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Shifting Tides: A New Middle East?

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Moderator: Steve Clemons, Founding Editor at Large, Semafor

Steve Clemons

Hi, everybody, having a good time? You're back. I'm so happy. I promise you this will be the very, very, very last time you will see me on stage today or tomorrow. I just want to hang out and be with all of you. And we can have coffee hanging out. We have a wonderful panel and today we're going to discuss the Middle East in 38 minutes and 55 seconds and we are going to take questions. So I hope you will think about your questions, comments, and we'll be sure to get to them this time. We've got more than enough, what I would call TV time to do this. I want to start with former Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, some of you were not at a dinner last night. Jane Harman hosted a dinner and there was a fantastic if you really read about in Semafor, for what I call it, the disturbingly excellent magic show put on by the former acting director of the CIA, John McLaughlin. There's a purpose to this. And he brought it with me on stage as a stage partner in this to show these magic shows and she got good at saying abracadabra and stuff happened. but I think the bigger thing that John was getting into and it gets back to the theme that underlies all of the sessions here at the Aspen security forum over the horizon around the corner is really anyone that watched that magic show last night, is scratching your head, how the heck did he do that? And it made me think that it was a way to say a metaphor that we know it alls don't know at all. That there are things that we have bias that we bring, we bring frames and I just want to start with you both about Israel's strategic dashboard, internally and externally. And what biases do we have to get rid of to understand what's happening on that front?

Tzipi Livni

Okay, first, speaking about yesterday's show, I want to warn yesterday that this is the magic that happens only with the combination of former CIA and former Mossad so don't try it at home. Speaking about Israel well you have different dashboards in Israel and these are really historical,

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dramatic moments in Israel when those those that are trying to change the nature, the destination the vision of Israel, as a Jewish democratic state, acting against Israel's democracy, this is the elected government and people are taking the streets the good news is that a new camp In Isael was born of those believing in democracy are willing to fight for it. So it's yet unknown where will be heading but it is inspiring. I'm part of this movement in speaking up for Israel's democracy. And I believe that in a way, we also taught the government some lessons about checks and balances and there are some limitations to power. But this is the substance.

Steve Clemons

If you were a neighbor of Israel in the region, and it's clear that Israel is the superpower in the region. Would you be hopeful about the future or pessimistic about Israel?

Tzipi Livni

If you want Israel's destruction, so be pessimistic. So it's an opportunity to say to our neighbors, those that dislike the existence of Israel in the region. Don't miscalculate the internal situation in Israel. But yet, internally This is a very important moment historically. Because if we have some time when Israel was born as the nation state for the Jewish people, it's written in our Declaration of Independence that Israel, within Israel we have equal rights to all its citizens. And when an Israeli government come and was elected, but it's changing this, this is not legitimate. So these are not judicial reforms. It's not about I. It's not about balance between different authorities. It's about substance and this is what we're fighting.

Steve Clemons

I'm gonna jump the Dina and I know Dina's husband, Dave McCormick's. In the audience. He says Steve you're so lucky, I mean there's not a power panel of four awesome, incredible women at this forum as good as this one. So round of applause for that. Dave is Right. But Dina Powell's been in for a long time and you knew you were long involved, you know, in the economic side of the equation, but I really want to talk about Abraham Accords, because when you look at if you're trying to sort of change the vector, we're going to get to talk to Iran, we're gonna talk about intergenerational complexities, but when you sort of look at what institutions are actually building that might create something different than the mess of the last many decades it's Abraham Accords. So tell us a little bit how your role in moving forward. And is it speeding up slowing down and what are your worries?

Dina Powell McCormick

Sure, kind of set the stage a little bit because I had the privilege of working for President Bush and Secretary Rice with my two colleagues, goalie and Farah and we were saying just before we got on stage, what a difference 20 years grace. I remember so clearly traveling to the region with Condi Rice, and what a tough time that was after 9/11 And how much she was urging those leaders to recognize what was happening in their countries to recognize the yearning of their people, but also

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how they had to shut down terrorist financing. They had to recognize the extremist elements within their populations. And those are pretty tough conversations. You fast forward 20 or so years and I was in Riyadh at that summit, 54 Arab and Muslim leaders hosted by King Salman and actually hearing Deputy Crown Prince then Deputy Crown Prince MBS, saying we need to return to a more moderate form of Islam. That was a pretty stunning development and if you think about the horror of 9/11, and to finally have a partner in the region, not a perfect partner. None of these allies are perfect

Steve Clemons

How imperfect for perfect is Mohammed bin Salman?

Dina Powell McCormick

Well, he's obviously made some major mistakes, but he's also reforming Saudi Arabia. And so maybe the way to ask the question is what is in the interest of the United States? And so it is undeniable that there is economic reform, it's undeniable that there's political reform, and there's also massive mistakes and steps back, but it's in our interest that those reforms continue. You know, we were talking again, we couldn't find one Imam after 9/11 and Farah lead incredible interfaith work to say that we have to cut off this financing to terrorists and we have to think about the culture that we're in. So fast forward. That was really the beginning of the Abraham Accords, what started to happen as a recognition with the Gulf countries that they needed to partner more with Israel, that Iran as a growing threat, really brought them together. And here's the thing

Steve Clemons

I just want to know Goli is not representing Iran.

Dina Powell McCormick

She's an expert. She's an excellent expert.

Steve Clemons

I just didn't want you to feel like you're carrying that.

Dina Powell McCormick

That's right. I'm sorry Goli. But you know, it's pretty remarkable to have those six Gulf countries normalize with Israel on a stage here at the Aspen Ideas fest. Thanks to Chairwoman Margot Pritzker. She invited Princess Reema, who actually said not only do we want to potentially normalize with Israel, we want engagement. And I think the Abraham accords have spurred more of that designer because of commerce and trade. They don't want to be left out of these opportunities in a region of the world where 70% of the population is under the age of 30.

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Steve Clemons

Real quick and I'm going to jump over to Goli is there a chance that something I remember the ASEAN Regional Forum was a way to get nations that hated each other in Asia to kind of sit down every once in a while and talk and over time it develops you know trade deals and all these other is your chances eventually becomes an alliance?

Dina Powell McCormick

I think it's already becoming an alliance. There's a Caucus in the House and Senate the Abraham accords caucus, there's many new funds that are investing across those countries. You know, that is the thing that's most needed, job creation investment in new areas, and the Abraham accords is really starting that and I think you're going to see that continue to grow.

Steve Clemons

Well, Goli I want you to take us to Iran and to give us some sense of the factors there that you think matter when it comes to looking at the questions about stability in the Middle East and where it's going. And I say this with some caution, because as Tzipi just said, we saw millions of people on the street in Tel Aviv, we saw you know, so there are lots of millions of people all over a lot of streets, but tell us what's going on Iran and and I guess the fundamental thing, which I have to say, and I don't need to be so callous. Are the protests received mattering in any way?

Goli Ameri

See, first of all, thank you for clarifying that. I'm not representing Iran, I am going to represent the people of Iran on this topic here and everywhere else. So as we all know, that with these massive protests that happened in September of last year, were coming up on that one year anniversary. I think I'd like to provide some context here. about who the Iranian people are, because I think that really is important. Iran has a population that 60% Gen Z. These are very young people. There's only 5% of boomers that 20 some percent are under the age of 35. And the rest are sort of in their 40s and 50s. So it's a very young country. It's also a very highly educated country. You know, the younger generation that has a 98% literacy rate 96% On average, and it has very high college graduation rate. In fact, 40% of the workforce, have some level of higher education. So this is a very connected, educated population that really wants to become part of the mainstream world, and it's dealing with a theocracy that is just refusing to reform and in fact, it's even becoming more arrogant as time goes on. And the significance of the recent protests, you know, obviously the spark was that beating to death by the morality police of this beautiful young, Turkish, Kurdish Iranian woman Mahsa Amini. that's what sparked the protest. But what was what is really interesting and new about this protest is the combination of people who participated. It was rich and poor, old and young. All sorts of styles of the Iranian society, including hyper nationalists, which is actually the first. Also Iranian protest this to happen every decade since 2017 to 21, it sort of is happening annually. And in 2022,

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it became semi annual, and because the morality police who was reportedly disbanded is now back. My guess is that it's going to continue going on. We have not seen the end of this yet.

Steve Clemons

So 20,000 in prison right now in jail and 500 dead and the morality piece, police are coming back and now enforcing hijab and scarves etc. What's not connecting there for the leadership want? I mean, why is this the sword that Khameni wants to fall on?

Goli Ameri

You know, Steve, that is such a great question. And I think the only way I can answer that is that we do something that I say unfortunately, a lot of the western world is not familiar with the mullah, clerical mentality. A lot of people who make policy in the United States or in Europe, just do not understand that those are very particular mentality, you know, and let me tell you a little bit about that. You know, for those people who have grown up there, they've been around almost quite a bit. And I think what they what they know about the mullahs is that negotiating with them doesn't work. And it doesn't work because of not all of them. Obviously, I don't want to generalize, but there's a tremendous amount of duplicity there. And there's a tremendous amount of backstabbing that happens there. So, you know, with them negotiating just does not work. Right. I hear I'd point I think, after four days, four decades, where when you really think about it, exactly what has the western world role done, to hold Iran back? When you really think about it, I'd love to get into that a little bit more like

Steve Clemons

Farah who you are Special Representative to the Muslim communities. I don't know of anyone more we were friends we I watched you work so hard, not only I mean, I'm just gonna be you know, as blunt as I can and as uninformed as I am. But I found you reaching out to lots of different Muslim communities. But I also saw you trying to transform ignorant Americans who thought being a Muslim and being a terrorist. Right, so you had your two sets of frame changes, maybe more that you had to deal with walk us through that. And as we're kind of talking, I think what you would Goli was just describing and about generational change with a very, very young, Middle East that's out there. You know, how what's the prospect for this becoming a stable, hopeful story down the road rather than a miserable depressing one? that I that I think it still may be?

Farah Pandith

Well, first of all, thank you very much for those kind. Sentiments, I really want to say a couple of things around the changes that have happened in America and around the world and how we think about not just Islam, which is one component, but also the people that live within the Middle East. The societies that live in the Middle East and Dina was was right when she just to say let's remember where we started 20 years ago after 9/11 When we were all wringing our hands, trying

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to understand what we needed to do and the honor to serve in various capacities. My last one is special representative meant that I had to talk to civil society, it meant that I had to understand culture and society. I had to know what young people were thinking because frankly, in the cohort that we all live in and foreign policy land. We're not in the trenches, we're up up in the sky talking to the most elite of people about what's happening down in civil society. And for us to understand the demographical shifts the dramatic, Goli talk a little bit about Iran, of course Dina talked about the Middle East in general, the Arab youth report that was just out in 2023 talked about Gen Z, and I just for those of you who don't know what Gen Z is, I just want to remind you, they're the generation so it's baby boomers, it is Gen Y. I started Gen X, excuse me, it's Gen Z, and then it becomes Gen alpha, which is the children of okay, so it's important to know this because Gen Z, the problem and the reason why I'm raising this is the problem is that none of us understand how dramatic Gen Z's experiences growing up as digital natives they are the first generation that this is fluid for them. And why does it matter? It matters because as we try to unpack all these changes that we've talked about in the Middle East for foreign policy people, the big gigantic thing that we are missing is cultural intelligence, understanding what is really happening with the trends are what this generation feels like. Dina was talking about Saudi Arabia heritage is really important to Gen Z in Saudi Arabia. They are influenced obviously their hobbies are influenced by YouTube. Their aspirations are influenced by Instagram. We aren't including that in the way in which we do foreign policy. Nobody is sitting around thinking about the cultural societal trends that are taking place, but the question is, shouldn't we be so when you ask the question about what I was very lucky enough to be able to serve and to take part in this? We were both trying to explain to the American public what was happening it's true because a terrorist organization had attacked in the name of Islam, but to go back and try to make them understand who is living in America as Muslims who are they get to know your fellow Americans. So these points around learning about society and culture, knowing where the cultural shifts are absolutely determines in my view, the future of our success to be optimistic here about this region in particular,

Steve Clemons

You know I want to ask all of you this, this question but put it up and I'm like looking at my friend, David Ignatius, David and I do a lot of global conferences and we always try to sneak away and actually go talk to real people. And I gotta try to talk to Gen Z's and Gen whatever's and, you know, try to, you know, get it get a sense away from the group, think of whatever conference I'm at. And if I were to share with you one disturbing thing I worry about is I'm not sure that the American brand is in good shape in the Middle East, that that many people look at China or even Russia today as more definitively important to their futures than the United States. So I'm just interested in what your impression with David, have you run into that? So that yes, that so i That wasn't even a plant that you know, but I think the American brand is in trouble and I'm just interested what you agree in to what can we what should we be doing? You know, by way of talking to people we're connecting, or people seeing somewhat aspirationally that we are a player who can help bring solutions and

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problem solving. Dina You've been very involved in economic issues for so I remember many of my friends in Abu Dhabi, saying, hey, it's. It's nice. You're coming to come meet young women, high tech entrepreneurs, because usually we meet generals who want to meet our generals and sell military weapons and others that want to talk about oil and gas. And that's about it. So I mean, so I'm just interested in your perspective is the American brand in trouble?

Dina Powell McCormick

Well, I never disagree with David Ignatius. So start with that. Look, we worked together when the American brand was in real trouble in a very, very difficult period of time. And I think there's the American foreign policy brand, and then there's the American people. And I do think there's a big difference. You know, one of the most interesting things that's happening in the Middle East today, when you talk to large global investors, large pools of capital, they'll actually say to you, you know, this US China thing isn't going away anytime soon. And we really have to think about that as we think about our portfolio and investments in China and Asia broadly. We have a land war in Europe, likely economic recession coming to Europe. The Middle East kind of might be the stable region, which is saying something right. When investors say that to you, it says a lot. And I think that what's happening is that, frankly, people aren't as focused anymore. I hate to say it on what our foreign policy is. They're developing their own alliances, who would have thought that we would see the Chinese foreign minister in between the Iranian and Saudi Foreign Ministers, so they're making their own alliances. They're not waiting for the United States are hedging their bets. And I think when you I think the people to people part is actually pretty strong. It's strong because of the youth of the region and strong because of the investments. And I have to say it's extremely strong, because women you know, it's interesting, yes, maybe women now, of course get to drive in Saudi Arabia, but they've been working, they've been working more than the men. And so there is also, I think, an increasing role, that women's economic empowerment is so central.

Tzipi Livni

as first I would like to comment about the new Middle East and they might refer to it. First. I would like to say that in one of the rallies that I'm speaking about Iran, and they are speaking about the women in Iran and they sit when I'm looking at them, it is so inspiring. And I'm thinking about grit their parents and grandparents. They did nothing not to say supported the revolution at the time and we are not going to be a we're not going to leave our children to be at the same situation. About the new Middle East. It is in the Middle East. And frankly, for many years, it's clear that it was all connected to the Arab Peace Initiative that they will not make normalization with Israel without peace between Israel and the Palestinians. And this was changed. And we are all very happy about it. But since I believe that eventually the Palestinian issue is something that they can afford it but Israel cannot afford it. And therefore, unfortunately, the law those of us were, in a way exploiting the situation saying you say we can make peaceful peace. This is what we did normal essential for normalization and that's it. And it is important for me as somebody believing that the only way for

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Israel to keep its value. So nature as a Jewish democratic state is also to separate to reach offering peace with the Palestinians. But to solve this problem.

Steve Clemons

Is there any chance for alignment of Prime Minister Netanyahu with what you just said?

Tzipi Livni

No, unfortunately, but speaking, the truth is told in 2014 2013, and 14, I was the chief negotiator for peace when Netanyahu was the Prime Minister Netanyahu like Netanyahu now usually he's willing to do something but he needs deniability. It's him it's the others. So he asked basically the US to draft a US proposal for peace. He agreed to each and every sentence and lettering this proposal. But unfortunately, we didn't get an answer for for the Palestinians about it, but now no chance, unfortunately, but no team and not these coalition. You you're speaking about the dashboard and returning to Russia that GPS, when our national GPS is choose democratic state and the need to keep Jewish majority and separate herself from the Palestinians, hopefully, based on two states for two previous but yet, for part of this coalition, their GPS, the National ways is greater Israel, it's about the land it's not about Israel as a democracy. And this is the modern debate, but this is the division in Israel today. And speaking about the US. Yes, when we are speaking about democracy, we are looking at the US as democracy but speaking truthfully, the was some time in which the President of the United States itself he himself crosses crossed red lines when it comes to democracy and the tweets at the time when Trump was in power, decreasing the English in Hebrew were the same because when the president of the greatest democracy of the world is closing these lines, these red lines doesn't exist in other places where not only Korean leaders are taking the advantage and doing the same.

Steve Clemons

Thank you. I want you to comment on the American brand, but in a slightly different context. And that is there a lot of things coming down the pike with Iran un restrictions on ballistic missile exports, we see Iran giving their short range but short range drones to Russia. And we've seen no diminishment of its activities and broadly in the region. I just want to get a sense from you. Because the United States has been torn apart over what to do with that the JCPOA is in and we're out and we're trying to get back in that the guy who's doing that is now has his clearances suspended and maybe in big trouble, we don't know but it's just a complicated nightmare here for a dangerous nation. And so in that is the American brand flagging and losing when it comes to dealing with the security equation.

Goli Ameri

I'm really glad you're asked this question. So when it comes to Iran, the American brand with the Iranian people is not only not fighting, but it's definitely been on the rise tremendously since the

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revolution and you know, I think oftentimes, when when you hear from people back in Iran on or you look at it on social media, they're always looking to the United States as the hand of support. And I don't know if you remember or not, but when the protests happened here, the Obama administration, one of the chants and the street was because Obama in farsi is he is with us. And the chant was Obama are you with us or are with them. So the Iranian people have a tremendous amount of respect for the American brand. However, the American brand as you mentioned, definitely is not not only not on the rise with the Iranian government, but it's it's sort of falling down. And the reason is, this partisanship that you're talking about in the United States, is has really been toxic in the in the framework that the Iranian Islamic Republic is looking at the United States as a weak country, because we are constantly washing our dirty laundry in public. Like, for example, President Obama, you know, keeps Congress out of the JCPOA negotiations and you know, Senator, Tom Cotton, along with 27 other senators, writes a letter to the Iranian parliament saying this is if this is not a treaty it's not a deal Do you know what kind of messagea are we sending? United? Where is American brand here? And it kind of reminds me of committee when the hostages were taken, what are the words that you use? Often, which my understanding is it's written all over walls in Tehran is, America can't do a damn thing. Excuse my language. And, you know, it's like, you know, Islamic Republic is still kind of thinking about this partisanship on Iran policy, as I said, is toxic because for four decades, just like you said, you know, we're in we're out. We're in we're out, instead of in, I think, for decades has shown us that neither Republicans nor Democrats have the upper hand, and then was perfectly Iran policy. But if they all came together, and you're the two pieces of each other to thinking and actually use all the tools of foreign policy, whether it gets soft power, whether it's negotiations with consequences, whether it's you know, deterrents, whether it's appropriate defense mechanisms, if they use all of this, and they really stood up to the Islamic Republic telling them, you just can't constantly get away with things. Like for example, they sell drones to Russia, right? What was the repercussion of that? What did the Western world do about that? I was listening to Secretary Cleverly this morning. And I was so inspired by a sense of unity, you know, in Europe and the United States against Russia. Where is that same unity? visa vie, a government that is on the cusp of developing a nuclear weapon. I can go into that later. They are literally on the

Steve Clemons

I want to mention 30 seconds we are going to go to fire and then the audience so you've got to later do it quick.

Goli Ameri

Okay. The reason why they're developing a nuclear weapon and they will do it is because look at Libya and look at North Korea. It is their ticket to longevity. Libya gave up its nuclear rights, like the RAF is crying.

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Steve Clemons

I think that that was pretty powerful imagery there. So there you go.

Goli Ameri

Right now Ukraine gave up its nuclear warheads in return for security assurances, and you can right so why do we think that you're ever developing?

Steve Clemons

Thank you for Thank you. And I'm gonna go to all of you in just just a minute but Farah I want you to ask this American brand question Why don't we give you a job and the job is to make Americans care more. So when I go the Middle East and I've talked to people, they don't feel respected. They don't feel connected, they feel as if they are a sideshow to whatever obsession we have. I don't have what is your insight into how to get you do a lot of bridge building out of there. How do you get make more Americans care? Okay, so

Farah Pandith

a couple of stats for you six and 10 young people in the Middle East think America needs to get out of the Middle East. 33% think that that they would want they would not want to have them have this anywhere around? They believe the UAE and Russia actually have some influence there. They believe as Dina said that China and Turkey are allies, we have a problem. Okay, let's remember what I said about the Gen Z Gen generation. They have their there are almost 3 billion Gen Z on planet Earth. If we were wise about how we were thinking about the future, not just the next two years, six years, whatever that short period of time is, we would spend some time thinking about hundreds and hundreds of soft power tools in the Middle East. cultural diplomacy works we know it works. We know it the power of the American brand on culture, who's taught both slow culture and fast culture. Secondly, and that was not just from the State Department, by the way, which is not getting enough funding. I will just say on the issue of all of the soft power that it needs to do the work that it needs to do. But secondly, it's on the intelligence side. I do not know how you create a strategy for the Middle East if cultural intelligence isn't part of the solution. There are some really wonderful things that are happening. What we hear about in terms of Morocco and Egypt and the UAE, looking at the favorable change in the relationship with Israel. That's great stuff. It's amazing. The ADL de we built the Menara Center, which is a coexistence center. Really good opportunities to take it forward. What we would do, what we should be doing is two things. The first is on the State Department side scale up broadly the kinds of programs we need do and secondly, invest in the NGOs across the Middle East that are doing this exact thing. divining new leaders for those that are Gen Z leaders and eventually Gen Alpha leaders and and making sure to your first point that you asked me what's happening here in America. You rightly talked about partisanship, the Middle East when you talk with the Middle East eyes glaze over so we've got to do something about making Americans understand why it is good for us to have a strong and stable Middle East

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Steve Clemons

And 30 seconds real quick Dina I'm obsessed with the UAE is hope mission to Mars. And it now was go to the moon and it has a woman astronaut and when I looked at the same polling data fire there's there's a fascination with kind of all this stuff we call modernity, but it's science and education and people who are out there isn't there's a big study through you're looking at St where I am, but I can't remember who it is. ECW affiliate is there in the world in which you want to when you kind of look at that, you know, I call them the big money crowd you run with but they're investing in these things that science and in that is there are other opportunities we're not paying enough attention to on that front to play a bigger role.

Dina Powell McCormick

Well, I think UAE is a really good example of that. They obviously are doing very well economically, the energy disruption around the world you know, means they have a lot of resources, where are they investing those resources, biotech and life sciences, clean energy and climate transition which are gonna oppose COP 28. And they're doing this because they see that these are the future you know, industries that will matter and I think that we are not being as innovative in ways that we can partner and I want to want to say one thing, you when you and I were last in Abu Dhabi, it's pretty remarkable. There's one street where there's a mosque, a Catholic church, and a synagogue next to each other. And so again, imperfect allies make a lot of mistakes. But I think that these are not changes that when Steve Hadley and Farah I believe I work together that we thought we'd see cool tip of your fingers.

Tzipi Livni

Just to add one thing and this is security and expectation from the US when the US is asking the international community and others to choose a side. So their expectations for the US and is when something is happening to react. I'm not speaking about sending boots on the ground to different places on the internet. But this is expected that the United States frankly, left in a way the region and there is no vacuum in the Middle East because this is the toughest neighborhood in the world. This is the

Steve Clemons

Straight Talk Express you're off where are these women are incredible. We got lots of questions. Let's go to lightning round. Okay, we have let's go let's go up here in the front, grab a few and, and I always believe in regional, being nice to every part of the country. So we'll go around the room and let's make it as fast as you can. Oh, yeah. Tell us who you are.

Audience question

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Okay, I'm Tony Bishop. I'm one of the rising leaders. So thank you for being here. Also millennial, so please don't forget about us as young as your 35 seconds. Okay. So okay. Iran specifically, but also other opportunities. Aren't these windows for democracy export on our end? And how do we then engage young people from this side of the pond to all over there to sort of use this as a tool for youth engagement for

Steve Clemons

Great, thank you, youth. democracy, democracy, export Iran Goli?

Goli Ameri

Yes, thank you. Actually, I kind of wanted to back back up for a moment here is that Divine is oftentimes the bellwether of the least right you remember when the Islamic Republic launched its revolution in 1979. That's when the whole Islamic thing started. Tony Blair Institute just did a poll about what percent of Iranians are religious. It's 30% and race. And in the US, just as a point of comparison, 70% of Americans identify themselves with religion. So democracy in many ways has already been exported. Why? Because they've seen the other side, and they don't like,

Steve Clemons

we're gonna have that. Yes, sir.

Steve Clemons

And you got to speak into because we have 1000s watching.

Audience question

Okay. Thank you for the panel. My name is Ahmed Nasir. I'm a Special Forces officer. My question for you is what is your assessment for the way for for Syria? For the countries in the region and for the US? Thank you.

Steve Clemons

Let me give that to Tzipi. You know, Syria,

Tzipi Livni

No, I mean, it is all connected. I mean, we cannot speak about Iran without dealing with what they doing in and with Syria and through until using all the situation and tension between his Hezbollah these were these days. And the last in the last few years Russia was in and in Russia. In Syria with Assad and things are changing now. So maybe this is the opportunity for the US to be more involved in the situation of Lebanon, Syria and

Steve Clemons

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Thank you it's important question, thank you. Yes, sir.

Audience question

The like danger, concerned citizen. So shouldn't the United States be doing more to support Iranian people and the demonstrators and what form should that be taken?

Steve Clemons

I'm gonna give that to Farah.

Farah Pandith

Now, of course, we should be doing more to support the people I talked about civil society and the ways forward, I strongly suggest Goli certainly some stuff on what we can be doing. I strongly suggest you read what she's written. We have a toolkit of soft power that has been exceptional all over the world. What I don't understand today is why we aren't deploying it the way we can in places like Iran and other parts of the

Goli Ameri

world. Actually speaking directly to the people of Iran in the multitudes of Persian language programs.

Audience question

Excellent. Yes, sir. Michael Greenwald Amazon, there's greater Chinese one activity in the Middle East like ever before.

Steve Clemons

Oh my god, this is such a Dina question. I didn't even plant that.

Dina Powell McCormick

Well, it's not just in the Middle East, right. I think we have seen and, and Xi Jinping has been very clear about his ambition around the world, all throughout Africa, in the Middle East. You know, they they are very clear about their intentions. And that is to compete and win economically, politically, and to forge more allies around the world and you see them doing that. What's interesting, and I've heard Secretary Rice say this is they're not particularly great partners. At the end of the day, you know, they come they search for the minerals, the lithium, but at the end of the day, they bring their own workers, they're not creating jobs on the ground. And and so they're actually not doing it, I think, the most effective way possible, but they certainly are. And I think honestly, and you know, all three of these amazing women had referenced this, I think the Middle East leaders right now are hedging. And they have to, they don't want to hear you have to pick one side or another. They have to work with the Chinese, they have to work with us. And I think that they're forging their own path

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in many ways that makes it a little bit more difficult for us to have the influence that we want to have. And speaking of and this is just a point of personal privilege because I see Steve Hadley the greatest thing this country has ever done, that helped people believe in America and appreciate America as PEPFAR what President Bush did, all throughout Africa, and that was those are the kinds of initiatives that can make a big difference today. Yes, sir.

Audience question

A lot going on in Lebanon the past few years only passing reference a moment ago. Does Lebanon have implications for the wider Middle East in your assessment?

Steve Clemons

Thank you who wants to Lebanon. The minister.

Tzipi Livni

The tension that was being raised between FISMA and these were, as I said at the beginning, they should have miscalculated the internal situation in Israel. But it looks like like the testing, and of course what Iran is doing in the region through its proxies is dangerous to the region and to entire the entire world. But may I add something excuse me about democracy and young generation? Is that okay? Okay, so it's not just about the Middle East we have seven segments. Young generation lost trust between administrations, I mean, the old generation, we need to rebrand what does it mean to be democracy, why it is important for them and to speak in their language. And frankly, we didn't raise this issue of global warming, we are leaving to them something that the expectation from us, then then what we deliver, and I think that we need to read that and speak with them to their social networks in a completely different manner than this kind of stages.

Steve Clemons

Thank you. 15 seconds.

Audience question

To follow that My question was about our effort to educate young girls and women in STEM education so important.

Farah Pandith

Of course, we need to educate girls. More than just stem but across other disciplines as well. I want to make the point that in the Middle East, tell me how many female leaders there are. And what example are we giving to the young women in the Middle East, we have to do more to make them rise and be leaders in a lot of different fields.

Steve Clemons

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One little data point that I really know is they're actually more stem female graduates in the Middle East in their own proportion the United States. When you look at gender roles and issues, a lot of the world is way ahead of us and stem. So just something to think about. I want to thank you fantastic conversation.