it, as it was in the Bush administration. But I think it also means the U.S. ends up working with governments rather than against them.

But it seems to me there are two principal challenges with this Countering Violent Extremism emphasis. One is that, to my mind, as I've looked at what people have done and talked about, too much of it has devolved into discussions of language. It sees the key indicator of extremism is language, it sees the key antidote to extremism is language. There's a real effort to change the way people talk, the way people receive doesn't seem to be very practically oriented towards situations on the ground. And it also seems to me that from the point of view of our partner governments, CVE gets compartmentalized, and it gets compartmentalized because they create teams of English-speaking interlocutors who empathize with U.S. concerns but they're ultimately quite remote from the kinds of people in law enforcement and intelligence work, both of whom are responsible both for the things they do well and the abuses they sometimes commit. And it seems to me that the CVE is going on over here and these things that are connected to violent extremism are over there, and there's not a clear connection between them all.

And if we return to the central idea, that is what's the connection between authoritarianism, extremism, tyranny and U.S. national security, I think there's been a connection that the Bush administration sought that the Obama administration has accepted. But when it's come to implementation, I think both administrations have had a fiendishly difficult time getting through the contradictions.

And just to walk through this, I think it's useful to talk about three case studies just to show how hard it is, even if you have an approach, either to work with populations or work with governments. You quickly come to really hard choices. And I want to just walk you through some of the hard choices.

The first hard set of choices is in Palestine. The Bush administration strongly supported elections in January 2006. The guys who won the elections were Hamas. They're designated a foreign terrorism organization. They won the elections. Rather than ending extremism, arguably, they handed the government of the Palestinian Authority to a foreign terrorist organization, they created a challenge for the U.S. government which on the one hand wanted to support the Palestinian Authority but was barred by law from giving any support to a foreign terrorist organization.

In 2007, in June, Hamas took over Gaza where it's ruled since. Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, also known as Abu Mazen, has a term that that expired in January 2009. That time has gone. He continues to rule. There's no prospect for elections. For the Obama administration, democratization has never been the issue in Palestine. The issue's been security, the issue's been cooperating with the government of Israel, diplomatic process, those kinds of things.

Abbas has been a security partner to the United States and to Israel and is significantly more compliant than any Hamas government would ever be. There is no sense in the U.S. government that the absence of democracy or human rights is what creates extremism in Palestine. The fact is, the U.S. government feels it needs a friendly Palestinian government to work on the diplomacy, and so the emphasis is on supporting a government that will work with United States on diplomacy.

Saudi Arabia, I think for the Bush administration, was just too hard. There was -- after 9/11, and especially after these explosions in 2003, tremendous governmental coordination on counter terrorism, intelligence sharing, all those kinds of things that made it extremely difficult for the United States to criticize Saudi Arabia on its internal political conditions.

The other thing is that, if you really look at it, a democratic Saudi Arabia, at least in the near term, would be much less cooperative with the United States than the current government of Saudi Arabia is. It would probably be less moderate than the current government of Saudi Arabia is. I think that always hampered the United States from really pushing too hard to get more elections because of a sense that the results of elections wouldn't really be in U.S. national interests.

To an extent, I think the Bush administration tried to develop closer ties with the United Arab Emirates as a way of showing, well, here's a moderate state that we can hold in contrast. But the United Arab Emirates, in terms of democratization, is not markedly different from Saudi Arabia. It's a little different; it's not markedly different. It's a monarchy, and it's ruled as a monarchy. The Obama administration ended up often using Bahrain as a proxy for Saudi Arabia, but also didn't feel like it could criticize Saudi Arabia because the relationship is really too fraught, it's too difficult, it's too complicated to exercise much leverage.

The rebalance toward Asia puts the Obama administration on the defensive. The Iran deal puts the Obama administration on the defensive. King Salman of Saudi Arabia is coming to Washington tomorrow night. I don't think there's going to be a lot of criticism of the human rights environment in Saudi Arabia because there's so much transactional work in this relationship, so much important work that needs to be done. It seems to be that any U.S. administration comes to Saudi Arabia and is looking for things with which we can agree with the Saudis, not on things we can disagree with the Saudis.

And then I want to talk about Egypt. Egypt in many ways has been the biggest target for U.S. human rights democratization policy in the Middle East. It's not merely that it's the most populous Arab country, and about a quarter of all Arabs live in Egypt. It’s also because we give $1.3 billion a year in

military assistance, about $250 million in economic assistance. There's this sense that the U.S. has leverage in Egypt and Egypt has had very little alternative to a relationship with the United States. So here's a place where you can make a difference that would matter.

I think there's also this degree of embarrassment. The U.S. has been trying on and off to promote democratization in Egypt since the early 1950s with pretty mixed results. And we keep saying wouldn't it be better to do it this way and Egyptians keep saying, yes, and keep doing it in ways similar to -- to ways they want to do it.

Egypt was a key target for the Bush administration, especially after 9/11. I think Egypt tried to host an Arab reform forum in 2004, partly as a way to deflect the Bush administration's push on this. Then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice went to Cairo in 2005, delivered a speech on governance and democratization at the American University in Cairo, taking it to Egypt, talking about the importance of human rights democratization, the importance -- I remember because I was at the speech -- of not having people get the knock on the door in the middle of the night from the secret police.

I think there was a sense of which the administration saw Egypt as typical, but there's also a sense of which the administration saw Egypt as “pressurable.” It was “gettable.” The reality is President Mubarak mostly resisted. He was able to deflect, he was able to delay, he was able to co-opt. For those of us who tried to get things done in Egypt, sometimes Egyptians are very good at deflecting, co-opting, delaying, and that's, I think, what they did with the human rights policy. And Egypt opened up, but it opened up slowly and unevenly, and on its own terms.

When President Obama came in, he made it a priority to address what he saw as the Bush administration's heavy-handedness. And you heard in the language from his Cairo speech, it's about respect, it's about, “We know where we're all trying to go together, and we're not going to try to push you.”

But I think that, for the Obama administration, it was awkward because you had President Mubarak, who had no interest in going anywhere. You had the seeming interest in passing on rule to his son, Gamal Mubarak. Mubarak fell in 2011, the second major incident of the Arab Spring. Then you had this rather spectacular election of the Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Morsi. And then massive protests in June 2003. The army moved in, Field Marshal Abdel Fattah Al Sisi comes in, and the administration kept emphasizing process. And what the emphasis on process did was it convinced everybody, “these guys are our enemy.” It convinced the Islamists the Obama administration wasn't on their side, it convinced the military the Obama administration wasn't on their side, it convinced secularists the Obama administration wasn't on their side. And the Obama administration said, "We're not taking sides, we're about process, because we think you need to have a process."

But what people on the outside saw of that process is that it seemed too deliberative, it seemed too deliberate, it seemed not reactive enough, it all seemed to get clogged up. What we have now is not only an Egyptian government which now seems much more hostile to the United States than any Egyptian government in memory. But we also have this paradox of a genuinely popular authoritarian regime. There is little question in my mind that now President Sisi would win any free election. There's also little doubt in my mind that 30 or 40 percent of the Egyptian public absolutely hates him, and some of them, murderously so. But what do you do if your democratization policy is undermined by an authoritarian popular leader? How do you accommodate that? And how do you accommodate all the national security implications of a different relationship with Egypt?

I think what the Obama administration has discovered is that democratization and human rights doesn't give you a very firm foundation for structuring a strategy toward a country, because it moves so quickly. And there are -- there are very difficult trade-offs you have to make along the way. So I think, on the one hand it's impossible to have a policy that's only about human rights. It's impossible in Egypt, it's impossible in Palestine, it's impossible in Saudi Arabia, it's impossible anywhere. But you can't have a policy that doesn't say anything, doesn't have any view about human rights or democratization. You can't do that either.

Administrations have struggled to establish the relative important of democratization and the proper trade-offs. In practice, democratization tends to be the most important in places that are least important, and least important in the places in are most important. That's worth remembering.

Surprisingly, the issues of correlation and causation with which I began remain quite unexplored, especially in two ways. One is, what are the effects of democratization on U.S. national security? The issue isn't whether western democracies are more moderate than eastern autocracies. The question, is whether transitioning authoritarian systems to more open politics will make these systems more moderate as well.

There are a number of examples in medicine of things where changing numbers doesn't seem to have the desired effect. We know for example, that high levels of high-density lipoproteins are associated with lower risk of heart attack and stroke. And we know ways to raise the level of high density lipoproteins, but it turns out that raising the level doesn't change the stroke and heart attack risk. It's an indicator of something, but just raising it doesn't get you in a different place.

It also turns out, for a long time people thought there was a connection between coffee drinking and pancreatic cancer. It turns out that the connection is among people who smoke cigarettes, almost all drink coffee. And cigarette smoking is linked to pancreatic cancer, but coffee drinking itself isn’t. Doctors were looking at the wrong thing. And the correlation and the causation are in different places. The question is, if you move this variable, will the thing you're trying to move change as well? And the fact is, we don't know that very well. We haven't really worked it out.

The second question, I think equally important, is what U.S. government approach is most effective? Working through governments? Against governments? With non-governmental groups? How do we work with publics? The context for any decision on the governmental side -- that is, their government -- is so complicated it's hard to draw firm conclusions. It's strange to me that we don't have more consensus.

And then, finally, there are all these really hard strategic problems, which have less to do with what the United States does, but what it's goals are and how it hopes to reach them, versus what does progress really look like. I mean, for about a decade I was active with Freedom House, which puts out a list rating every country in the world in terms of its freedoms. People have used those numbers to draw political science conclusions. I've been to those meetings, I wouldn't use those numbers. It's a process that's not scientific.

But what does progress really look like? What does it look like when you're getting to where -- where you're trying to go? Where are you really trying to go? What's the end state look like? What's good enough? Is more stability helpful, or do you want less stability? Do you need instability to get to

stability? Are you willing to risk instability with friendly governments? What does that do? And how do you -- how do you work that in? And what other goals are you willing to balance against? And how much? And where does democratization go in your priority list?

These are big strategic questions which, I think, as a country, we haven't really answered yet. Fifteen years of focus haven't done much to address them. I think there's unlikely to be consensus within governments. And I think the -- whatever decisions U.S. governments make are likely to change over time.

Just as the Bush administration has started off with a very clear idea and ended with a different idea, and I think the Obama administration has been struggling. These are all going to be dynamic, but they're important questions.

It's important to try to fix something, and if you can't improve human rights around the world, at least, please, avoid eating margarine. The marriage of a nice family in Maine depends on it.

Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE)

DR. ALTERMAN: As you like. Sure. I'm yours. Sir.

QUESTION: I'm Dr. Ray Johnson from School of Advanced Warfighting, I have three very quick observations, I'd like for you to respond to them. First of all, this problem of democracies in bed with authoritarian regimes and acting at odds with their own national values and political ideology dates back at least to Thucydides. So this is nothing new that you've been talking about.

Second, I -- I would disagree with you that the literature today is inadequate on causation. There's a great deal of literature from the '60s on causation. I would agree that -- that perhaps today it's inadequate.

Finally, I was the senior defense advisor to Joe Duffey, the last director of the U.S. Information Agency, during the elections in Serbia. And this problem of -- of democracy in regimes like Serbia is one that's quite dangerous because in nations ridden by sectarian and economic divide, democracy can actually result in the wrong person getting elected, so that, although we touted democracy in the elections in Serbia, Milosevic was elected.

And I say that in response to your remark that Hamas wins elections in Palestine, is that a good thing? So it comes back to your original point about causation. Does democracy cause problems or is -- or are the problems a result of democracy?

So how would you respond to those -- those three observations? There is sufficient literature, democracy is in some cases quite dangerous, and finally that this is nothing new.

DR. ALTERMAN: Yeah, I'm glad you're satisfied with the literature. I'm not satisfied with the literature. My training is as a historian, not as a political scientist, so I tend to look at -- work on large data sets as a little bit inherently suspect.

And, as I said, having worked for the Freedom House for about a decade, supplying political scientists' data sets, and I have reservations about large data sets and drawing political conclusions from them.

I agree that, of course, democracies have had relationships with authoritarian regimes. I didn't say it was new; I said that the problem, as a problem of a policy and a problem for Europe's national security, rose in the 1970s when you began to have U.S. legislation constraining the government from its relations with authoritarian regimes.

There are clearly people who have majority support who I would argue are not democrats, because I'm a huge fan of Federalist 10 and the respect for minorities, and one of the dangers you have in a lot of societies is, majority rule doesn't mean respect for rights. Majority rule means rights are overridden.

This is especially true in the Middle East, where you have 90, 95, 98 percent with some populations, sometimes Sunni Muslim populations, sometimes you have a sectarian mix, you have other kinds of mixes, and you have these minority groups who don't feel they have any protection, and the majority says, "This is majority rule."

And it seems to me that democracy isn't what you want. What you want is tolerance and respect for difference, and it's hard to especially that when you're arguing at the same time that majorities should rule.

I don't know how to promote tolerance except through the -- the U.S. system of ensuring that -- that nobody has a majority. That was the magic of the American colonies, was that nobody had a majority. I mean, there were Catholics and Quakers and Presbyterians and -- right? The model of the Massachusetts Bay colony, which was essentially bringing church and state together in government, was a failed model by the late 17th century. How you get to that in states where you do have clear majorities, where people often see their identity in singular terms rather than multiple terms, is hard.

One of the advantages of having multiple sources of identity is that you can see yourself as a minority in some ways and majority in others, and you're always balancing and bouncing in between. When you have a single identity -- Sunni Muslims against the rest, Shia Muslims against the rest -- the numbers don't change, and it's -- sometimes the system doesn't accommodate minorities or minority rights in the same way.

So the the problems of democracies, I think, are also old and -- and, to my mind, can only be mitigated by a sense of -- of pluralism or respect for minority rights, which elections don't necessarily promote at all. So...

Sir, in the back?

QUESTION: Douglas Streusand. I'm on the Command & Staff College faculty.

I grew up in a town with a Friendly's restaurant that was very popular, but nonetheless, we had no murders.

(LAUGHTER)

(OFF-MIKE) your -- typically, or typical for you, or extraordinarily capable -- take your pick -- presentation, you didn't address Jeane Kirkpatrick's distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, which is one of the approaches to how to handle human rights in this situation.

And if one regards the ideology that is euphemistically known as violent extremism as a third totalitarian wave, one can make the argument in accord with Kirkpatrick that supporting authoritarian regimes in the cause of resisting it is not merely a compromise, but a moral obligation. So I would like you to respond to that.

The second point that I was going to make was the one that you just made in response to Dr. Johnson's (ph) question that electoral democracy does not necessarily facilitate human rights and, in fact, in some cases necessarily doesn't.

So would you accept the proposition that -- that perhaps the problem is that we are trying to promote human rights through democratization rather than democratization through human rights?

DR. ALTERMAN: Interesting.

I have had the very interesting experience of spending a lot of time in authoritarian and totalitarian states.

I lived in Egypt for several years under President Mubarak. I've been to every country in the Middle East accept for Iraq, interestingly. It's probably the reverse of everybody else in this room. I was in Libya under Gaddafi. I've been all kinds of crazy places and seen crazy, abusive governments.

But it feels to me that there're -- there're several things that don't get recognized efficiently. One is how lumpy authoritarian and totalitarian regimes are, which is, they don't affect everybody the same way.

There are people who are in league with the government, people who are allowed to make money as long as they support the government. There are people who just make money and they stay away from the government.

It seems to me that the -- there's a system that works, and it kind of works the same way as any government works, where there're people who are clients and people who are patrons and all those kinds of things.

But I'm not sure I see that keen distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. I'm not sure I see ideology as being especially salient in the way these governments work. They often say they have an ideology, but that's like anti-corruption drives in some countries. It's a way to punish people who are on the wrong side, it's a way to convey power, but I'm not sure it's actually a guide to thinking.

So what strikes me is not that there's a distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian governments so much as, within the most totalitarian system, there's a huge spectrum of experience. Within any authoritarian system, there's a huge spectrum of experience.

And what I've come to feel is that we -- we've sort of fallen away from thinking about elite politics, because it's not fashionable and people want to talk about mass mobilization and Twitter and everything else.

And the more I look at these places, the more I talk to people, the more I'm convinced that we need to pay more attention to the subtleties of elite politics, because I think they end up being more decisive than we give them credit for being.

You asked a subtle and nuanced question about sort of, does the human rights serve democratization? Does democratization serve human rights? I haven't thought about that. I'm sure that the answer I give wouldn't be as eloquent as the question, so if you don't mind, I'd rather back off.

Sir?

QUESTION: This is (inaudible) from (inaudible). I'm from UAE, and...

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION: ...one -- only the one from the region, over there.

So I have -- sir, thank you for your speak over there (ph), and I appreciate it that you study a lot about our region, and democracy over there. And I don't have to agree with you everything -- am I...

(UNKNOWN): (inaudible)

(LAUGHTER)

QUESTION: Yeah. You know this region, Arab world, already 1,400 -- more than 1,400 years exists, and there is so many things about your speak (ph) regarding if this country is facing a danger from inside or outside. As Saudi and United Arab Emirates, we are facing problems outside the country. The extremists. Al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda is enemy for us and for you -- and for USA. We are fighting both enemies. We are allies. And, regarding Hamas, who elected Hamas? Is it the majority of people? Is it democracy, or not? Why, now, we are fighting Hamas? Because it is elected already. And you said UAE is not following democracy.

As a Saudi, we are a happy nation, and what you think to make us -- thinks to make us more happy than we are now. And thank you.

DR. ALTERMAN: The Arab world, of course, has gone back since before the time of the prophet Muhammad, more than 1,400 years. It has its own history, it has its own culture. It's changed over time. One of my fundamental conflicts with extremists is with those who argue, "no, it hasn't changed at all." And they try to create their own version of traditionalism, which actually is neo-traditionalism, and

impose it on everybody. No respect for minority rights of any kind. And the UAE, as you know, has been this remarkable -- remarkably diverse population.

Emiratis are a small minority in their country, but you go in the Dubai metro, and everything from women in a full veil to men in skimpy T-shirts, and everything in between. Ten languages in any car in the Dubai metro. It's a remarkable thing.

The UAE has decided that the leadership will make decisions, and is a federal national council, and elections to the federal national council are being broadened and broadened. It started off, I think there were -- what, about 110,000 Emiratis were allowed to vote in the last election for the FNC, which is probably about 10% of the total national population, so maybe about 20% of the adult population.

And that's either good or bad. I mean -- that's not for me to judge. But I think that as authoritarian governments all have different pockets of ways they work, I think all Middle Eastern states have different national cultures, they try to create different national cultures.

I think leaders try to deal with extremism in different ways. Sometimes relying more on riling people up, and sometimes reassuring people, and sometimes giving people greater benefits, and sometimes saying, "This is the law."

And I think we have a tendency not to see the difference. We have a tendency to want to give something a grade, or lump things together, and I think what I see, not only in the GCC, in the Gulf Cooperation Council, but more broadly, is the Arab world is taking a whole series of different approaches to the problem.

What I think is also happening is there's an effort to learn from what other people do, and to learn what are the mistakes. I gave testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April 2011, I think, about Syria, where I talked about the lessons that Bashar al-Assad had drawn from other countries in the Middle East. And that's, I think, one of the interesting things that's going on that doesn't get enough appreciation, is Middle Eastern leaders are paying much more attention to the politics of neighboring states than we are, and they're trying to learn both from successes and mistakes, and they're continue to do that, and they're going do it with much more attention than the U.S. ever will.

They have their own sense of causality. They have their own sense of their goals. But what I think is different about leaders in the Middle East, in the UAE and elsewhere, and leaders in the United States, is that leaders in the Middle East start with a presumption that they are preparing their own future, and I think leaders in the Middle East say they're preparing their children's future, and I think that's a difference.

There's a presumption of continuation of government, in the Middle East, which is not a presumption that I think is shared in the United States.

Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

BGEN PRATT: Sir, want to step behind me real quick, we have a small token of appreciation for you being here today, from the Marine Corps University -- I mean Marine Corps University foundation. Thank you for your time and your comments.

DR. ALTERMAN: Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

DR. TARZI: I don't think we could have had a better setting for what we decided to -- this whole year that we were going to discuss this democratization, so, as always, thank you very much. I -- I can say one thing personally, I -- I -- I'm privileged and honored to know this man since I was much younger -- he was much younger. Since the early '90s, actually.

END