Mark Gonnerman: Good evening, and welcome to the Aurora Forum at Stanford University. I’m Mark Gonnerman, the Forum’s director, and it is again very gratifying for us to see so many people gathered here in Kresge Auditorium for a public conversation that explores democratic ideals in a manner that inspires social hope. Tonight our theme is “Democracy in the Middle East: Prospects and Problems,” with two Hoover Institution Fellows who also have appointments in Stanford’s Department of Political Science: Dr. Abbas Milani and Professor Larry Diamond. Tonight’s conversation will be moderated by Mr. Erik Jensen, whom I will soon introduce.

Tonight we will follow our typical Aurora Forum program format. That is, we will have 45 minutes of on-stage conversation followed by another 45 minutes of audience conversation. If you have a question or a brief comment germane to tonight’s topic, we ask that you stand up behind one of the aisle mikes when we come to that portion of the program, and our moderator will recognize you.

Tonight’s program is being recorded by KQED Public Radio for a later broadcast on June 1, 2, and 3. For details about this broadcast and other Aurora Forum program offerings, please consult the printed program for tonight and visit our website: auroraforum.org. Also on the website you will find an archive of Aurora Forum programs in audio, video, and transcript formats, and many of our programs are now downloadable for free on Stanford on iTunes.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce our moderator tonight, Erik Jensen, who is a lecturer at Stanford Law School and who divides his time between Stanford and the Asia Foundation, where he is a senior law adviser. Here at Stanford, he codirects the Rule of Law Program and is a faculty member at the Freeman Spogli Institute’s Center for Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law. For the past 20 years, he has lived and worked in 20 different countries, where he brings an expertise in the rule of law in relation to Islam. Please join me in welcoming Erik Jensen, Abbas Milani, and Larry Diamond to the Aurora Forum stage. [Applause]
Erik Jensen: Thank you, Mark. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I’d like to welcome the Stanford community and the general public to this forum tonight, which will be a conversation about one of the most hotly debated topics of our day, “Democracy and the Middle East: Prospects and Problems.”

Dr. Larry Diamond needs no introduction, but I’m going to introduce him anyway. Larry’s contributions to Stanford University over the course of his life—as a student, as a scholar, as a professor—are stratospheric. Larry received all three of his degrees from Stanford, including his Ph.D. in sociology. Larry is a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, coeditor of The Journal of Democracy, and codirector of the International Forum for Democratic Studies of the National Endowment for Democracy. He is also professor of political science and sociology, by courtesy, and coordinator of the Democracy Program of the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law here at Stanford. Among his books is one of particular relevance to this evening’s conversation: Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq, published last year. The new edition is outside and is available for purchase. Larry has written, edited, or coedited more than 25 books on democratic development around the world. Many of us feel perpetually overstretched, but Larry Diamond is the gold standard in overcommitment. The amount of speaking, writing, teaching, and inspiring that Larry does reminds me of an old subcontinental parable: That which is not given is lost. Larry seems to live by this creed; he gives everything.

Dr. Abbas Milani is the director of the Hamid and Christina Moghadam Program in Iranian Studies here at Stanford. Abbas is also the codirector of the Iran Democracy Project at the Hoover Institution. Abbas has widely published in Persian and English about culture and politics in Iran and the country’s contributions to modernity as well as its struggles with it. That is the story line of his book, Lost Wisdom: Rethinking Modernity in Iran, also available for purchase outside the hall. Abbas’ personal memoir, Tales of Two Cities, describes among other things how he was infused with idealism during his undergraduate days at Berkeley. Upon his return to Iran in 1975 during the Shah’s regime, Abbas was thrown into jail where he spent a year with mullahs who would emerge as the next generation of leaders of the Islamic Republic. Before returning to the U.S. in exile in 1986, Abbas taught on the Tehran University’s faculty of law and political science. Abbas is an unusual combination. In fact, the BBC recognized him as one of Iran’s culture majors. He is a combination of philosopher, historian, man of letters, and an intellectual of extraordinary Persian pedigree, yet he is policy relevant and remarkably productive in the policy arena.

Please join me in welcoming our two panelists tonight. [Applause]

All right, gentlemen. Let’s start this conversation with a question about something that I’m sure is on the minds of many in the audience. As we look at election results from Egypt to Palestine to Iraq to Iran over the last year, should we watch out for what we wish for?
Larry Diamond: I think that the old parable, Be careful what you wish for; it may come true, comes into play, but only in a sense of process, of tactics, of how you get from one point to another. What do we wish for the in Middle East? We wish for responsible governance, we wish for forms of government that will diminish corruption, deliver development, be accountable to the people, be responsive to their wishes, and thereby—and I don’t think this term is inappropriate—in a certain sense, drain a moral developmental swamp of bad governance and failed development. And I think that wishing for that and working for that is appropriate because it will make us more secure and it’s morally the right thing to do. I do not depart at all from the goals that President Bush stated first in his November 6, 2003, speech marking the 20th anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy—a very important speech in which he really aligned himself with the quest for freedom and democracy in the Middle East and rejected, really pretty explicitly, 60 years of past American policy, including, therefore, that of his father—and the goals he stated in his second inaugural address putting the quest for freedom at the center of American foreign policy.

I think the lessons of these recent developments, which we’ll be talking about in greater detail, are multifold, and I would just begin to address them in the following ways. Number one, it should never be assumed that elections are the beginning of the process of democratic development. There are many ways in which democracy emerges in the world. There are different needs for strategy and sequence in getting viable democracy in the world, and, in many cases, elections—particularly free and fair, truly competitive elections at the national level—come later in the process of political system change, even very much later, even toward the end of the process rather than the beginning. I think in many of these countries, for reasons we can explore, we need to encourage other types of changes first to promote—this will be close to your heart—a real rule of law, a more independent judiciary, and a respect for human rights, to promote a more open and vigorous civil society, to promote a variety of changes in society, politics, thinking, education, and so on, that will create a more level playing field so that you don’t have a social and political reality, which you have in much of the Middle East now—certainly much of the Arab Middle East—where the two main alternatives are radical political Islam on the one hand and a corrupt, decadent, more or less secular regime, in most cases, on the other. There needs to be a third alternative, but we can’t assume it’s just going to emerge spontaneously because we have immediately open elections. So I think we need to draw the correct lessons from what’s happening and not conclude abruptly that the quest for freedom in the Middle East is unattainable or misplaced.

Abbas Milani: What I would like to add is that if you look at the two elections that have created the greatest amount of concern—one in Iran and the other one in the Palestinian Authority—and if you look at the specific content, then you will realize that the problem is not with democracy. In the case of Iran, the problem is with the very truncated form of democracy that exists there. In the case of the Palestinian Authority, the problem is that you have had for several years a corrupt, kleptomaniac group that ruled the Palestinian Authority. Several billion dollars were in there and ended up in the pockets of Mr. Arafat and his cronies in Swiss accounts while people in Palestine were living in poverty. Hamas on one hand was engaging in terrorism and on the other hand was delivering
social services to the people on the street level. It was delivering schools, it was
delivering banking without any interest, and people looked at what was being delivered
without the foreign assistance—without the billions of dollars the Europeans and the
Americans were sending—and they were getting results, whereas Mr. Arafat was
hoarding it away in Swiss accounts. And when people had a chance to actually vote, they
obviously voted the bums out, so to speak.

In the case of Iran, you had an election that was preselected, essentially. The ruling elite
didn’t allow anybody they didn’t want to run in the election. Then, by all accounts, by
very good evidence, Mr. Khamenei spent millions of dollars of illicit government money
to get his candidate, Mr. Ahmadinejad, to win. It was essentially a barrack democracy, as
it’s been called in Iran. The Basajis, the militias, that act sometimes as the militia and
sometimes as the hoodlums in the street, were very instrumental in getting the vote out.
The Revolutionary Guards were very instrumental in getting the vote out, and the Basajis
and the Revolutionary Guards themselves are anywhere between three to seven million
people. In the first round of the election, Mr. Ahmadinejad only got 5 million votes. In
the second round, they essentially saw to it that he was running against a gentleman who,
two years earlier, couldn’t win a seat in the parliament; Rafsanjani is despised in Iran. He
is seen to be corrupt to the core, he’s seen to be involved in every act of despotic brutality
that this regime has committed, and he was trying to sell himself as a reformist, and it
didn’t sell very well. So, will democracy always result in this kind of a thing? In the
case of Palestine, I don’t think that is going to be the case. In the case of Iran, if we have
a free, fair, democratic election, I doubt the likes of Ahmadinejad will win. So there is
hope for democracy.

Diamond: I’d just say one other thing about the Palestinian election, if I can put my pure
political science hat on. Hamas got about 43 percent of the vote. They won quite a solid
majority of seats with a plurality of the vote. Now, the way they did that was that the
ruling Fatah alliance rigged the electoral system so that it would over-reward the party
that got a plurality of the vote even if it didn’t get a majority because they thought they’d
be the party that would get the plurality. And they used the type of electoral
system—partially, the blocked vote—that does that. And so it’s very important to put the
Palestinian election results in context in the following ways. Number one: Hamas only
got 43 percent of the vote, not a majority. Number two: It won the majority of the seats
through a bad electoral system, not a very fair and proper one, because Fatah was not
only corrupt but divided and incompetent. It’s really a truly spent political force in that
area. Third: Many of the people, as Abbas has suggested, who voted for Hamas did so
as a protest vote, not in favor of their program. They wanted to vote against the corrupt
establishment, and Hamas was the alternative. Now, my point is that if we can facilitate
and support the emergence of viable other alternatives in this part of the world that may
be Islamist but that are not radical, intolerant, undemocratic, terrorism-supporting Islamic
political forces, that are truly democratic Islamists—and I think there are some of
those—as well as secular forces, and enable them to compete as another alternative, I
think over time we’ll get to a reality where the radical Islamists will not win these
elections.
**Milani:** I think part of the problem is that there is a perception that democracy is something that can be socially engineered and socially willed from outside. That you can sit, for example, in London or Washington and decide that such a country in the Middle East will or will not have democracy. And if we accept the notion that democracy will work in places where the internal situations—the internal conditions—are ripe and then allow the process to go on...in other words, don’t do damage to the democratic process, then you will see that a lot of countries in the Middle East will go towards the democratic way. The enemies of democracy are sometimes as much the internal as the external.

I think what has become a major obstacle to democracy in the Middle East is the curse of oil in the sense that it has both gotten the world interested in the Middle East in a way that is shaped and formed and dominated by oil, and secondly because it has created governments that are not responsive and responsible to the people. They are bosses to the people rather than servants of the people. I think there is a serious fundamental problem that these countries have. In Iran, for example, if right now the government doesn’t have the money—with the billions of dollars that are coming into its coffers—to subsidize the economy, to give billions of dollars of subsidies, from daily bread to daily gasoline. We’re paying $3.50 for gas; the Iranians pay something like $.30 for gas, and it’s all imported gas and it’s all completely subsidized by the government. The government pays something like $10 billion in gas subsidies. The bread subsidy is almost as much. And that has stopped the democratic process. Hopefully, if the West gets over its addiction to oil and gets out of this kind of idea that if they give us free oil or oil at a cheap price we will keep the bums in power, then the local movements, the middle class, the democrats who have been sometimes fighting for democracy for 100 years in the Middle East.... It’s not a new game. Democracy is not a new gift to the Middle East. Some of these countries have been fighting for it...they have been at it for 100 years. [Applause]

**Jensen:** Larry, you talked in general terms about the importance of timing in electoral democracy and I wonder if you’d expand a bit on that vis-à-vis Iraq. You wrote an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* expressing concern about the timing of elections, and I wonder if you could expand on that.

**Diamond:** The problem is where do you start when you start talking about Iraq? Let me say that the time to launch a largely unilateral American invasion of Iraq to impose our vision of democracy, in my opinion, was...never. [Applause] I quote an international official whom I don’t name but greatly admire who had a very telling metaphor for the problem we’ve had in Iraq in the postwar era, which now is past its third year. He said, When you turn down the wrong way of a one-way street, every other turn you’re going to make is going to be the wrong turn. And there is a sense—I don’t think it is hopeless—but there is a sense in which he’s quite right about the dilemma we face. Specifically, with respect to Iraq, I’ll give you a few examples. Number one: I think we needed to move earlier to local elections; in fact, much earlier to a sovereign Iraqi government. One of the problems with the postwar American engagement in Iraq is that we robbed them of their sovereignty, we’re dominating in a way that has no stated end and no commitment to full withdrawal, we started building and rebuilding military bases in a way that fed the suspicions that Iraqis had that we were seeking permanent military
bases and then some kind of neocolonial foothold in Iraq. I appealed before I left, when I was there, and to the now Secretary of State after I left, for the United States to make a clear, unambiguous, declarative statement that we were not seeking and would not seek permanent military bases in Iraq. I think it’s obvious that such a statement has not been made for the simple reason that we are seeking permanent military bases in Iraq.

Now, with respect to timing, if we had done what we did in Afghanistan: transferred sovereignty much more rapidly to an Iraqi interim government, done what many local American and British military commanders and civilian local administrators wanted to do in 2003. That is, rather than our appointing provincial and municipal governments (we’ve gone around and asked, Who is your leader? Take us to your leader, and then we’ll appoint him as mayor; or, Who are the notables in this town? Then we’ll appoint them as the municipal council), rather than doing that, we could have had, in a kind of rough way, local elections. It could have been done, and in a couple of places it was done, but as I talk about in my book, for the most part it was vetoed by the American administrator, Ambassador Bremer. At the same time, I would have tried to wait longer to allow the society to recover and a more organic array of political parties that were not purely aligned on ethnic and sectarian terms to emerge before holding national elections. And if we didn’t have an American occupation of Iraq, the country might not have been in such a frenetic hurry to get national elections so that they could get rid of either the American occupation or then the American-appointed interim government of Aiyad Allawi.

Now, then, fast-forward to January of 2005, when we had those first national elections. It was clear that we were headed for a train wreck. I wrote about it at the time. Everybody celebrated these elections as a great success, but the seeds of the paralysis that Iraq is in now lay in those elections in at least two senses. Number one: They were an utterly polarizing affair in which almost all of the Kurds voted for the Kurdish Alliance, 75 percent of the Shia voted for the Shiite religious alliance, and about 80 percent of the Sunnis voted for their choice, which was a boycott. Having boycotted the elections, the Sunnis were not at the table until very late in the game and then were marginalized for the negotiations on the permanent constitution. You then had, as a result of Sunni marginalization and lack of participation in the constitution, a flawed constitution that was ultimately adopted in which the Sunnis are—this is to really make a very complicated story much more simple for reasons of time—in which the Sunnis are extremely disadvantaged in the distribution of that famous commodity that obsesses the Middle East that Abbas was talking about: oil—the distribution of oil and gas revenue and control over it. They’ll fight indefinitely until they can change an extremely decentralized, not even federal, but confederal constitutional system in Iraq in which control over the country’s oil and gas wells descends to a considerable extent to what’s going to be a Kurdistan government in control of the resources in the Kirkuk area and a Shiastan government in the south in control of the other 80 percent of Iraq’s oil and gas wells.

A final comment about timing: Late in July of 2005 as the officially stated first deadline for completing the negotiations over the permanent constitution was approaching (the
August 15 deadline), Iraqi officials went to the United States, and the chairman of the Iraqi Constitutional Drafting Commission informally went to the United States, and said: We need more time; we've only had two or three months now to begin a discussion about our entire constitutional future embedded in a document that’s going to become extremely difficult to amend once it’s adopted. There was a provision in the interim constitution which I had strongly appealed for when I was an adviser there allowing a safety mechanism to be employed of more time—allowing for a six-month extension of the process to be adopted. It’s very important that the American people understand that that process—which could have alleviated the disaster that I think this Iraqi constitution is, and which is now going to be very difficult to amend, and if the country descends into civil war, it’s going to be a major cause of the descent into civil war—that request for more time was vetoed by the president of the United States, by one man sitting in one building thousands of miles away, detached from the situation, who had a vision of time that was self-confident and, in my opinion, wrong. [Applause]

Milani: Let’s look at this time issue from the Iranian perspective. Before the U.S. went into Iraq, when they had done the invasion of Afghanistan, oil was about $25. The Islamic Republic of Iran was absolutely scared witless. There were 150,000 U.S. soldiers in the area; they had just won very handily in Afghanistan, and there was a very viable democratic movement in Iran. Students were in the streets, Khatami was still the president, and the Islamic Republic was very, very timid. They were timid internally and they were timid externally. You can draw a graph: the more American casualties there were in Iraq, the more the price of oil went up, the more the Iranians became intransigent, the more the radical groups in Iran wanted, and the more they dismantled the democratic process in Iran. In other words, the impact has been enormous on the Iranian situation. And now Iranian television shows the carnage in Iraq on a daily basis for one unstated but effective purpose: If you go with the democratic process, if you rock the boat, this is what’s going to happen to you. A lot of people I talk to in Iran tell me that if democracy is going to entail this, we don’t want this. Mullahs are much better than having the country go towards this carnage. And this mechanism is occurring in other parts of the Middle East as well, where other despots in the Middle East are basically using the same message: If you take the path of democracy—if you get rid of the autocratic despots who are sitting at the top but they’re keeping the trains running on time, killing the flies, but nevertheless holding the country together—if you get rid of them, this is what you get. You get chaos. In that sense, I think it has undermined democratic aspirations.

Then we talk about Kurdistan. Again, one of the things that is very intimidating to the Iranians right now—the democrats in Iran—is the fear that if Kurdistan in Iraq goes, then Iranian Kurds are going to be inclined to join and then the Iranian Balujis are going to be inclined to join. Iran is a multi-ethnic society. A quarter of the country is Turkish-speaking. There are seven million Kurds, there are two million Arab-speaking, there are a million Balujis. Just three weeks ago, the Balujis, a group called Jond ollah (The Army of God) attacked a convoy in Bajestan, killed seven government officials (by some accounts killed 22) and held a number of them hostages. They’re still holding them hostage. People outside these marginal areas—people in Tehran, people in the cities—are all worried that if, in fact, the democratic movement pushes for democracy
and gets rid of these guys, the country is going to disintegrate—it’s going to go into chaos. So not having planned well in Iraq—having gone somewhere where they shouldn’t have gone or they should have planned better if they wanted to go, which is very doubtful—has had consequences throughout the region for democracy. [Applause]

Jensen: You both have brought up a bewildering array of issues: there’s oil, the resource curse, and we’ve got kinship, tribalism, ethnicity, sectarianism, social hierarchy, and clerical hierarchy. To what extent does Islam play a role in this? Much of the popular discourse focuses on the inherent inconsistency between Islam and democracy, and Arab countries are always cited as Exhibit A. Arab countries constitute 15 percent of the world’s Muslim population, and by my back-of-the-envelope calculation, the countries of Turkey, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Malaysia make up nearly half of the world’s Muslim population. I’d like you to reflect a little bit on to what extent Islam is a causal factor in the antidemocratic nature of governance in Arab countries. And I’d like to turn Bernard Lewis’ question—What’s wrong with Islam?—on its head, and I’d like to ask you, What’s wrong with the way we may be thinking of the role of Islam in democratic development?

Milani: First of all, I think one of the great misperceptions that exists in the West about Islam is that there is a monolith out there called Islam. We have as many varieties of Islam as we have varieties of Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism. There are stridently fundamentalist pseudofascist Islamists, and there are democratic Islamists who want to live as much in a democracy as anyone anywhere. The fact that Islam has a unifying antidemocratic history is also, I think, a great misperception. When the West had never heard of the idea of multiculturalism, Islam had a multicultural empire. And according to the same Bernard Lewis, the Jews—when they were being thrown out of Spain, when they were being thrown out of England (England threw its Jews out when it was signing the Magna Carta; Spain threw its Jews out when it was discovering America)—during that very same period, the safest place for Jews was in the Muslim world. And this is according to Bernard Lewis. They thrived greatly in the Ottoman Empire. They had Jews at the level of ministers. And 1,000 years ago in Baghdad, there was a setup where Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians would have open philosophical discussions about the different merits of religion. During that same period, we had clerics who ordered the death of anybody who didn’t think like they did. So we don’t have one Islam; we have varieties of Islam, some of them very open to change, some of them very open to democracy, some of them completely opposed to democracy.

I think part of the problem of the way the West approaches it… this is particularly true in America, folks, I’m sorry to say… is that America has an attitude that the Islamic world is easy to understand, that anybody can be an expert on the Islamic world. Three-fourths of the people who talk on television about the Islamic world couldn’t find their way out of a bag in the Islamic world. [Laughter] They don’t speak a word of Arabic or Turkish or Persian; they’ve never lived in that area. I know people who have written books about Iran; there is a whole book describing 2,500 years of history, and the lady who wrote it doesn’t know Persian from Turkish; she wouldn’t know a Persian alphabet from a Turkish alphabet. Think about this: in the last 25 years, when the United States knew that
the Muslim phenomenon was going to be a problem, the number of study centers for the Middle East, the number of centers for the study of Iran, have diminished in America. They have diminished except after September 11. The State Department did not teach Persian before September 11. They had a handful of people speaking Arabic. When Ronald Reagan was looking for the moderates in Iran and brought a group of Iranians to the White House, they had to bring in an Iranian businessman as the translator. The CIA didn’t have one person who could translate that discussion. Look at the way they responded to the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union became a problem, billions of dollars were poured into American academia to study the Soviet Union. In the last 25 years, that money has shrunk. If Stanford University has an Iranian studies center, it is only because Hamid and Christina Moghadam came to the university and said, We’re willing to give the money; we need an Iranian studies program. At other places, they have closed Iranian studies programs. Princeton University had a chair in Iranian studies; they gave it to an Ottomanist, and they said it was endowed for Iranian studies by the Shah. But he made a mistake; he wrote something in his endowment letter that allowed the university to misuse it, and when Clinton died (not President Clinton; an Islamist-Iranian scholar called Clinton), they gave it to an Ottomanist. And I have been trying to figure what kind of an attitude leads to this. I don’t know, but the result is the kind of facile attitude that you get in the media.

Let me just add one point. Twenty-five hundred years ago in Iran, the idea of separation of church and state became a central element of the Achaemenid Empire. Twenty-five hundred years ago! They say, Read Western scholars; don’t listen to him. They say, He’s Persian, he’s trying to talk about his country; read Western scholars; read Richard Frye. Twenty-five hundred years ago, the Persian Empire was a multicultural empire. They went to Egypt and they allowed the Egyptians to keep their religion. So religious intolerance isn’t in our blood; there was a time when our blood was full of tolerance. And our blood got corrupted over 2,000 years for a variety of reasons. [Laughter] One of them was this strident version of Islam.

**Diamond:** Let me just echo a couple of points that Abbas just made and build on them. Number one: We are in a deeply unfortunate and, I think, embarrassing, and for our student body, disabling situation at Stanford University. Let me say that there are so many students trying to get hold of this gentleman sitting to my left and pouring into his classes that he’s had to teach multiple seminars beyond what he was planning to and turn many of his seminars into lecture courses because he can’t personally adequately accommodate the student demand. Students at this university are constantly trying to get into his classes, particularly in the past four and a half years. Ponder this: we are four and a half years past September 11. I remember looking at the roster of American academic political science departments to see how many tenured experts they had on the Middle East, and I think only one of the top ten departments in the United States had a tenured expert on the Middle East in political science. Well, we’re four and a half years later and the record is really not much better, and it’s not much better at Stanford either. We’ve been slow off the dime, we’re slow to recruit, we’re slow to retain, we’re slow to respond to the student interest, and without the generosity of the Mogadons, and Mr. Abbassi, who endowed the Abbassi Program in Islamic Studies at Stanford, and Ismael Hameed...
Hosur, who has been a lead donor for the Hoover Iran Studies Program, and some of his colleagues, we’d be virtually nowhere here at Stanford University. So for our Stanford colleagues, students, and friends, please take this awareness away with you tonight.

If I can just say a word in response to your original question, let me do so from a contemporary political science perspective. There are 43 or so—it’s hard to count when you get close to the 50 percent line—Muslim majority states in the world. Some of them you know very well, Erik, because they’re in southeast and south Asia. So what I’m going to say will not surprise you because you’re acutely aware of it, but it may surprise many Americans. And that is, of the 27 Muslim majority states that lie outside the Arab world, there are actually a number of democracies—ones you know well like Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan for a time and maybe again someday, Senegal, Mali, and so on, and of course, not least, Turkey. Inside the Arab world, of the 16 Muslim majority states in the Arab Middle East, there are exactly no democracies. Now that distinction should tell you something, and it should tell us that the problem is not Islam; the problem is something about the political economy and institutional legacy and structure, and international engagement with the Arab Middle East.

**Jensen:** Because we have Larry here, we almost have to ask this question: What is the role of the U.S. as a promoter or a tainter of democracy efforts in the region?

**Diamond:** Well, historically, it’s been an inhibitor. I think that’s pretty obvious. When you pour $2 billion a year in unconditional assistance on an authoritarian regime, as we’ve done to Egypt since they signed the peace agreement with Israel, and until very recently asked for nothing in return in terms of accountability to their own people, what are you doing? When you embrace the kinds of regimes we have embraced so uncritically; when you intervene (Abbas has written about this at length) to depose a democratically elected government as we participated in doing in the early 1950s in Iran; well, what do people think about our motives, our credibility, our sincerity? I think that we carry a lot of baggage, Erik. And this is why I feel so strongly that we should be working to promote democracy in the Middle East, but I think we have so much baggage historically and politically that we’re not going to be effective doing this alone. We’ve got to have partnerships with our democratic allies in Europe. I think we need a transatlantic alliance for this purpose. Europe is increasingly concerned about the direction in which the region is headed. I think a lot of Europeans who are forward looking are ready for this. And it’s got to be a partnership between that transatlantic alliance or international actors and the democrats in the region. We can’t be coming in with a few carefully chosen exiles, as we did in Iraq, and imposing our vision of what the change should be and how it should unfold. [Applause]

**Milani:** I think the example that Larry pointed to is very useful in two ways. The example that he was talking about is 1953 Iran, and the example is interesting both because of the whole democracy promotion and regime change discussion that we are having these days and for another aspect. And that is, what does it take to improve the U.S. image in the Middle East, and how was the U.S. image in the Middle East bagged, so to speak? What went wrong? If you look at Iran up to 1953, you can see categorically
that the United States was by far the most beloved of Western countries in Iran as late as February 1953. The Prime Minister of Iran, Mosaddeq, who was a democratically elected prime minister, was fighting the British and was extremely popular in Iran. And up to February of 1953, Iran was pro-American, with the exception of the left, which was pro-Soviet Union (it was a Communist Party that was bought and paid for by the Soviet Union) and was very anti-American. But the population was pro-American.

The first person to die for democracy in Iran was an American. He was an American teacher in 1905 with the name of William Baskerville who worked in Azerbaijan in Tabriz, where the constitutional revolution essentially began. So people saw Americans as either wonderful educators—some of the first girls’ schools in Iran were begun by the Americans; some of the best hospitals were begun by Americans—or as people like Baskerville. And this continued up to 1953. In August 1953 the United States finally decided to come in with England, which had been trying to topple Mosaddeq from the moment he came into power, and eventually together they organized a coup that toppled Mosaddeq and brought the Shah, who had escaped Iran on the first day of the coup, back to power. That changed the U.S. image in Iran. The U.S. became the ugly American and this continued until 1985-86.

After 1985-86, when the United States began to stand up to this regime and when the Europeans began to cozy up to this regime for oil, the image of the United States changed. I can say with some certainty that right now among the Muslims, at least, there is no country that the people have as favorable a position toward the United States as Iran. Everywhere else, the mobs on the street are decidedly anti-American and the governments are supposedly pro-American. In Iran, the government is anti-American and the street is pro-American. And now, today, with this talk of going at Iran with a nuclear weapon, it’s potentially squandering that very goodwill. We stand at a very, very dangerous moment. If the U.S. goes down that path, all of that goodwill and all hopes for democracy for the next 20 years will be dashed. [Applause]

Jensen: Before turning over the microphone to our audience—I’m sure there are a lot of people with questions out there—I’d like you both to look into your crystal balls in a region where the crystal ball is not so very apparent and think about the prospects for democracy in Iran, in Iraq, across the Middle East, and what America’s role might be in those prospects getting from Point A to Point B.

Diamond: Well, I think the first thing you have to say, Erik, is that we’re sliding backwards because of Iraq and the disaster it is becoming, more than any other single reason. What Abbas said about the lesson and the warning that the regime in Iran is drawing, manipulating, and dramatizing is true all over the region. And most of the authoritarian regimes in the region are now seizing upon the deepening chaos and political paralysis in Iraq to say quite literally: That’s democracy; is that what you want? Après moi, le déluge. And so a lot of even moderate, middle-class, liberal forces are pulling back and are on shakier ground.
It’s important to emphasize that this comes in the wake of two other events that have reverberated in the region. One is the victory, majority or not, of Hamas in the Palestinian elections, and the other is the extremely good showing that the Muslim Brotherhood made in the parliamentary elections in Egypt in the fall of 2005. So regimes that might really want to think about political opening—maybe not pure democracy, but political opening—such as a forward-looking modernizing king in his instincts like King Abdullah in Jordan, I think has got to look at these developments and be scared out of his wits.

So I don’t think in the near term the prospects are very good. I think they will get better if we can stabilize Iraq—I mean, be realistic in our aspirations for the country and at least promote stabilization and a power-sharing agreement. We can talk about how that might come about if we can avoid the calamitous mistake that we are now considering that Abbas talked about of a preventive war against Iran to try and derail its nuclear weapons program, and if we can mobilize a shrewder, more variegated, more sequential, more sophisticated long-term strategy for promoting democracy in the region. And I would look for opportunities in less than obvious places.

I think the Arab Muslim country (with the possible exception of Lebanon, if we could really get Syria out of there) that is the best place to make significant strides toward democracy is probably Morocco, first of all because it’s so far away from the epicenter of chaos in the region, and second of all because it’s closer to Europe geographically and culturally, it’s got an Islamist Party that is somewhat more moderate by many estimates, it’s got other strong political parties and civil society forces, and by many assessments, it has in its young king someone who is seriously interested in thinking about how to get to a more liberal, open, and democratic society, though clearly not in one fell swoop. I think if we really want to resume democratic progress in the region, we might indispensably ask ourselves with the Europeans: How can we induce Morocco to make this leap incrementally and to really institute constitutional reforms that would put it on a democratic path?

**Milani:** I would like to end on an optimistic note. If you look at the history of the last 100 years in the Middle East, there are two countries that are truly bellwether states; they tell you what is happening in the Middle East. They sometimes foreshadow it, and sometimes concurrently with what is happening there, things are happening everywhere else. One is Egypt and the other one is Iran.

In 1905 Iran had its constitutional revolution and that was followed by a number of other democratic movements. In 1951, Iran had a nationalization movement with Mosaddeq. Then you had Nasser and you had other forces. You had the Ba’ath nationalism combined with fascism that came to power. And then you had Islamic government in 1979 that was followed by all of these Islamic movements. In Iran, I think today the situation is extremely, extremely ripe for democracy. Iran has a very large middle class; it is very well-connected to the outside world. Iran has a very youthful population; somewhere between 60 to 70 percent are below the age of 30. They are deeply disgruntled with Islam as their governing ideology. I think Jon Stewart said it best. He
said, “If you want democracy in the Middle East, create an Islamic republic, wait 20 years, and stir.” [Laughter]

We now can see that if you want a democratic martini, an Islamic republic is a good option to go. And people have realized this. So you have essentially most of the requirements for a democratic government, a democratic transition. We have the phenomenon of the clerical rule, but they cannot solve Iran’s fundamental economic problems. Iran today is in shambles. Oil is at $70 a barrel. Iran is in enormous economic crisis. Money is leaving the country. More money has left the country in the last 26 months than has come in with oil at $70 a barrel. So the economic exigency of democracy is the only thing that is going to solve Iran’s problems. The readiness of the people, the readiness of an Iranian diaspora that is very successful and is willing to underwrite the transition gives me enormous hope that at the right moment Iranians will choose democracy. And if Iran goes democratic, I think you will see a democratic domino effect throughout the Middle East. [Applause]

Jensen: At this juncture, let’s hear from the audience. Larry and Abbas welcome your questions.

Question from the Audience: Thank you for your very erudite comments. If we could put aside the president’s demand that we stay the course, what do you think might happen if we were to announce tomorrow morning, “We’re going home”?

Diamond: What would happen if we withdraw from Iraq? I can answer it in a sentence: Almost immediately, the country would descend into all-out civil war. I don’t say this because I want to see American troops stay there one more day. I just think it’s a simple analytic fact. And part of the tragedy of Iraq and part of the dilemma of American involvement in Iraq today is that frankly there is no obvious solution. We can’t stay indefinitely; I think that’s very clear. If you read The Washington Post today, you learned that the administration is now preparing to ask the Congress for another $70 billion this year to fund our engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan. These wars are costing us $10 billion a month. Americans are continuing to die there, not at the level of Vietnam, but John Kerry’s message from the Vietnam War when he came back does echo again in my mind, and he reiterated it: How do you ask someone to be the last person to die for a mistake? So I think we really need to focus on how to get out. But simply announcing we’re going to get out will make al Qaeda deliriously happy and emboldened. You’ll have more violence, the different groups in Iraq who think the answer to their ambitions comes through violence will seize territory, seize power, seize resources far beyond what they have done, and you will have a pretty rapid descent into the worst days of the Lebanon warlord-style civil war.

Question from the Audience: Thank you very much. Obviously, the big turnout tonight says this is a very important issue to a lot of Americans. Thank you for your work. My question is really related to the last one and is in two parts. First, what do you think just generally is most likely to happen over about the next decade in the Middle East with
respect particularly to the U.S.? And the second related one is, What policy would you recommend that we follow considering the mess that we have?

**Milani:** In terms of Iraq, I fully agree with Larry. There is no easy option, and the idea of packing up and leaving tomorrow would lead to chaos and would lead to not just civil war but the strengthening of al Qaeda. When the U.S. left Afghanistan, which was a far less complicated place, after the end of the Soviet occupation, the result was al Qaeda, the result was Taliban. Iraq will be a much, much bigger mess.

I think in terms of the Middle East, my hope is that the United States will have the humility to recognize that it cannot dictate the future of that region alone, that it can’t dictate it at all, that is has to allow the people to decide their own future. [Applause] But I think the United States, unless they have changed course—and there is some indication that they might have (we have talked with Larry about this and I think he agrees)…. Condi Rice’s speech in Egypt was a very interesting, important speech where she said that for 50 years, we have sought security at any price and we haven’t gotten it and we have essentially completely allowed democracy to go by the wayside; we got neither democracy nor security. Now we want to see whether we can get security through democracy. And this might be a moment in history where the democratic aspirations of the people in the Middle East run parallel to the West’s recognition that if they want peace in the world, democracy has to come to the Middle East. That possible parallel—if there are wise leaders in the democratic movements in these countries—can, I think, lead to good things. Otherwise, if wisdom is lacking on the other side and humility is lacking on this side, I think we are heading for a very, very rough time.

My sense, to be honest with you, is that Islamic radicalism is in its death throes, and I know “death throes” is a bad term to use. I don’t mean it in that sense of death throes—the sense in which they said the insurgency was in its death throes about a year ago. What I mean by it is angry radical Islam. There are two ways of looking at it: is it the voice of resurgent Islam or is it the voice of Islam that feels defeated? Angry radical Islam is, I think, the voice of the defeated Islamists. They think they have no way to reconcile themselves with the modern world. But beneath and beyond this angry voice, there is a body of Islamist scholars who are doing fascinating work—who are trying to reconcile Islam with the modern experience. In Iran, some of the most important Islamist scholars who advocated for this regime until five years ago are now dedicated republican theorists. Akbar Ganji, who was a Revolutionary Guard, is now one of the most eloquent defenders of the notion that we have to have a secular, democratic government in Iran if we are to have peace. So that is the voice, I think, of the ascendant Islam that is recognizing that it has to reconcile itself to the world. The voice of the bin Ladens is the voice of the wing of Islamicists who see themselves dying because they can’t reconcile to this world. They’re isolated from the majority of Islamic communities. And if the U.S. can create a situation where those voices in the Middle East can speak for democracy… they can’t speak for democracy right now because they get accused of being American agents. You cannot have democracy unless democrats in the Middle East can dare speak their minds, and a wise U.S. policy might help that.
**Question from the Audience:** My name is Richard Brand, and I’m actually interested and intrigued by the absence of any comment about the effect on Iran and Iraq and the larger issue and the problem of democracy and the process in the Middle East of the U.S. administration, and I don’t just say the present administration. I think it’s been pretty prevalent—the sort of unblinking (at least to the Middle East) support for the administration in Israel, and what that pressure point is doing to this. If that were changed in some way, what would that do?

**Diamond:** Well, we knew this question was going to come at some point, so…

**Milani:** And we decided Larry was the one to answer it!

**Diamond:** I think that if we value freedom, if we value democracy, if we value human rights, if we value national self-determination, if we value what we value as a people and a society, we should be supporting the right of Israel to exist within secure borders, and I don’t think we have any reason to apologize for that. I think the problem that arises among the minds of many people in the region is the sense that it’s been in some ways… you say “unblinking”…maybe blind in a way to certain actions that should not have happened. I will say that I thought 20 years ago that the pace and extent of Israeli settlements in the West Bank in particular were deeply unfortunate, wrong morally, and counterproductive for Israel’s security. I just got back from a week in Israel. I can tell you that a lot of Israelis now, who thought this was a good idea 20 years ago, deeply regret that they went down this road. I don’t think they deeply regret that they decided not to live precisely within the 1967 borders, which were very difficult to defend and awkward in a number of respects. I don’t think they regret that they sought the unification of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. But the pouring in of over 100,000 people deep into the West Bank I think was a huge mistake, has made Israel less secure, has contributed mightily to the outcome of Hamas winning this last election. And now you have the interesting development of a formerly right-of-center politician and an extremely able one, I think. He’s someone who is going to surprise a lot of people with his savvy pragmatism and willingness to compromise. The incoming prime minister and current interim president, Ehud Olmert, is really abandoning, as Ariel Sharon, the former prime minister did, this legacy of settlement and thinking about and proposing even unilaterally the prospect of very considerable withdrawal of these settlements from the West Bank.

So I think the United States has been right to stand behind Israel as a democracy in the region, but wrong at times to do so without criticism of and an effort to constrain some of its policies that were not serving its interests and were not fair to other people in the region. I think that we’ve got some opportunities now, by the way, that are going to emerge from the ferment of the current situation and in the new context of an Israeli government that really wants to pursue a pragmatic solution to this festering problem, even in the context of a Hamas government. And so I think that when you have a crisis, it also presents new opportunities, and I think you may see these unfold in the next coming months in the Israeli-Palestinian question.
**Milani:** The only thing I’d like to add is that a pragmatic solution has to be a two-state solution.

**Diamond:** Of course.

**Milani:** Unless the Palestinians have a viable state of their own, unfortunately we’re not going to see peace in that region. But when I read everything that I read in Israel, I think the majority of Israelis are now convinced that that is really the best way to secure their long-term stability.

**Diamond:** Let me say, a majority of Israelis increasingly understand that a viable Palestinian state cannot be a Bantustan state with huge pieces of territory in many sections occupied by Israel and with different cities isolated and cut off from one another.

**Question from the Audience:** A follow-up on Larry Diamond’s comments about Morocco: A number of years back, about the time Turkey first applied to the European Union, Morocco also applied and the European Union told Turkey, You are European; maybe sometime in the future…. They told Morocco, You’re not European, never. Should the European Union reconsider its position that Morocco can never be European, or is that just a lost cause?

**Diamond:** Let me say two things. Number one: That’s for the Europeans to decide. Number two: If you look at the European Union, it can’t keep expanding forever, and if you look at the degree of integration of economies, cultures, societies, and so on that is encompassed in full membership in the European Union, there has to be a point for the viability and sustainability of the European Union as an idea and as a functioning reality where full integration stops. I don’t think you can keep going on forever. And so I think it’s entirely reasonable, fair, and logical for Europe to decide it will stop ultimately after the Balkans with the integration of Turkey. And then there’s the possibility of extremely generous and wide-ranging economic forms of integration with the Maghreb countries on the periphery and even beyond.

What worries me is that I think many Europeans, including many European political leaders, are now turning away from the idea of Turkey coming into the European Union. And let me say (I’m just back from Turkey), the Turks perceive this, and it’s beginning to seep into Turkish political consciousness in a way that I think could undermine some of Turkey’s turn to the West and some of Turkey’s turn to liberalism. So I think the thing to watch for—one of the great questions that’s going to shape the character of our world in the next 10 to 20 years—is whether Turkey is, in fact, admitted to the European Union when it meets the very, very far-ranging and complicated conditions for membership that are delineated in the *acquis communitaire*.

**Question from the Audience:** My name is Leonard Cherry. I have a question probably for Professor Milani. When you spoke earlier about the rule of law—the fact that particularly the current administration has violated the rule of law in terms of many UN
principles and more recently the domestic violations such as, specifically, the spying scandal—would that have much, if any, impact among the Middle Eastern peoples?

**Milani:** I can tell you that the papers, media, and Internet sites connected to the regime in Iran are having a heyday with these things, from the torture in Abu Ghraib to the issues that you referred to. It is having an enormous impact. Let me tell you a personal conversation that I had that I think brings this home. A few years ago I was trying to interview, for a book that I was writing, someone who worked in the old Shah’s secret police. The SAVAC was not known to be a democratic secret police; it used rough techniques. Because I had been in his prison, the first time I talked to this man he was extremely apologetic, almost timid. Three years ago, after some of these revelations came out, I needed to interview him again. I called and the first thing he said to me was, “Did you see what your American friends are doing now? We were fighting terrorists for 20 years, and they just had one terrorist attack and are now talking about whether it’s right to torture or not.” In other words, he had become aggressive. He had now seen that his despicable acts in the past are legitimized and he doesn’t have to apologize for them. I think that speaks volumes to the change that this is having. It is allowing this regime—these bullies in the region—to say, If they can do it in America, if they can hold people without a warrant in America, why can’t we hold them here?

**Diamond:** It’s one of the things that most disturbs me about President Bush’s stated commitment to the promotion of freedom in the region. One commitment that I very much admire and welcome is the gap between the rhetoric and the reality. And let me say, by all accounts we are still today handing over terrorist suspects to Middle Eastern regimes that we know—as a matter of fact know—use torture on detainees. And we claim that this so-called rendition is done with an understanding that the detainees who are handed over will not be tortured. I’m not talking about torture like it may be and was practiced at Abu Ghraib; I’m talking about things even much worse than that. And if we know that this torture is being used, why are we still handing these people over to these regimes? And what does it say to an Arab authoritarian regime when our government says, We want freedom and democracy, and our national security apparatus cooperates with the Mukhabarat, a secret police, that we know is torturing detainees, and we continue the cooperation with a wink and a nod? [Applause]

**Erik:** Just those two answers alone leave us with a lot of food for thought.

**Question from the Audience:** How is it that we as a nation seem to be baffled about what has happened in Iraq when I believe we all know much better? Why is it we have allowed this to happen?

**Diamond:** The debacle in Iraq?

**Audience Questioner:** Yes.

**Diamond:** [Sighs] I think we have been badly, badly spooked by September 11, and I think we have been manipulated quite skillfully by the political strategists and
craftspeople of this administration to be spooked, to be fearful, to concede and not ask questions. I think the members of Congress who voted for this and then kept voting for the appropriations without asking questions were worried for their political lives after September 11 that if they didn’t accept this, they’d be defeated in the next elections. I think there are very few things that politicians, particularly those who are not on the political right but who are more moderate or particularly left of center, have feared since September 11 more than being condemned as being soft on terrorism. And we’ve seen the fate of prominent candidates who have come into the line of fire of these political tacticians who were painted and demonized as soft on terrorism. And I think of course we have ourselves to blame as a society that has been lulled into this fear and lulled into a kind of mentality that I must say is reminiscent in some ways of the early days of the cold war. So I think we need to be more questioning and more assertive in a variety of respects as a people, as a mass media, as a set of independent organizations, and as intellectuals and scholars at universities, and we need to demand that of our elected representatives.

**Milani:** I’d also like to add another very important factor. Saddam Hussein was very helpful in this game. In other words, the true demonic nature of his regime was such that it made the sell much, much easier.

**Diamond:** That’s undeniable.

**Milani:** You have to remember that this was a guy who used chemical weapons against his own people; he used chemical weapons against Iran. Where the U.S. went wrong was that when he used chemical weapons against Iran, nobody said anything. Even the issue that we haven’t talked about, the nuclear issue: if you look at its genesis, the Islamist republic restarted this nuclear program only after Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against Iran and the world said nothing. Rafsanjani, who was president at the time, said, The world is not going to do anything; this guy can use anything he has against us. And he did. And the only reason he didn’t use nuclear weapons against us is because Israel went and took them out. If Israel hadn’t taken Osirak, Saddam Hussein would have used nukes against Iran. Saddam Hussein used everything. I was in Iran in 1986 when he bombed the city of Tehran on a nightly basis—the defenseless city of Tehran. So he was a bastard that made him a poster boy for a demon, and when you had an administration that wanted to sell the idea that this was a connecting link to al Qaeda, unfortunately he obliged.

**Question from the Audience:** I would like to ask a hypothetical question of both of you. What would be your position on a peaceful nuclear program under a democratic government in Iran in the future?

**Milani:** In a future democratic Iran, I would have one vote. And if they asked me if I wanted a nuclear program or not, I would say no, I don’t want Iran to have a nuclear program. I don’t want Iran to have a bomb. But I would say that’s one vote against the vote of everybody else. If there were a democratic Iran, there would be a chance to have a serious discussion in the country about the true costs, the true dangers. Do we want to
build?  Is this economical, first of all?  Is it strategically in our interests to go that route?  If a democratic Iran has that discussion, free and fair, whatever the people of Iran decide, they must have that right to follow.  The problem with the administration’s nuclear policy on Iran is, I think (Larry and I have written about this very clearly many months ago), that the U.S.’ position is not consistent.  You can’t at the same time tell Pakistan or India, “We’ll give you nuclear technology,” and then, in the same week, say that you don’t want it in Iran.  A democratic Iran wouldn’t tolerate that.  In a democratic Iran, people will have a chance to discuss these things, but they haven’t had a chance to discuss them.  Nobody has allowed Iranians to discuss whether a country that sits on the greatest supply of gas—the cheapest supply of gas—needs to go nuclear.  The U.S. for 37 years hasn’t built a nuclear electrical plant because they say it’s not economically feasible; it doesn’t make economic sense.  Does it make economic sense for Iran then?  It’s very hard to make that argument.  But my answer has always been…and as far as I understand it, I think this is Larry’s answer, too…that a democratic Iran must be allowed to have a democratic discussion about this.  And whatever they decide within the existing NPT, they should have the same rights everybody else has.

Diamond:  Let me just add one point.  I regret to say it’s probably going to be at least a little while before there is a democratic Iran.  And I think Abbas would agree that you can’t believe a word that this duplicitous regime in Tehran says.  It seems to me they’re just hell-bent now in pursuit of nuclear weapons.  I think this is one of the most dangerous developments in the world right now.  I think key national security thinkers and strategists regard this as by far the single biggest threat to the existence of the state of Israel, and so do I, by the way.  So something needs to be done.  I don’t think the answer is military.  I think it is diplomatic, and I think it’s not only diplomatic in terms of the mobilization of pressures and penalties, but also bold and creative in terms of proposing a very wide-ranging dialogue directly with the Tehran regime that would put all the issues on the table, including the potential lifting of economic sanctions and normalization of relations if they abandon this program and start behaving responsibly in the world.

The other thing is that we have just been so incompetent, so tragically incompetent, in communicating with peoples in the world directly in what used to be called public diplomacy.  And it just mystifies me as to why we have not launched a really comprehensive, sincere, open-ended, rational debate through our international broadcasting to air for the Iranian people the dangers and the irrationality of this program from an economic standpoint, as Abbas mentioned.  There’s the fact, if I remember correctly, that one of the nuclear plants that’s being built now, the Bushehr plant, is using the Chernobyl design.  My guess is that most Iranians don’t know what happened in Chernobyl, but I think we could let them know about that.  So I think we need to stimulate debate and awareness and real understanding of the costs, consequences, and alternative possibilities among the Iranian people.

Milani:  The design unfortunately is not Chernobyl; the engineers are from Chernobyl.  [Laughter]  The design was offered by the Germans, and Germany would not allow it to be built in Germany because they said it was too dangerous.  They brought the Chernobyl
engineers and—this is true—they bought spare parts on the black market, and then they built it on the place where two of the world’s greatest fault lines meet. [Laughter]

**Erik:** For those of you who are interested, Abbas, Larry, and another colleague, Michael McFaul, have authored a policy paper in 2005 published by the Hoover Institution Press entitled “Beyond Incrementalism: A New Strategy for Dealing with Iran” and I strongly recommend it for your review.

**Question from the Audience:** This is more of an economics question, but given the underlying influence of oil and our dependency on it in the whole structure of the policies of the last 50 years, what do you think would be the effect if this country finally got off its duff and committed to programs that could lead to energy independence?

**Milani:** I think you’d have democracy in the Middle East. [Laughter]

**Diamond:** I’d like to add one brief comment. And that is the question of what happens if we don’t do that. What happens is that it’s going to be a very frightening world to live in. First of all, if we don’t switch from our dependence on fossil fuels, I really shudder to think what kind of world our children and especially our grandchildren are going to be growing up in when the polar ice caps have melted and the sea levels have risen to the level they’re going to rise to and havoc is wrought on global temperatures and climates. Secondly, we are very close to $100 per barrel oil. If you think $70 is bad, wait until it hits $100. We’re one calamity in Nigeria and one other accident somewhere away from it, and we just have got to move with much greater urgency than we have been, and with a sense of national sacrifice, which has never been called for from the American people, to a strategy to pursue this. [Applause]

**Milani:** After what Larry said, I just want to add one small, one-word addition, and that is: China. China is the big elephant in the room. They just signed a $100 billion deal with Iran. I just had a very frank discussion with the president about it today.

**Question from the Audience:** I cannot figure it out. In this war, where so many have lost their lives and their money and their homes and their security, oil companies like Shell and Mobil and companies like Halliburton have gained tons of money. I don’t know anything about politics, but I’m wondering if this was a business move, not a move for peace and democracy.

**Milani:** In the Middle East, the perception that you have is really oftentimes the dominant perception: that the politics of the Middle East is petrol politics. And there’s the fact that oil companies in the last year, from what I understand, have gained $200 billion. The president of Exxon last year made $288 million. That was his salary, folks: $288 million. I want to know what kind of memos he wrote for that pay. [Laughter]

**Gonnerman:** Larry Diamond, Abbas Milani, and Erik Jensen, thank you very much for a thoughtful and informative evening.
Larry Diamond
A senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and professor by courtesy of political science and sociology at Stanford, Larry Diamond has served as coeditor of the widely respected Journal of Democracy since its founding in 1990. From January to April 2004, he served as a senior advisor to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad, an experience recounted in his recent book, Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq. A Stanford BA and PhD, he has worked with a group of European and American scholars to produce the “Transatlantic Strategy for Democracy and Human Development in the Broader Middle East,” published in 2004 by the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

Abbas Milani
A research fellow and co-director of the Iran Democracy Project at the Hoover Institution with an appointment in Stanford’s Department of Political Science, Abbas Milani is the author of Tales of Two Cities: A Persian Memoir (1996), Modernity and Its Foes in Iran (1998); and Lost Wisdom: Rethinking Modernity in Iran (2004). He received his BA in political science and economics from the University of California at Berkeley in 1970, and his PhD in political science from the University of Hawaii in 1974. He was an assistant professor at the National University of Iran from 1975 to 1977 and a research fellow at the Iranian Center for Social Research from 1977 to 1978. He now directs Stanford’s new Hamid and Christina Moghadam Program in Iranian Studies.

Erik Jensen (moderator)
Erik Jensen is a lecturer at the Stanford Law School and faculty member at the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. He has been a Fulbright scholar, a consultant to the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, and a representative of The Asia Foundation where he currently serves as a senior law advisor.

Comments?
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Aurora Forum at Stanford University
537 Lomita Mall
Stanford CA 94305

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