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REMARKS:

I'm a sociologist, not a lawyer, so I'm going to talk to you as a sociologist but I will make references to the law. I'll give you a synopsis of our understanding of the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring is, in essence, a grassroots outcry and movement for social justice. The reason why it didn't stay limited to Tunisia, but spread throughout the

Middle East and North Africa, is that this cry reflected deeper trends and grievances that included, most importantly, the notion of patrilineal succession in what I call republican monarchies. These are, basically, republican dictators acting as if they were monarchs ready to hand power over to their sons. Another reason is because of conspicuous corruption. Not just corruption, which is widespread anyway, but corruption in a very conspicuous way, especially by the sons of these dictators and their friends and cronies, which is visible to all. And finally, the lack of opportunity and the lack of upward social mobility, especially in a situation where you have a youth bulge. All of these factors combined created this outcry, which started in Tunisia. Because it was so quick there and so successful, it was able to spread very quickly to other places. Middle class youth and professionals who used social media to organize and mobilize led it initially.

The big drawback of this movement is that the participants refused to organize. They were willing to join together and come out into the squares and the streets to protest but they resisted the notion of self-organization and leadership. This meant that over time, which didn't take long actually, they were overshadowed by political parties that took advantage of the vacuum that had been created. These parties had been there all along but had been suppressed or illegal, or were lying low, and they were very well organized. The main group was the Muslim Brotherhood, which is a Sunni Islamist movement that is politically moderate but socially conservative. They are as extreme as Obama is an extreme Christian, which is not at all; or Romney, for that matter. Among Islamists, they are moderates. In addition to their rise, there were other parties that also took advantage of what were essentially a free-for-all and a vacuum after the fall of some these dictators, including more radical, fundamentalist groups, like the Salafis.

The main challenge that these parties, which are coming to power through elections, face is solving the very deep economic crisis that exists throughout the region, especially in North Africa. The problem is that these parties have no experience in governance. They don't have the capacity and they don't have the tools to address this very deep economic crisis. So it is very likely – and we should look at this on a case-by-case basis, because each country is going to be a little bit different – that the future will bring either a descent into chaos, which hopefully will not happen but is certainly a possibility, or a new trend towards authoritarianism. The only way to keep people on board and quiescent is to create new forms of authoritarianism. Of course, people have now found their voice, but the problems, which are very deep, are not being resolved. As such, the people are going to make claims that the state will not be able to satisfy. In addition, we have had elections in many places and now we are facing constitutional battles in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and possibly Yemen.

As these events took place, when the first dictator fell and then the second, the third dictator said, “Hey, wait a minute. This is not going my way.” This was Qadhafi, and unfortunately for him, he ended up on the side of the ledger with the ex-dictators, or as a dead dictator in his case. Another one, Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen, also ended up an ex-dictator. But the remaining ones, with Qadhafi first, put up a fight. Qadhafi lost because of the combination of popular uprising and military intervention, and the other dictators learned the lesson, especially the next one in line: the leader of Syria, Bashar al-Assad. They did everything in their power to head off popular uprisings in their countries. This included the region's monarchs, who have been handing over power to their sons for

generations. Their populations have generally accepted this. Yet these monarchies have the same socio-economic problems and same issues of social injustice and corruption that we saw in the republican states. They include Jordan, Morocco, and the Gulf monarchies. Some of the latter are immensely wealthy and therefore can buy off their own people more easily than the relatively poor states in North Africa.

When the surviving regimes realized that they might be next they decided to sow discord, which was the easiest thing to do. They set people up against each other. How? By pushing certain buttons. The most important button was the sectarian one. So they said about a certain group, “Those people are Shia and they want to gain power, and you as Sunnis, you should help us resist them, or civil war and chaos will ensue.” They said this very explicitly and it worked like a song. It worked in Bahrain and it worked in Syria. The result in Bahrain has been a kind of stalemate: the regime remains very strong and enjoys the regional support from Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states. In Syria, the result has been civil war – the regime’s threat come true.

The rise of sectarianism must be understood in the context of a larger regional struggle between Sunni-dominated and Shia-dominated states, but also between Iran and the Arab world. Iran is a predominantly Shia country and the Arab states are mostly Sunni, some with substantial Shia minorities, or even a majority. For example, Iraq has a Shia majority, as does Lebanon and Bahrain. So the Arab world is actually divided between Sunni and Shia. Many of the Sunnis consider Shias as proxies for Iran. There is a political cold war between Iran and the Arab world, but it takes sectarian overtones. This is very dangerous and destructive.

You will also see that some of the stronger states, Iran on one side and Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and Turkey – the Sunni states – on the other, are fighting this cold war in the territory of the weaker states, such as Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain, and Yemen. The question is: Is this like the old cold war between the super powers, where there were hot conflicts fought by proxies in other places, or are we going to see some kind of stalemate? That is the big question with regard to the Syrian civil war.

Finally, on United States (U.S.) policy, the Obama administration has been essentially bewildered and perplexed, not knowing how really to respond, because these events are out of the administration's control. This was the first time where, at mass protests in the Arab street, you didn't hear the slogan "Down with the U.S." The fact that the U.S. was irrelevant is very interesting. It meant that, in a way, President Obama had a free pass at first, but also that he had to keep a low profile and play things very carefully in order to take advantage of the Arab Spring so that, in the end, the U.S. would find itself "on the right side of history." As such, essentially de facto, the U.S. chose the side of the new powers-that-be, primarily the Muslim Brotherhood, in the countries that have undergone a democratic transition. You won't find the administration saying this explicitly, but that is what is happening.

Now we find the U.S. suddenly with new allies who used to be persona-non-grata. As a U.S. official, you used to generally not be able, or allowed, to speak to the Muslim Brotherhood. Perhaps low-level diplomats could contact them but you definitely were not able to have open relations with this group. Now this has changed dramatically. At the same time, old allies have become intensely embarrassing. One example of this is the Bahrain

monarchy, which has undertaken a series of highly repressive measures against its Shia population. Even the U.S. says this is the wrong thing to do, but at the same time, the Obama administration recognizes Bahrain is a strong and strategic ally, and so they reason, “We have a lot of military assets there, we face an Iranian enemy across the Gulf, so what can we do?”

By contrast, in Syria the U.S. has placed itself on the side of the rebels who are trying to overthrow Bashar al-Assad. Some of these have a jihadist agenda and are somehow affiliated with al-Qaeda or feel an affinity towards al-Qaeda. The U.S. has found itself de facto on their side because it is against the regime and wants it to fall. The U.S. cannot really pick and choose in this confusing and fluid environment of multiple groups seeking to topple the regime. It cannot really control where weapons go and so de facto it is reinforcing radical groups that are strongest because they are so particularly violent and brutal. These groups could prevail in the end and impose their own post-regime political agenda in Syria, regardless of what the U.S. might wish. We thus could find ourselves in a situation similar to that of the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan in the 1980s, when the U.S. helped create al-Qaeda in the first place. This would indeed be a very unfortunate outcome of the Arab Spring.