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REMARKS:

American foreign policy in the Middle East has many different objectives. The narrative that we often hear is that the United States (U.S.) supports dictatorships in the name of its national interests. I would argue that U.S. policy, in the last twenty years, has shifted to some degree. The U.S. certainly does look after its interests. For example, the U.S. supports Saudi Arabia which does not look anything like a democracy. It does not support the political values of the United States. The Saudis helped crush a democratic movement in Bahrain, yet the U.S. did not criticize Bahrain or Saudi Arabia. In this case, U.S. supports the authoritarian monarchies in order to secure U.S. interests in the region. This is the narrative that we often hear about U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

On the other hand, the U.S. State Department has put a lot of effort into supporting civil society organizations that push for democratization. Many of the bloggers and

social media activists in the Middle East have been trained or supported by the U.S.; some of them through U.S. supported agencies and others indirectly. In addition, the broader justification for the invasion of Iraq was to establish a democracy, not just to eliminate weapons of mass destruction. This shift towards emphasizing democracy was a result of criticisms of the U.S. in the past about supporting dictatorships in the Middle East. So U.S. policy and actions are sometimes quite contradictory.

Professor Hiltermann did a nice job of laying out the parameters and forces that are driving the Arab Spring. I want to look at Yemen as a case study.

What is the Arab Spring? It is a good question and people are debating how to describe these events. They were initially called “youth rebellions,” or “youth revolutions.” The uprisings have clearly brought a new political ethic to the Middle East. The idea that people have to live under dictatorships is rejected. People now in the Middle East understand that they can overcome authoritarianism and this is very powerful. This has shifted to some extent the dynamic of politics within the countries of the Middle East.

I think the best term I’ve seen is “rebellion” and not “revolution,” because we have yet to see what is going to happen. I think the best case is Tunisia where you had a tradition of institutional integrity. In other cases I am not so sure. I’ll tell you a little bit about the Yemeni case. In the Yemeni case, as Professor Hiltermann pointed out, there was a succession. The president of the republic was trying to position his son to become the next president, which was widely rejected by people in Yemen. The insistence of the President on grooming his son for the position was the lightning rod around which other

grievances such as the lack of economic development and, particularly, the lack of popular political participation—the ability of people to shape their political future—coalesced. Then, the Arab Spring in North Africa—the fall of Ben Ali [in Tunisia], the fall of Mubarak in Egypt—inspired the Yemeni youth and students outside the university set up a protest movement. The President immediately backed down in response. He said that there would be early elections. He also stated, “I will not be a candidate nor will my son.” Saleh got the message. Things continued for a little while until, about two months into the demonstrations, security forces started shooting into the demonstrators. At that point, the key enforcer in inner regime, Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, the general most known as the face of oppression as the person who put out fires, who fought many wars, in Yemen against the President’s enemies, split off and said he was going to protect the protesters from the government troops.

Those of us who knew Yemen saw the wolf guarding the sheep, but the split in the elite was significant in the Yemeni case because it brought the President’s military power into check. There now were two opposing military forces, with more or less equal power, and the country ground slowly into what could have been a civil war. After General al-Ahmar split from the regime, the opposition parties rallied around him to become a significant force against the President. There they sat for quite some time, with guns pointed at each other in the capital city ready to explode into a civil war. So in Yemen, there was an initial rebellion, and a split in the political elite, that the opposition political forces within the country took advantage of. Interestingly, the drive for international intervention in Yemen really came from the Gulf Cooperation Council, from Saudi Arabia, because Saudi Arabia’s relationship to Yemen is like the relationship of

the United States to Mexico. The U.S. fears Mexican instability and the Saudis fear Yemeni instability. The Saudis also fear a powerful Yemen. They like a Yemen that is stable, but not too strong. They felt that Yemen's rebellion was getting out of control, so they negotiated an agreement between the elite, which the Yemenis are following right now. They have a transitional two-year government, where half the government is composed of the old ruling party and half the government is opposition people. They are trying to have a national dialogue after which they are going to write a new constitution, and have new elections. The Gulf Cooperation Council rather than the United Nations (U.N.) brokered the agreement. The U.N. initially had very little to do with the agreement. The U.N. sent an observer, who, because of [his] own personality, has become very influential in the subsequent negotiations. Now the U.N. is playing a prominent role in Yemen in negotiating the future, but the political force that really brought the Yemeni parties together was the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Because of the split within the political elite in Yemen, centrifugal forces in Yemen are strong. Yemeni society is quite diverse and people have the monopoly on the means of coercion. Everybody is armed in Yemen. The central state does not have the ability to repress in any systematic way. Some regions and groups in Yemen are now completely autonomous. The fact that Yemen is so diverse and that everyone has the ability to break off and to negotiate on their own via military force, I think, has forced the Yemenis to try to think about the rules that will allow a political settlement amongst this diversity. There is no one group in Yemen that can impose itself on everyone else. So, the Yemeni are beginning to think about institutionalizing political processes that will allow this diverse society with so many different interests, with no

one group that is able to dominate, to survive. People are talking about institutionalization of diversity rather than dominance of one group or another. This may be the beginning of the rule of law in Yemen, I'm hoping, as a result of the particular characteristics of the situation in Yemen.

The last point I want to talk about is the U.S. position in Yemen. Yemen for the United States is primarily a battleground against al-Qaeda. Yemen is the "cutting-edge" of the U.S. counterterrorism policy in that the military and CIA are involved in the use of force far from any declared warzone. The U.S. is not at war with Yemen yet the U.S. is using military means to assassinate people in Yemen. This is a very controversial policy. Inside of Yemen, there is considerable blowback but the media coverage here in the U.S. misinterprets Yemeni opinion. People here argue that drones are driving people into the hand of al-Qaeda. I don't think that's quite the case. What is clear is that no one in Yemen likes the drones. Everyone is against the drone policy and it is causing quite a bit of blowback against the U.S.—not driving people into al-Qaeda but against the U.S. and, in particular, over the issue of national sovereignty. It makes the Yemenis feel as if they do not have control over their own territory and airspace. People fear anything that flies above them. It is quite an unsettling situation and it turns people against U.S. foreign policy in Yemen.

Thank you.