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TRANSCRIPT

"RESISTING THE ARAB SPRING: EGYPT, TUNISIA, AND THE SPECTER OF SAUDI ARABIA"

A Conversation With Asef Bayat and Madawi al-Rasheed

Moderator: Anthony Richter

ANNOUNCER:

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ANTHONY RICHTER:

And I'm Anthony Richter, Associate Director of the Open Society Foundations. Nice to see all of you-- in New York. And it's-- a pleasure to be here to moderate today's-- presentations by-- the Open Society Fellows-- Madawi Al-Rasheed, and Asef Bayat. So I'm going to-- in a moment introduce-- the-- the-- two speakers-- a little more. But I think that the-- the attendance today is reflective of the broad interest-- at the Open Society Foundations in and the engagement of our foundations-- in-- the-- events of the past-- three years-- in-- in the Arab region.

Of course, the foundation has been-- active there-- presence-- present in the Arab region for-- closer to-- to 15 years. But the-- the past three in particular have raised hopes very high-- about-- the possibility of-- people power, even if the-- the-- the power of the people-- has been-- at times-- leaderless-- un-ideological-- unguided-- incessant-- disruptive, and-- in many cases-- has-- has not produced the types of-- change that we had-- originally-- anticipated.

And it speaks a lot about-- the-- the limitations-- of the-- of these kinds of-- uprisings. We even struggle-- to find-- the proper language-- to express, and d-- to describe-- what is going on. And language itself-- in the region-- has been a subject

of-- great contestation. (NOISE) As different sides-- argue-- for-- one word, or phrase-- or another-- to impose-- over a reality that-- still-- refuses-- to-- accept-- easy categorization. And-- explanation by historical analogy-- or other types-- of-- our intellectual disciplining of it.

The-- the setbacks-- of the past-- particular-- several months, in-- in places like-- Egypt, the s-- the-- stagnant situation in-- in-- in-- Tunisia. The outright c-- civil war that has-- taken over-- in-- in Syria. The situation in-- of Yemen and-- Bahrain. Many of the countries-- now even where-- huge-- protests erupted-- have been-- the-- those energies have been-- as it were appropriated-- in places like Tunisia, for example.

Even if the-- the protests-- were-- unleashed by young people, the-- the-- the negotiations in a place like Tunisia are all between-- you know-- men in their 70s and 80s. The-- the situation in-- in Yemen-- has a lot in common with that. And so-- the-- - the-- the-- the very-- possibility of-- of a pr-- the institutionalizing-- profound-- change-- it's not just a question of-- language or spin-- but-- actually of-- the-- the-- the constraints of-- that are-- placed by the-- (UNINTEL) regime, and-- and-- and so many of these countries.

It-- it is a backdrop-- for-- two-- fellowships, one which is well underway, and one which is-- yet to begin. And-- we're very lucky to hear from these fellows, and we're grateful to the fellows program, that they've-- made possible-- for the scholars-- such as these-- to-- to be with us, and to-- to pursue their research and en-- enhance-- our own work.

Asef Bayat is a professor of sociology and Middle East studies at the University of Illinois at-- Urbana-Champaign. The author of and editor of ten books, including-- *Life is Politics: How Ordinary People Change-- the Middle East*. For me-- that was a book which-- I used as-- an intellectual guide-- over the past couple of years. And-- having worked with-- Asef and-- and other connections, it's been also great-- (NOISE) to-- to have him-- in our midst.

Madawi Al-Rasheed-- whose fellowship will begin-- in January, is a visiting professor at The Middle East Center of the London School of Economics and Political Science. Al-Rasheed is the author of-- several books including *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics & Religion in Saudi Arabia*. That's published this year. And-- she and I have-- been-- spending the past hour getting to know-- one another, and make-- some-- some plans-- to-- how we can work-- closely over-- the time that she will be a fellow-- with the Open Society Foundations. With that-- Asef, the floor is yours.

ASEF BAYAT:

Thank you-- Anthony, and thank you everyone for-- having me here again. It's-- wonderful-- to be here. Based upon my experience of last time, which-- I thought we had a-- great discussion. And so I look forward-- for another round of-- you know, passionate discussion-- today. Yes, I'll-- I'll speak for about-- ten to 12 minutes,

basically-- say, how I see-- the situation.

Anthony mentioned-- already-- how, you know-- hope had-- been risen after the-- Arab Spring. And now-- in my view there is a lot of-- cynicism and-- for some good reason-- there is cynicism. So I don't go into detail why there is. The economy is bad, and-- and-- the prospect for-- transformation-- towards democracy. A lot of people think that it is really slim, and-- not really forthcoming.

I want to suggest that-- I think part of the problems that we see-- in post-Arab-- Arab Spring-- is actually part of the-- problems that the Revolutions, per se, have. It's not just the Arab revolutions. But partly also has to do with the specificities of-- of the Arab-- revolutions, and I think partly as the specificities of each government within each-- Arab-- counties.

Just to mention one-- significant, general-- sort of anomaly, or-- paradox of post-revolution, is this anom-- anomaly between-- the incredibly high expectations on the part of those people who have made sacrifices, have gone on strike, and have made a revolution-- and-- on the other hand, disruptive economies, and disruptive administrations, and so on, so forth, immediately in post-revolution.

So people have gone on strike to-- top of the regime, and then-- the regime is toppled, and then they don't ca-- they can't find jobs. This is a terrible contradiction, right? Which-- happens in-- most-- revolutions. (COUGH) And, of course, the result will be-- basically-- you know, social protest, and disenchantment-- and-- you know, some degree of-- cynicism.

And we know that, you know, how the economies are work-- are working-- whether in Egypt, Tunisia, or-- Libya. For instance, in Libya, actually, the economy has-- contracted for about-- 50 percent. And the growth in Egypt has-- declined from five percent in 2010 to one percent, right-- in 2012. So-- you see-- how this situation-- is.

I think partly, also, this related-- so-- so-- so-- the-- idea is, of course, that you have to have, you know, functioning-- economies, and functioning-- administration. What this comes, actually, into another to-- contradiction, with the-- another desire and demand of the revolutionaries. That we should actually do a revolution, meaning that we should purge the institutions, right? So on the one hand you have-- you want to have a function.

Administration, ministers-- and ministries-- that delivers. On the other-- hand you want to purge them. That is, put them aside the-- managers and directors, and so on and so forth. (NOISE) So that is another problem. And I think this manifested-- in almost all of these countries. But especially in-- in-- in Libya. The major, I think, conflict that exists right now in-- in Libya, is this.

You know, this issue of political-- isolation that-- you know-- the militias-- a lot of them are Islamists, saying that we should have an incredible purge, because you want to have real revolution. On the other-- others are saying that, okay-- we need managers. We need-- directors, we need-- yeah, administrators. So-- (NOISE) so this is-- I think inherent in-- in most of the-- revolution.

Often-- in post-revolutionary times-- these kind of-- contradictions are resolved, in inverted comma, by-- you know-- revolutionary countries going to war. As you know, most of the revolutions that happen in the (UNINTEL) actually has been coincided with war. External war. And external war in some ways-- of course it's terrible, but in the other ways it's good.

Good in the sense that it actually creates unity, right, within the-- country, against an external-- enemy. For instance, this happened in Iran-- in-- after the-- Revolution of 19-- '79. But, of course, in the long run-- a war, and-- and-- and the implications of the war forces-- the-- the existing state to be more security-conscious, and therefore more-- authoritative and dictatorial, and so on.

So the-- long run-- sort of prospect would be-- would not be-- very-- very good. In the context of the Arab Spring this hasn't happened (UNINTEL). I can, you know, talk about it a bit later, 'cause I don't have much time. But it has happened in a different way. It's kind of-- mostly a kind of proxy war. Now, why-- did this-- I-- I think didn't happen, it partially has to do with the very nature of these revolutions.

I have talked about it before, that-- the-- these revolutions are very different. Arab revolutions are different from the 21st-- revolutions, which-- revolutionary movements-- mobilizes, and comes and takes over the state, and-- so there is a complete overhaul of the state and institutions. In this inst-- they-- they are-- revolutions. In the context of-- you know, the Arab-- revolution, especially Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen-- Libya and Tunisia is a sort of somewhat different trajectory for a different reason.

It is three-- the context of the three countries. That type of revolution didn't-- happen. In-- in these countries revolutionary movements emerge, and-- and poise to compel the existing institutions, the existing or incumbent-- states, to reform themselves on behalf of the revolution. And of course here-- you know, the state might reform-- reform themselves, or might not. Often they don't because they have vested-- interests.

So the revolutionaries have incredible-- you know, popular-- power on the street, but they didn't have really administrative power. We have-- have incredible hegemony, but we actually did not rule. Unlike the revolutions that you had in the 20th Century. So this has, you know, two very important-- implications. On the one hand-- because-- a significant and-- and profound change hasn't happened, it is always the danger of-- successful counter-revolution.

Counter-revolution is always there in any revolution, right? But-- but there is a danger that counter-revolution will succeed. And I-- I think we saw it-- in the-- in the-- in the case of Egypt. But on the other hand I think-- I call it revolutions, not "revolution," or reform revolution, right? But revolutions have also-- has something good in them. That by de-facto-- they create some degree of pluralism in society.

In other words, unlike a 21st Century, whether it's (UNINTEL) or Lenin when they come over and take over and eliminate the opposition, and they start ruling-- this could not happen, you know, in the revolutions. Because there are plurality of forces

already available, especially from the past regimes, and so on. And I think this we can see-- kind of happening in-- in the case of-- Tunisia. There is a-- some kind of a-- some balance of-- forces there.

It is not just-- (UNINTEL)-- ruling (UNINTEL), but also-- other forces. But why Egypt and Tunisia are different-- I think-- had largely to do with the fact that in Egypt they're ruling, those people who came to power after the revolution-- Islamists-- (UNINTEL)

Were Islamists, in the sense that they were more exclusivist, right? And really they didn't deliver-- what they had-- somewhat promised, especially in-- in social and-- and-- and-- and economic-- terms. And-- and so therefore-- they created an opposition-- that came from both counter-revolutions and revolutionaries. Right? And so they were-- toppled.

We can talk about it a bit later. Tunisia, however, and that is not, in my view, Islamist. It is post-Islamist-- meaning that it is-- it is Islamic-- religious, but it still wants to play the-- democratic-- rules. So they want somewhat secular-- non-- religious state. But they want, of course, religious-- society. But they are-- able to-- work with the other-- sort of-- institutions-- institutions, other forces in society.

And-- and-- something which is also peculiar in-- Tunisia is the presence of-- strong labor movement, that somewhat-- mediates-- (UNINTEL), that mediates between the secular and-- Islam-- Islamic forces. (NOISE) So I think therefore I feel that there is a chance, in a sense, for some kind of-- electoral democracy in-- Tunisia.

But this electoral democracy, at least-- for the short-- short term is going to be e-liberal democracy. E-liberal elec-- electoral democracy. Electoral democracy, meaning that, you know, neither will take part in the elections, might lose, might win, right? Like in Indonesia, right? It's less than-- they are not inclined to-- Islamizing the state.

But their-- vision about an Islamic society might come, and it does come into contradiction with-- the-- sort of with a certain degree of individual-- rights and-- and freedoms that-- other constituencies desire, yeah? And-- and that is a dilemma that they should really-- think of how to resolve it.

But I think if electoral democracy continues there will be a space for them to actually debate-- on these-- issues. Finally-- post-Islamism is not only a liberal-- democracy, but-- even if it is democracy, but it is liberal. But also economically it is new liberal. New liberal. Largely they are for-- market economy, and-- and that-- you know, is an issue. Of course, in market economies some people benefit-- you know, quite considerably. But others are-- excluded.

For this reason I think that because of the nature of the (UNINTEL) and-- the economy, I feel that-- social movements-- in the future in these countries will play very significant part. Both on the part of those who are seeking-- social rights, individual-- rights, and-- gender rights, and so on. And also-- economic rights, on the part of the subordinate classes-- poor. And-- so it's going to be pretty-- (NOISE) volatile, and we should really watch to see how things (NOISE) are going to get

resolved. Thank you.

ANTHONY RICHTER:

Thank you-- Asef. So I think we-- turn over-- the floor, now, to-- Madawi Al-Rasheed. She's going to take us maybe to a slightly geographically different-- reality, in talking about Saudi Arabia.

MADAWI AL-RASHEED:

Yes, thank you. Today I'm-- very happy to address you for the first time. And I look forward to working with-- some of you in the future. It's a great opportunity to share my ideas with you today. And I hope by-- within 12 months I'll be able to-- speak with more authority on the topic of my research. So what I'm going to say here is really preliminary observations that-- I have-- worked on over the last couple of-- months.

Well, I'm gonna take you to the country where it didn't happen. So that is Saudi Arabia. Since the Arab uprisings-- we had-- a kind of discourse in the public sphere, in the media, in the West, and also in the Arab world, that there are those-- very nasty-- dictatorships associated with republics.

And there are those benevolent monarchs, and monarchies in the region that are actually immune from this sort of upheaval and protest that the other republics had witnessed. And this is the division between those who say that the republics are the bad ones, and the monarchs are the benevolent ones. However, I would like to say that there is really no-- clear distinction in terms of the practices of power between the republics and the monarchs.

And-- one-- interesting-- famous social scientist-- (UNINTEL) Ibrahim called them-- called the republics-- (UNINTEL), which means-- republic and monarchy. And in a way the practices of power were very similar. They all tried to divide society-- put their sons and relatives in-- in places of-- of power, and position. They (UNINTEL)-- they-- the-- public sphere in a way to just sum the whole situation-- and difference between republics and monarchies seems to be hypothetical, and doesn't correspond to what was going on on the ground.

So why did it happen in these monarchies? So many-- explanations were put forward. One of them is to say that these monarchies are oil-based economies, and therefore they have more purchasing power, basically, to put it bluntly, they-- distribute subsidies in return for loyalty. So they redistribute-- the-- the state, or the government, plays a redistributive role.

And they give handouts in return for loyalty. And therefore citizens get to-- accept power, without challenging it. There's another argument which says, well, it is the culture of these countries. And here I'm talking about six monarchies in the Gulf region, plus two in-- in the Arab world; Jordan and Morocco.

Culturally, Arabs are more inclined to accept this kind of-- government-- with succession, smoothly moving from father to son, et cetera. And-- another argument is put in terms of legitimacy. Saying that these monarchs have more legitimacy than others in the region. But I would like to say that all these arguments, the economic one, the cultural one, and the legitimacy argument are-- very, very-- inadequate to understand why it didn't happen in these-- monarchies.

First we have to define what we mean by happening or not happening. And second thing I would say that-- in terms of their political-- practices, they-- the republics and the monarchies shared quite a lot of things. Now, how do we understand the fact that in a country like Saudi Arabia we did not see the kind of protest-- or-- more-- accurately, the kind of collective action that took place in place-- in countries like Egypt-- Tunisia, Bahrain-- Yemen, and-- and other places?

I-- I would say, if we look at Saudi Arabia, we really need to see-- how they-- there is an entrenched fragmentation of the Saudi public. By that I mean there are dividing lines-- along sectarian issues. And that is the division between Sunni and Shia. Also there is a gen-- a gender divide between men and women, over many important issues. Also there is a regional divide-- in terms of the multiple regions-- that-- constitute Saudi Arabia.

Between the central region, the eastern part and the western part. I think that that-- the southern part of the Saudi Arabia. And also there are ideological divides between people who belong to different ideological trends from the Islamists, to the liberal, to the-- moderates, and the radical, et cetera. So th-- this fragmentation prevented the emergence of what I would call national politics. National politics is a set of demands that people-- ask, and therefore these demands were not shared by everybody in Saudi Arabia.

There are groups that-- ask for specific issues, but these were not the issues that the others wanted. So this fragmentation is one of the reasons that-- the Arab uprising did not actually reach Saudi Arabia. A second factor is the role of the Islamists-- in Saudi Arabia. In Egypt and Tunisia we take it for granted that this Arab uprising did not actually start by the Islamists.

Although they joined later on. But they were not m-- the vanguards of revolutionary action-- at-- at the time-- from-- December 2010 onward. Now, I we look at-- Saudi Arabia, the Islamists themselves had-- always existed in a kind of negotiation with the state.

And sometimes they were part of the state. Part of the government apparatus. They were not in the opposition like they were in Egypt, or in Tunisia. And therefore during the Arab uprisings there were calls for demonstrations in Saudi Arabia but the Islamists resisted them. In fact, they sided with the government against any kind of manifestation of collective actions, such as protests, strikes or demonstrations.

And finally I think-- the reason why it didn't happen is because-- there is the perception in Saudi-- in Saudi society that the U.S. consistently supports the Saudi regime. But, of course, the U.S. also supported Mubarak, and supported-- Tunisia,

and Yemeni-- regimes, Bahrain, et cetera.

And it didn't prevent those people from going to the squares and streets. But in Saudi Arabia there is a perception that the situation is much more complex-- in terms of the oil resources. Saudi Arabia is important for-- not only the U.S., but for Europe and China, and other-- countries in Asia. And-- for s-- strategically, also it is important.

In-- in a different way-- from Egypt, used to be important for U.S. policy. Later on perhaps I could talk about the recent shift in American policy-- as a result of the U.S./Iranian-- sort of-- diplomacy, or diplomatic efforts that may have serious consequences on the-- internal domestic scene in Saudi Arabia, because it may alter that perception in Society that the U.S. is with a regime-- all the time.

So let me-- having said that, it didn't happen in Saudi Arabia, I would just briefly like to talk about forms of protest that we have seen over the last three years. Some of them-- basically-- are-- sort of-- continuation of the old traditional mobilization. And other forms of protest are very new, and-- and I would say a product of the last three years of-- activity across the Arab world.

One of the classical forms of protest that had taken place is in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia, where-- the Shia minority-- live. And those-- communities had (NOISE) always-- engaged in collective action-- from the 1950s onward. They had protested in-- in a classical way. They are organized. They have-- leadership-- known leadership.

They have-- youth activists on the ground. And from February, 2011 they've been protesting-- against-- certain repressive practices of the regime, with specific demands. Also the situation in Bahrain had great impact on the Shia in Saudi Arabia. Bahrain is only 16 Kilometers away from-- the-- the Shia territory on Saudi Arabia.

And therefore there was a kind of-- religious solidarity with-- with the Shia of Bahrain. But their demands-- were specific. They wanted the-- freedom for political prisoners, or prisoners of conscience. They wanted economic opportunities. They went-- they wanted employment opportunities. And also an end to discrimination. But this kind of protest failed to reach-- the mainstream society.

The protests remained isolated, and Saudis started talking about the Republic of Qatif, which is the main-- one of the main towns in the Eastern province. And as long as the protest was confined to that region-- Saudi-- government, and mainstream society were happy-- that it would not spill over to other areas. Simply because of the sectarian divide that I mentioned earlier. So it was-- a confined protest.

That actually served the government. As the government tried to describe this protest as an Iranian conspiracy against the security of the Sunni majority countries. And in a way it absorbed some of the tension in Saudi Arabia, because it could be directed against the Shia. So that was one form of protest.

It hasn't succeeded in gaining any sort of-- acceptance across Saudi society. Second

type of protest that is been going on for a while, but it increased as a result of the Arab uprising, and that is women-- issues. Women protested-- and asked for specific rights.

So for example-- driving campaigns-- employment campaigns. And also-- women who protested in support of their male relatives who are-- imprisoned, or detained for a long time without trial. So you feel-- you see-- small groups of women-- and relatives of the detainees-- assembling in front of the security-- buildings, the ministry of interior, asking for the release of their prisoners.

But-- again, this kind of protest was very limited, and confined-- to specific demands. And also-- it failed to reach the rest of Saudi society, simply because I think the government succeeded in depicting, describing the prisoners as terrorists or sympathizers with terrorists. But given the nature of the Saudi judiciary, lack of transparency, it's very difficult to fi-- actually know exactly who is a terrorist.

Who is a convicted terrorist, who is a criminal, and who is a-- prison-- prisoner of conscience. So-- they-- the-- the third type of protest, and I think this is the most important one, is human-- activism along human right issues. And it is for the first time in Saudi Arabia we see what I would call a startup civil society that has no existence on the ground. Simply because civil society is banned, and they are not allowed to form independent human rights organizations. The government coopted the issue of human rights and set up its own human rights organization.

Where the director is actually appointed by the government, and he serves in the council of minister. So here there's a cooptation of civil society. (NOISE) And creating something that looks as if it's an independent civil society, but it is actually an arm of the government. And-- one-- s-- truly civil-- free civil society is the civil society that started in 2009.

And it was called the-- civil-- Saudi-- Association for Civil and Political rights. Known in Arabic as Hassim (PH). And-- it started by activists who had been around for a long time. Some of them had crossed the-- the-- the boundary between being anti-Islamist, or being a liberal. And they formed something that is vigorous-- (NOISE) and they want-- they wanted to-- take the cause of these-- political prisoners in Saudi prisons.

And also-- discuss, and publicize torture in prisons. But obviously the government-- realized that they are a dangerous group, although they had no legal presence. They had a website, and they were known figures in the community. And-- and-- and put the founders of the organization on trial. And today they are all serving prison sentences. Very long ones, between ten and 15 years of prison sentence.

Simply because they-- their list of accusations that th-- th-- the government-- launched-- such as le-- reading dissident literature, or-- having dissident literature, encouraging people to demonstrate-- encouraging the relatives of political prisoners to demonstrate. So in a way this startup civil society is facing-- a challenge.

And it is ended as far as the government is concerned. But its discourse, and the-- the information, the language of human rights, the language of civil and political

rights had actually permeated the public sphere in Saudi Arabia. Although the main founders are in prison. Another type of protest that has taken place are these cyber actors. (NOISE)

And one might want to call them the hashtag generation. Or the Facebook generation. The YouTube producers. And these are younger activists who are actually-- engaged with-- political issues, and also social issues. And they are not-- some of them are ideologues. But others are real activists, or artists, or people who happen to be there when the security-- officer hits a woman.

Or-- he can-- get hold of a YouTube video about torture in prison, or the condition of the hospital. And those people are-- opening up the public sphere to a new kind of information. So there is-- if there isn't-- a Saudi Revolution, there is an information revolution. Because-- this information revolution is undermining-- public statement, public discourse and official media.

And it is-- it is not possible to-- control it. Those people are making commentaries on what is going on. And-- they started as bloggers, some of them. But-- quite a lot of them have just joined as people who are interested in putting their video on-- on YouTube. And-- in a way-- they are engaged in a kind of resistance. But this resistance tend to be fragmented. It is not like the youth movement of the 1960s.

That many sociologists and probably us have-- have studied-- and wrote about. They are critical voices that are fragmented. They may come together in the virtual world. But it has proven very difficult for them to have a platform to come together, to share some-- common themes and ideas.

But I think it's the nature of the tool of communication that makes them very individualistic, and very difficult, also, to come together, simply because new-- law-- cyber laws in Saudi Arabia were introduced in order to curb the activities of those people who are-- using Facebook, blogs, and tweet-- tweet regularly.

And they are followed. And in this respect the government has enhanced its capability to control this new media. And quite a lot of them ended up in prison. And the spectrum is from the liberal to the Islamist. For-- and also people who have-- talked or-- produced films, short clips, about poverty. They will be put in prison for two, three-- months.

Now-- the final kind of protest is foreign immigrants. And this has happened-- strikes, in private companies. People who haven't been paid for six months would decide not to work. And-- again, the YouTube, and the tweets are all coming together with those actual-- and real active workers. They come together to publicize their case.

And the recent-- round of-- the problem was-- with the (UNINTEL) immigrants in Saudi Arabia who were described as illegal. And-- they had reacted, and retaliated against the government trying to-- round them up, and-- deport them. So all this sp-- sporadic-- protest-- hasn't yet-- led to what we call-- contentious collective action.

There are signs that this is happening. (NOISE) But Saudi Arabia wanted to preempt

all collective action. And it-- it-- in the region, it feared-- what Asef described, a real change or-- transition toward democracy. And-- so far Saudi Arabia, as a regime, played three roles in the Arab world, since 2011. The first one is a counter-revolutionary force.

And it-- did this-- first in Bahrain where it moved its troop. So it was an actual positive intervention assisted by military troops to-- support-- the monarchy-- in Bahrain, as-- as a model of government. And indirectly, in Egypt, as a result of subsidies. So far Saudi Arabia has probably paid around $6 billion-- h-- in subsidies and help to the Egyptian-- military and government after July-- 2013.

Then in other countries it played the role of a containment-- agent. So they wanted to contain the revolution. For example, in Yemen. Yemen is too complex-- for direct military intervention. And therefore through the-- Gulf Accord they tried to remove (UNINTEL) from office-- while maintaining the regime. And also ensuring that (UNINTEL) had immunity.

But the most ironic-- sort of role that Saudi Arabia-- played in the region is to-- to be a revolutionary force on behalf of the Syrian rebels. And this was a strategic choice-- not because Saudi Arabia supports democracy, or are interested in democracy. But it was part of-- defeating Iran in the Arab world-- and Hezbollah.

The two can-- the two objectives ca-- can be achieved in Syria, and therefore Saudi Arabia put its weight-- both at the level of diplomacy and-- in economic terms, behind the efforts to topple (UNINTEL). This hasn't happened yet, but it is increasing. And-- I think-- the recent international scene has made it more complicated for Saudi Arabia to continue to play that role. The-- there is currently a rift between Saudi Arabia and Washington over the-- (NOISE) rapprochement with Iran.

That-- the Saudis feel the U.S. has failed to-- respect their wishes. And these were represented in-- a military strike against Syria, and possibly a military strike against Iran, both of them didn't happen. And as a result-- Saudi Arabia has-- potentially-- its own ways of destabilizing the situation if the agreement-- or the coming Geneva conference lead to some kind of easing of tension.

Only-- for example, at the humanitarian level. They had-- an interest in-- in sabotaging that simply because their main objective of-- defeating Iran in the Arab world-- (NOISE) is the-- the main focus. So I think I'm gonna conclude now just very briefly. I may have gone over the time allowed. I think resisting the Arab-- uprising-- was a priority for Saudi Arabia. We could discuss why-- in detail. But-- Saudi Arabia has succeeded in de-railing-- this-- Arab uprising.

Turning it into a sectarian war in some regions, such as in Bahrain, and in Syria. And also turning it into-- a serious secular v. Islamist confrontation in countries like-- Egypt, and in Tunisia. The protest I described in Saudi Arabia does not aim to cause-- major political transformation.

And perhaps at this stage it is not capable-- of doing so unless it transforms itself into a national movement. Grievances, and multiple voices can create disruption. But for

serious political change I think they-- there is-- they-- you need more than that. And so far the government has the upper hand in dealing with these minor protests, whether they're the immigrants, women-- activists, human rights activists, et cetera.

What we are gonna see is a shift-- perhaps it has already happened, in U.S. policy towards Iran, which may send a message to Saudis that their regime does no longer enjoy the full support of Washington. And the consequences of this message are still unknown, I think. But they may have serious implication at the Saudi domestic level. And I think I'll stop here.

ANTHONY RICHTER:

Thank you. (COUGH) (UNINTEL) extremely illuminating, comprehensive-- take on Saudi Arabia, a country about which we (NOISE) (UNINTEL) often hear-- hear so much. But I wanted-- maybe to start with a question-- back to Asef. And Asef, you-- in article in-- (UNINTEL) in-- right after the-- deposing of Mubarak, you kind of coined this-- phrase about a refo-lutions.

And-- indeed, the whole terminology-- of-- what-- the Arab-- people are living through over-- the past three years-- has been-- as we've-- observed, a subject of very considerable contestation. And you didn't make it easier by adding a new term-- to the-- to the-- analytical lexicon.

But one of the-- one of the-- places, one of the venues-- for this-- terminological contestation, on top of all of the other forms of-- dispute-- has been-- the events of the past summer-- in-- in Egypt. And I was wondering-- you could-- talk a little bit-- about-- what it was-- that-- took place-- in-- between June 30th, and-- July 3rd. You-- have written an article-- talking a little bit-- about this. And you were one of the people to come down-- terminologically-- on-- on one side-- very early. But it's a-- it's a subject which is-- continued to divide-- (COUGH) the public-- in Egypt, very considerably. So what-- what was it-- what happened this summer-- exactly? How do you think about that?

ASEF BAYAT:

Yeah. So the piece-- thank you. The piece that I wrote-- was actually-- I think a couple of days after July 3rd. And-- that should be, of course, contextualized. But before that I was actually in Egypt. I was not there on the 30th. I had left, unfortunately. But before that I was there, and I could see-- somewhat-- how-- things were really developing.

I-- I think what happened in Egypt-- in summer, to me, was-- a real manifestation of-- the-- the refo-lution. I think it did show the limits of refo-lution, with "F", with "F". (NOISE) You know, as I said, refo-lution meant that revolutionaries, that is those people, groups who have initiated the uprisings, right-- although they-- had, for-- you know, for a couple of years, real social power, street power, but they did not rule,

right?

And of course-- you know, the revolutions came to the realization that-- in fact even in the course of the uprising, that this is not enough. That they needed institutions, they needed-- coercive power, coercive power. And all revolutions, revolutionaries have had coercive power. Force has been very important, right?

Because there is resistance. So they came to the realization that they needed it. But it was just too late. They didn't have-- resources. Neither typical sort of (UNINTEL) organization, with charismatic leaders-- leadership, or-- you know, coercive power, military and-- and-- and militias, and so on. Yeah?

So as a consequence they-- constantly-- they have constantly, and paradoxically have relied on the state institution to change things. On the state, which actually they were against. (NOISE) So that is the-- kind of frustrating contradiction. And I mean they were telling me we do not know what to do. What-- what else-- where else to go.

So they take over, in a sense, of-- for some time, not a take-- the forceful removal of (UNINTEL) on the third of July, for a lot of revolutionaries at the time meant-- a very uncomfortable-- I-- I say it is a midwife. This is a Marxist thing. It was a midwife for a pregnant Egypt that was-- ready to give birth-- to a new social order.

But it was an agonizing pain. Agonizing labor. Because the baby wouldn't come out, right? And-- but the midwife, however, happened to be very dangerous. Happened to be the military. And-- of course, with that midwife, the military midwife, you cannot have-- I hate to say desirable baby. Of course, babies are always desirable.

But in this-- metaphor, the outcome-- (LAUGH) will not be-- don't quote me on this. But-- but-- but the outcome, of course-- is-- (NOISE) you know, what we see. And there was an understanding that, you know, this is the situation. But-- they were also conscious that it is very deeply contradictory. But I think that they didn't-- in fact a lot of us did not-- think that the military would move-- and create a situation where now we see the rise, comfortable rise and restoration of counter-revolution.

I mean-- there is now a real counter-revolution that are arising, and is very confident, and-- and-- and they have-- and they have-- victimized not just the Islamists. Not the Muslim brothers, but I was telling them that it would actually-- will subject you too, the seculars, the-- the revolutionaries, right? The secular revolutionaries. Those people who initiated it.

And we see this as-- they are rounding them-- up. So this is how I describe, yeah. It is-- it was part and parcel of the very sort of contradiction of Egyptian revolution that-- led-- to that. I-- I did mention-- this didn't happen in Tunisia. For the difference between the-- I think, the-- ruling parties in post-revolution. I think there's a big difference. Although they are both Islamic, Islamic-- (UNINTEL) and-- (UNINTEL). And I explained that-- the difference, I don't wanna-- repeat it.

ANTHONY RICHTER:

And-- of course, the military wanted to-- use the language of legitimacy for its-- actions, and-- wants, to perpetuate the understanding that it's-- a revolution. That it-- it conducted a popular-- revolution against the brotherhood. And-- that seems-- to be-- part of the whole Orwellian-- topsy-turvy-- order in which-- the Egyptian public is still trying to-- to get out of, now.

But do you-- do you see-- do you see the situation in Egypt-- do you see that there's any way-- in-- present conditions that a dictator-- that a military dictatorship-- is possible to-- endure? In-- in-- once the genie is out of the bottle? I mean, I think you also have this-- a new article which-- I saw about the 18th (UNINTEL) which-- of-- of-- comparing, obviously-- the-- the present counter-revolution-- to-- the 1851. And do you-- do you find in that some-- some hope? Are you trying to suggest that there's-- some hope, that-- the military's-- revenge can't-- can't survive for long?

ASEF BAYAT:

Yeah. Yes. You know, initially the military-- of course the military-- and basically counter-revolution were already-- even on the-- the day after the-- downfall of Mubarak were thinking of counter-revolutions, to do something. Obviously they would do-- they were always looking for-- a chance. I think there was a lot of chance, because as I said-- especially the Ministry of Interior, and judiciary, and so on.

Almost nothing-- not much at least had really changed. And-- and they were looking for-- a situation, you know, an opportunity. But the (UNINTEL) in post-revolution you need-- popular support. And-- and but you know, post-revolution was-- in a situation where in 2012, and '13 and so on. You know, a lot of people were against-- the military, especially 2011 and 2012.

When (UNINTEL) were ruling. So I think unfortunately (UNINTEL) was so-- acted so badly that brought-- these two strange bedfellows, revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries together in a kind of unholy alliance. And led to-- the-- you know, presence of millions-- in the street. That military, in fact, use, and counter-revolution use, to justify its-- sort of-- takeover, as another-- revolution.

A revolution of-- 20th-- 30th, of-- of June. And th-- and initially-- it seems that, you know, the military unfortunately had-- incredible popular support. And I was even afraid of the rise of some kind of-- you know, fascism. I mean-- they-- they use a language of ultra-nationalism. And-- and Egypt, and so on. Anti-foreign, and-- and-- and very nativist, you know, ideas, and so forth. (NOISE)

And-- and not to mention of the media, which-- has been horrible, in-- in that-- in that situation. So there is-- there has been that-- danger. You know-- you know, we can talk about it. These are the situation where-- can lead, in fact, to the rise of, you know, that type of, you know, fascistic. Times of instability and-- the demand for a strong leader.

There are all these-- you know, instability and uncertainty, and so on. You want some-- someone strong. And (UNINTEL) comes off with a strong leader, so on. However-- however, I think that-- if the military is able to address, to really clear demands of the revolution itself, then they might actually succeed. Succeed in a sense of-- you know, their dominance. Ruling.

But I feel that it is-- it is very unlikely. I think the fundamental demands of the revolution-- issues of dignity, social justice, freedom, and so on, still are there. Social demands of the-- poor classes, they are still there. Issues of unemployment, they are still there. And given the economy, and-- the way they are-- managing so far. You know, they have not been able to address.

Now, I feel that there will be some kind of-- press-- pressure, really, on the-- the-- the military. I don't know, you know, what-- you know, how-- what kind of scenario to-- to envisage. But I don't think that they can comfortably-- rule. I mean, one thing I am pretty confident about-- Egypt, that you know it has-- the Egyptian people have shown to have a remarkable ability (NOISE) to be ungovernable. Ungovernable.

And I think the time can come that-- the-- the regime would have a hard time to govern. Not that necessarily a democratic system would emerge out of this. That depends of real program, real organization-- and I think real strategy on the part of the opposition, (UNINTEL) opposition. But-- but I'm saying that a regime would have a hard time to rule comfortable. And out of this conflict something good might emerge. And something bad.

ANTHONY RICHTER:

I want to-- pose-- pose one question to Madawi, and-- and then open it up. I see Joe has a hand, and others will as well. Madawi, I was-- (COUGH) I'm struck by the-- by your conclusion that it almost seems-- too bad to be true. That the Saudi-- I mean, the Saudi's defeat of the revolution is absolute-- both abroad, and at home.

And, you know, the picture one hears of-- (NOISE) Saudi Arabia, you know, from many places, is-- first of all, that there's been a certain degree of experimentation at home-- with-- certain kinds of top-down reforms. You spoke about a kind of demand-- driven-- reform process, which-- isn't-- going anywhere fast. But by the same token there's-- a kind of supply-side reform-- from above.

In-- experimenting with certain things, the appointment of a woman-- in-- a high-- council-- position, as a sign of something. The introduction of more-- education, single-sex-- education for women. And-- and then other things happening from below. We were-- kind of-- talking about-- the appearance of this-- surprising-- independent arts-- scene.

The YouTube-- the content of the YouTube, maybe. I don't know. Maybe some of the YouTubers are going to jail. But the number of-- of hits that-- you know, these-- the-- there's a whole-- video industry. There's no, you know, interesting Saudi television to watch.

But millions and millions of people are-- and I don't know where they-- they can tell where they're viewing them from, but they're viewing the-- soap operas, and TV production on YouTube. Groups like-- Telfaz (PH) and, you know, many others. And-- everything that I hear is-- that there is kind of surprising things still going on.

So is it-- is it actually-- is it-- is it not the case that these revolutions have had a resonance-- there, both on the leadership, and in the population? And that the-- kind of the-- the old Saudi Arabia is-- not capable of-- continuing without-- paying heed to the enormous changes that it's spending so much money trying to contain abroad?

MADAWI AL-RASHEED:

Yeah. Well-- I-- I take your point, that-- perhaps it's a very dark picture. But-- in a way-- abroad, the Saudis felt euphoric about-- toppling (UNINTEL). And they-- they thought that they scored a victory-- there. In Bahrain, it's the same story. So they did succeed. In Yemen-- they did succeed.

And let's not forget there are enormous financial resources that are-- cementing, preparing, and enforcing these policies, that possibly not many other countries in the region can compete with. So to just give you an example, when the U.S.-- said that they will-- de-scale, or withdraw the military aid to the Egyptian army, Saudi Arabia volunteered to replace that.

So who could compete with this money, coming? And in a way th-- abroad, they did succeed in some projects. But this doesn't mean that they will continue to be successful. As Asef said, that we have-- in the last three years, witnessed something that perhaps, you know, we might have a setback. We might have a military dictatorship. We might even have a populist, fascist leader.

But I think the process is there. And it's very difficult to go back to the old ways of doing things. Given the demographic, social, economic factors that-- are there in Egypt, Tunisia and other countries. Internally, yes, there's a vibrant-- participation in social media, and-- as I mentioned. But-- the-- at the moment it is resisting-- certain narratives about politics, about religion, about the role of women in society.

They are deconstructing these hegemonic narratives. But you-- we haven't reached the stage where there is a shift from that sort of deconstruction at the level of intellect, and at the level of feeling, and belonging, to the ground. You mentioned that there had been a lot of reforms-- from the top going down. But if you look at these reforms individually, and I've actually written about them, especially the ones that are related to women's issues, in my last book.

And-- most of them do not actually threaten the authoritarian rule in Saudi Arabia. In fact, they enhance it in a very bizarre way. They-- these-- reforms, especially in the domain of gender-- they create-- international legitimacy for the regime. Especially at a time when there's a global feminist-- civil society putting pressure on different regimes in the middle east and elsewhere.

Highlighting abuse of women, discrimination against women, et cetera. So international legitimacy is extremely important. And-- appointing some women, making women visible is very important. It's part of the sort of-- media hype-- that we talk about the first women, Saudi women, who can fly a plane. The first Saudi women scientists.

And there-- that is really what-- what we have all discussed in academic circles as a state-orchestrated feminism. And-- quite a lot of-- both Islamists, secular dictators, have done this before. And-- it doesn't threaten the foundation of authoritarian rule. In fact, it enhances it. Appealing to women. But also in Saudi society there is now a section of women who are extremely educated, with great opportunities.

But they feel frustrated. So the Saudi government preempted their mobilization by coopting this mobilization, and by turning this mobilization into its own interest. And the issue of women is very complex, because-- if they go for-- to drive, the Saudi government always can rely on conservative elements to go and object, and campaign against women driving.

And they really serve the interest of the regime, because the regime could say, "Well, we don't want to interfere in this social issue because it would-- our society is conservative." The fact that now there are men supporting women's campaign to drive is beyond the point, because you only need a group of-- religious-- clerics, or activists to go and-- and-- object to driving, and then you get the message to the world, and to society, that if we allow them to drive-- that is going to be against society's wish.

But the fact that those may not represent the majority of Saudis is-- is neither here nor there. So, yes, there is quite a lot of activism, protests, but it's still not-- leading to this collective action. It is fragmented in its demands, and it's-- tools.

ANTHONY RICHTER:

So I'm cancelling that trip to Saudi (LAUGH) in March. So we had-- we had-- I saw Joe Glicksberg (PH) and Elizabeth France (PH) here each had a question. Joe, do you wanna go first? Step up Joe.

JOE:

I just-- I really had a comment-- for you, Asef, when you-- you were talking, I-- I completely agree about the-- the possibility-- and the likelihood of an army entrenchment-- in-- in-- in politics in Egypt. I mean, it's always been the main actor in Egyptian politics. But it seems very interesting, I was just curious to talk to you, now-- and get your thoughts on what may happen with the new Constitution, and the struggle over the new Constitution.

I-- I was thinking of the first Constitution. I was just sketching notes to myself, and I was thinking that you know, the-- the-- the Muslim Brotherhood, basically, was in

control of the process and the timing and things. And they excluded, to a certain extent-- the secularists, and even the far right-wing-- Islamists. And-- and the army, to a certain extent, was pushed aside, although I think that was-- and now you have this new Constitution, produced mainly by elements supporting the army, which is pushing aside-- or the main goal of (NOISE) the Constitution, I think, is keeping the Brotherhood out.

Yet at the same time there's very liberal things that the secularists and the liberal elements-- want. Which is what-- what-- it's just what you were saying. Which is that they want one-- the-- they're stuck in the middle. Because now, like, the military trial of civilians, and these things staying in the Constitution. This is making-- so-- so it's now the army has pushed out the other two. (LAUGH)

So you almost have like a re-- *Back to the Future* situation, in which the-- the constitution's being drafted by a group which included the others, now you have a new group drafting-- excluding the others. And I'm wondering if you feel that this battle over the new Constitution that's just been drafted will be an indicator of-- of how things may go in the future, as to whether or not the military's going to actually listen to the popular demands more, or whether it's going to kind of fold in on itself, and just retrench?

ASEF BAYAT:

Yeah, I think it-- somewhat it does. I think-- I think-- I think it's not just the military. I hate to say that, but th-- there are-- within the government-- within the government there are actually good people. You know? And I happen to-- (LAUGH) I happen to know them. And-- and there is a contradiction between, for instance, the deputy-- prime minister, right, (UNINTEL). And, say, the ministry of interior. There's a big difference between the two. Right?

And-- and so in other words there are some people within the government, and also within the constitutional, it's 50 people. And I happen to know some of them. They are actually good people. (LAUGH) Good people in the sense that they want to do something good, today. So they are using the opportunity, this is very typical (UNINTEL), using the opportunity to-- to do the best at what they can.

Right? In terms of rights, and so on. So-- so there is a conflict-- there is a conflict, yeah? And with the new-- you know, (UNINTEL) policies against people like-- Allah, and-- his wife, and-- and his sister, and so on. And others who were the-- you know, the archetype of revolutionaries, (UNINTEL) now. Things are actually-- the sentiments are changing.

For instance, Tamaru (PH), Tamaru initially, you know, Tamaru the movement that was supposed to-- mobilize people again, and so on. (NOISE) Initially, of course, it was totally-- a people thing, right? It was totally-- it was perceived to be totally a popular thing. And then after-- the takeover of-- you know, the forceful removal of Tamaru it turned out that some of the-- you know, the leaders and so on had had--

you know, talk, negotiation, and so forth.

But my argument, first of all, is that the very idea of Tamaru is very different from the very organization, and the leadership of-- Tamaru, right? The very idea that we should go out-- and demonstrate, and, by our demonstration, force an early election, or-- an impeachment of-- (UNINTEL) was very different from-- some of the leadership of-- the Tamaru that we know now, who were talking to the military and possibly agreeing with.

I don't know whether the military had told them that we were going to, you know-- (VOICES) I don't know. But even if this happened-- there is a difference, you know, between the two. And even now-- a number of Tamaru people are disassociating th-- disassociating themselves with the-- with this-- recognized-- you know, leaders, you know? So, yes. So all these conflicts, I would say that it's likely to make some-- kind of opening. Opening. Space.

JOE:

Do you think this-- do you think the struggle over the new constitution, and what's gonna be happening, do you think this is where it'll happen? Or do you think it may happen post-- a little further down the line? I mean, it's gonna be a process, I realize, over time, but.

ASEF BAYAT:

Well, I think the struggle, you know-- I think the struggle that you had-- against the-- constitution that (UNINTEL)-- time-- against that, against this one, this different. This is-- would illicit less-- opposition than that one, yeah?

JOE:

I mean, and it is an improvement, I think, in-- I mean, in terms--

ASEF BAYAT:

Yes, I-- I think so, too.

JOE:

Coming from our-- where I think for people who believe in open society values, I think it is an improvement, but still got--

ASEF BAYAT:

That-- that's correct.

JOE:

Still has a ways to go. Thank you.

ANTHONY RICHTER:

Thank you. Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH:

I had a question for (UNINTEL). You know, despite the oil, there are pockets of poverty and unemployment in Saudi Arabia. I think some of the-- you know, Saudi Arabia's not immune from the demands for economic justice that-- that Asef was referring to-- about other parts of the region. So I wonder what form of mobilization-- you see addressing issues of economic inequality.

How this is playing out in the Saudi context. Labor, obviously, isn't playing a visible role the way it is elsewhere. But-- you know, what-- what other forms of contestation might you foresee (NOISE) in the future? Is part of this playing out in the current crackdown on deportation of migrants-- or--

MADAWI AL-RASHEED:

Yeah. I mean-- economically-- Saudi Arabia has one of the highest unemployment rates among (NOISE) the youth. Amounting to something like 30 percent. And also even higher among-- women. But-- again, remember-- Saudi Arabia has also nine million-- foreign workers-- expats-- not all of them are in-- unskilled jobs. Some of them are-- in managerial positions. And this has contributed to fragmenting the workforce, which is extremely interesting.

Saudis have always had what they call Saudization programs. That is-- to replace the-- foreign immigrants with local labor. But in fact we see that the number of foreign workers has increased, and has been increasing steadily over the last decades. And-- and I think it's an interesting policy that the government has in order to fragment the labor forces.

And-- and unfortunate for the-- illegal immigrants-- they were-- rather than deported-- fe-- and the rational was that they will be replaced by Saudis. But it is very uncertain whether they will actually be replaced by Saudis. And this would push Saudis to-- take their jobs. I think-- it hasn't happened yet. And we will see. And

some schools have-- been forced to close because the cooks, and the cleaners were foreign.

And they didn't turn up. And even the teachers, in some cases, they didn't turn up to school because they thought that the security forces, the police, would come and-- round them, and-- and deport them. So-- there-- labor is extremely interesting. And in terms of mobilization, again, because the labor force is segmented-- Saudis themselves would-- started-- when the Arab uprising-- gathered momentum in the early months.

They started going to employment-- centers, or to the-- women would turn up at the-- labor-- center, in order to ask to be-- employed. And most of them were teachers. And the interesting thing is they have to appropriate-- sort of loyalty to the king. And-- confront the local bureaucrats who are-- claim to be-- delaying the-- the-- the employment, and not following their kings-- s-- sort of, you know, recommendations.

And therefore anger is-- is directed against the-- the lower-ranking civil servants, and not the king. So women had no choice but to actually go along the narrative that the king is a reformist, and he's empowering women, very much like-- what (UNINTEL) has mentioned. And-- and therefore the-- the problem is-- identified as a problem of im-- of implementation, of high orders. And therefore anger is directed against these middle-ranking officials, rather than the-- the-- the political system as a whole, and the-- the problems within that.

QUESTION:

Thanks for both (UNINTEL) I think this is very exciting. (COUGH) Asef, it's great to listen to you again. Listening to you talk about Tamaru just now, and listening to Madawi earlier talk about Hassem (PH) made me also think of whether the revol-- my guess is that the revolution can sometimes be a fertile ground for certain movements, while other times it--

ASEF BAYAT:

Fertile--

QUESTION:

--while other times it can be more of a challenging and defying force for some movements to grow. And I wasn't sure-- if you agreed, and if you can think of examples of movements from-- from your experience in Egypt, where the revolution helped support these movements, grown and move forward. While other types of movements that the revolution proved to be a force that, you know, goes against it-- and-- and prevents it from growing. And-- and the same-- the same, I don't know if-- if Madawi would have an example as well. And-- and what kind of role does-- the

international movement then plays. When-- when is it-- when is it time to connect these movements to international movements. And-- and when is it best to just leave them alone? And-- and also, being-- being from Iraq I felt I have to say that I-- it's hard for me to think of any war that helps people unite, (LAUGH) whether it's external or internal. But-- but that's-- that's-- that's just a side comment.

ASEF BAYAT:

Yeah, yeah.

FEMALE VOICE:

History proved that wars helped unite. For example--

ASEF BAYAT:

Sorry?

FEMALE VOICE:

I said history has proven that war help unite, because when you take the example of the French Revolution, and the arrival to power of Napoleon, then you have all these wars that united the French people, until they started losing. So history is full of--

QUESTION:

Yeah, no, no. I agree. I just think in the context of the Middle East, those-- you know, regardless of-- of the wars that happened in the past ten years. Whether they were internal, or external, or a combination of both.

ASEF BAYAT:

Yeah.

QUESTION:

You think-- I think the Chomani and the Iranian regime, after the revolution, really used the Iran/Iraq war. I-- I think they not only was helped by it, but I think they actively-- perpetuated-- I don't know. It's a way--

ASEF BAYAT:

I agree. I think-- I think-- I think societies that perhaps don't have large diversity within the society, mostly sec-- you know, religious, sectarian--

FEMALE VOICE:

Sectarian.

MALE VOICE:

--it's-- it's-- you might be right.

ASEF BAYAT:

But there was political division. There as enormous political-- in post-revolution Iran, political division.

MALE VOICE:

Yeah.

ASEF BAYAT:

Be-- because a lot of people, of course, were-- not-- people benefitted from others, because of the-- policies of the new regime, they were excluded. So they were beginning-- they were beginning to actually-- you know-- you know, develop-- a new movements (NOISE) against the-- you know, post-revolutionary regime.

And-- and there was a-- a lot of things going on in the provinces, in the (UNINTEL), in-- (UNINTEL) and-- and also in the streets of Tehran. So-- so but when the war came-- I-- I was there. Finished. All this finished. Right? Because Saddam was the, you know, main enemy, we should defend our country, and so on. Well, of course-- of course maybe that also-- Iranian-- regime also helped Saddam to-- you know, division, Sunni/Shia, so on, so forth. (NOISE)

But Iranian think-- were thinking that maybe Shias will join them, and of course they didn't, right? So-- but why you question, I'm thinking-- I'm trying to think. I have to think. I mean, I don't know now. But-- all I can say is that-- revolutions open-- (NOISE) revolution opens space for the emergence of all kinds of movements, right?

And often contradictory, right? You have-- you know, in post-revolution-- you know, Middle East-- the em-- emergen-- of course, Salafis (PH) were there, right? Salafis were there. But the fact that they became so visible, and vocal, I think, was the result

of the-- revolution. But opposite to that there are not ideologies and-- and trends within-- among the young, and-- and-- and the women, were totally opposed to the very ethics, to the-- to the very i-- idea-- ideas that, you know, Salafis are-- Salafis are advocating. Yeah?

It's very contradictory. You know, the socialist face that has been created. So I-- I will say that-- I-- I-- I think it has contributed-- enormously for women's power. I really think so. Now, don't ask me how. (LAUGH) Don't ask me how. But I do feel that-- there is a great potential in the future in places like Egypt, that women will play very important part.

And the-- their very public presence, presence-- their very existe-- really presence in the public space is-- public spaces. And in institution, they're vocal, both physical and-- and-- and-- and-- and-- vocal presence-- will have really a-- I think a significant impact. Especially against the regimes which are by and large (UNINTEL) based upon partially patriarchy.

Yeah, they are-- they are-- they are-- questioning that. And that I think is-- very significant-- opening. Which I think will be-- I think related to what's happening in-- you know, Saudi Arabia, too. I'm actually very-- well, who am I to-- to be hopeful about (LAUGH) Saudi Arabia.

But Saudi Arabia, to me, is kind of manifest-- in somewhat-- similar-- say late 1980s, and early 1990s, in Iran. You know, pretty repressive-- repressive patriarchal religious state. But a lot of things are happening, you know, on the other side-- in society. That-- tends to unsettle. Unsettle. They are not as such movement, but I say that they are largely not movements, right? And-- and-- and-- so the individuals are becoming aware of what is happening. But they are not-- organizationally connected to another-- one another. Which is happens, then it creates-- you know, of course, movements, and further-- unsettles-- I'm sorry. I want to give you a chance too.

ANTHONY RICHTER:

No, no, no. I actually wanted to-- to connect it back-- to-- your presentation about Saudi Arabia, because-- even for the moment, if-- you-- insist on your blooming-- picture. The leadership of Saudi Arabia-- or the whole succession or series of men in their 80s or late 70s.

And among the schisms which you didn't list, which you said were sectarian-- men/women, regional, and ideological, (NOISE) you didn't talk about a generational-- schism, but it's kind of implicit in everything that you say. And also your research-- project, for your-- your fellowship time-- is looking maybe at some of the unexpected sources of change. So do you-- as a-- as a-- Asef suggest-- maybe ending on some more optimistic, or-- tentative note about the future in Saudi Arabia?

MADAWI AL-RASHEED:

Well, I mean, I-- I described a lot-- six forms of protest that are taking place. But-- I-- I don't want to-- go beyond my empirical data. I mean, there's wishful thinking, and there is the reality on the ground. A lot of things is happening.

A lot of protests-- forms of protest that didn't exist before are emerging now. But they have not led to any political change. They may have led to certain kind of reform in-- in certain practices. But the overall system remains intact. There is-- a problem of succession. At the top level, and that actually might-- be more problematic for observers of Saudi Arabia-- and allies of Saudi Arabia, than what is happening on the ground.

But there is just one point that I want to mention in reply to Hader's (PH)-- question. What can global civil society do? I think this is extremely important for people who are not simply looking at these issues from an academic point of view, but people who are on the ground.

And-- I think for-- groups like Hassim (PH)-- one of the issues-- against them from the perspective of the regime was that they contact foreign media. Or they talk to-- intena-- to global-- human rights organizations. In a country like Saudi Arabia this is stifling. And this is very, very difficult.

I mean, you know, you could go on-- on one of the television channels that are not owned by Saudi Arabia, and immediately after that you could be put in prison. Or you could sign a petition asking for-- for-- as what happened recently, asking for the-- a state of-- rights and institution.

Which is one of the famous Hassim-- petitions. Asking for elections, national-- at the national level. Separation of powers, et cetera. These are really advanced-- petitions, basically. But the-- the-- the organizers-- were immediately put in prison. And as I said earlier, you could put them in prison, but their discourse is being-- exchanged, and talked about and circulating. But what global society could do is-- I mean, there are two levels internationally.

There is the level of governments, and the level of the civil society. And what we have seen so far that when-- when governments intervene, they can make some minor changes to improve the situation. As-- for example, what happened-- in 2008, when one-- girl who was gag-- gang raped in Saudi Arabia.

And the judge sentenced her to prison. And then I think Hillary Clinton, at the time, intervened, and the girl was pardoned. And-- so that's one thing that internat-- governments outside-- outside government could do. But global civil society, I think it would make sense for them to find ways of engaging with this kind of civil society that is stifled in Saudi Arabia.

And-- and engage with it in ways that protect the activists themselves. And also doesn't-- this engagement doesn't become counter-productive. Because it could actually-- undermine them. As, for example-- the dragon campaign, when the-- in June, 2011, when there was the first driving campaign after the Arab uprising in Saudi

Arabia. The woman who-- not-- she wasn't behind it on her own.

(UNINTEL) she was part of a group. But she was sort of the most-- outspoken, prominent one. And she was-- awarded-- a prize in-- I think in-- in Sweden, or Norway, I can't remember now. And then-- then immediately-- you know, people started talking about her as an agent of foreign powers, or agent of-- (UNINTEL) movement. So there is a balance that is important here. (NOISE) You know, cooperation in ways that don't undermine these really simple efforts that are just beginning in a country like Saudi Arabia.

ANTHONY RICHTER:

Well, maybe I will go after all.

MADAWI AL-RASHEED:

Yeah. Yeah, you should, I think. (LAUGH)

ANTHONY RICHTER:

Asef, how are we doing-- Steve, how are we doing on time? Because I'm confused--

STEVE:

We should wrap up.

ANTHONY RICHTER:

--by the time zones. Okay, so--

STEVE:

We should wrap up. After Asef, perhaps.

QUESTION:

Just-- I'm dying to ask this question. You know, I recent-- so, you know, you talked about the possibility of-- you know, (UNINTEL) movement. Especially, like, street pro-- protests, and so on. In-- Saudi Arabia. You know, I recently was in-- in-- Riyadh, and-- well, recently. Talk-- few months ago.

And I-- I felt that the-- I haven't been to other cities, right? At least-- the area that I

was I thought that-- that the street, or the space is not conducive for street politics at all. There aren't people in the street, right? In the way that you see you have in-- you know, in-- in Cairo, and Tunisia, and so on.

Or-- or in neighborhood (UNINTEL) where mostly the foreign-- you know, immigrants are. And their streets are full of people. But the other areas, there aren't. Because to have street politics you need a particular conducive space for it. Are there-- is it symptomatic of all other cities? (NOISE)

MADAWI AL-RASHEED:

Yeah. I think this is-- I think your question should be the subject of another-- brown bag meeting. But it's extremely important, because space was central-- in the Arab uprising. This (UNINTEL)-- square, et cetera. Now, in Saudi Arabia, obviously, I mean, we know from the French Revolution how Paris was completely redesigned after the revolution.

So there is a connection there. But then, you know-- it may be in a different location. And I have seen-- demonstrations in support of political prisoners in a shopping center. (NOISE) In-- you know, they would go to a shopping center. First it's cool, and it's confined. And people were holding banners that, you know, (UNINTEL), which means-- it's a religious statement, which means you have to free that person who is suffering in prison.

Or-- (UNINTEL) the people want to free the prisons. And they were in the shopping center. So you know, in-- you're absolutely right, the layout of Saudi cities-- are not conducive to-- pol-- politics in the street. But another side is the mosque, which is the old site that we-- and people-- in-- in March, 2011, there was-- some kind of demonstration.

And it was after Friday prayer. And they arrested one famous-- person-- who-- who became very famous. He was nobody, but he posted his-- video clip on YouTube saying that-- I want-- downfall of the regime. And the following day, on Friday, he went and demonstrated. And he was holding a banner-- calling for that.

And he was immediately picked up, and he's still in prison. And therefore the mosque, Friday-- they're similar sites of protest. And this is the mosque, unfortunately. But it has not happened. There have been some clashes in the mosque, over Egypt. Whereby-- Saudi preacher-- denounced supporting the coup.

And then some of the audience attacked her and there was sort of-- a contestation there. And therefore, you know, I think people are imaginative. It doesn't have to be a national public square. As I said, a shopping center was-- good enough for-- for those people demonstrating at the time. Also the cyber-- activism is-- is really rampant.

Saudi Arabia has, like, almost 40 percent-- of-- high-- one of the high-- this is the highest in the Arab world in terms of people who use Twitter. So yes, but-- it is there.

And the protest is there. It has not led to this national politics.

MALE VOICE:

Yet.

MADAWI AL-RASHEED:

Yet.

QUESTION:

Okay. This is regarding-- maybe this is not related completely, but-- the topic. But-- this is regarding the overtures of Iran. That it has recently made-- with-- Middle East. I was wondering why Iran at this moment, when they have rapprochement with U.S. have, you know, adopted a different stance, not as a confrontation, but, you know, like, the-- seeking cooperation with them. How would it impact? And what would be the reactions from the Middle East? What do you think? Like, how would-- they are gonna respond to this?

ASEF BAYAT:

Yes, so-- so Iranians-- Iranians-- have been pretty vacillating since the-- Arab uprisings. In the sense that well, Iranians first say, "We started first, 2009. And they learned from us." And then they, of course-- in 2009, nothing particularly happened in Iran, right? They felt it was defeated. (NOISE)

And then they became jealous. When the-- you know, four regimes were-- fell, you know, in the Arab world. Arabs can do, we can't do it. Right? So (NOISE) (UNINTEL) change, really. Really. And they said, "Well, we-- maybe we should actually pursue a revolutionary road. Not reform. Reform doesn't work in Iran anymore." Right?

And then these days, and if you look-- you look at the-- Iranian/Persian websites, you realize that, say-- you know, actually good that we didn't go for revolution. It's not working. The end result is not good, and so forth, right? And-- and we pursue-- of course, I'm, you know, simplifying. But we pursue a reform-- path. And-- you know, a lot of people were not very-- happy with-- all the-- Ahmadinejad, and they wholeheartedly (UNINTEL)-- in fact the last days, for (UNINTEL), right?

Now there is some degree of optimism, again-- in the country. That-- this-- this path might be more reasonable, and manageable, and in the long run may be beneficial-- for Iran, both-- (VOICES) No, no. I'm sorry. Reform. Reform. Yes, yes. Electoral-- electoral, yeah-- mobilization, and so on. And both domestically and--

internationally. And there is some-- yeah, degree of that in the country, too.

ANTHONY RICHTER:

Well, I guess we're gonna have to-- we-- there's-- more questions than time, which is a good sign. But-- we're gonna have to stop here. It's already-- Friday evening. Steve.

STEVE:

I just want to encourage colleagues to be in touch with us, and we will be happy to act as intermediaries to Madawi and Asef. And by all means, the conversation should be continued in other venues. So this is not-- this is not the end of anything but the beginning of a conversation. And thanks to-- to all of you. Participants.

ANTHONY RICHTER:

Let's-- thank our two speakers for-- for-- talking with us, and-- and the-- fellows program, as well. (APPLAUSE)

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *