



**Author Series**  
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**Robin Wright**  
**Author and Journalist**

***Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion across the Islamic World***

**Diana Villers Negro Ponte:** Welcome everybody. If you'd like to come around here a bit because Robin is going to talk with us tonight about her book. I'm glad to see that many of you are holding it and I'm sure she's going to sign copies later. Now Robin, for those of you who'd only know her books, is also a singer, an actress, and has developed a new talent, rapping—because through the word of poetry of rap she has discovered the discourse of protest. She compares and links it up with a rapper of Tunisia to Sultana in Morocco and to names so chilling and as *[inaudible]* that even 24-year-old John Negro Ponte would admire the discourse. *[Laughter.]* So we have a writer who has written many books and I have them all listed there and if I took the paper out I'd have to look for my glasses, so please. Since 1989, Robin has been writing, and she's been writing about areas way before the protest began, but she identified the moments, and she identified the elements which later reached to the Springs or whatever name you wish to give to the upheavals. This is an extraordinary woman. This is a woman with a sensitivity and nose for what is going to happen and then the capacity to write it in sheer poetry. So what you have tonight, what you are clutching is a book that you are going to enjoy enormously—now the only—oh she's hidden there—Robin why are you hiding? She should be on a pedestal and not sitting hidden because in fact what she is going to do is let her book and her words shine forth. Thank you all for coming. Thank you Pat Ellis for suggesting we have this event and the floor is yours.

**Patricia Ellis:** Thank you so much Diana. I want to begin by thanking Diana and John Negro Ponte so much for opening their beautiful home, for their very, very warm hospitality. And it is wonderful to have Diana on the Board, and we are just thrilled to be here tonight. Robin spoke to us in New York last week and so I can only assure you, you have a real treat in store. It was a fantastic program and I highly recommend the book. I'm glad to see a number of you have already gotten it and she'll be signing after she speaks and we do the Q&A. Before I turn it over to Robin I just want to recognize a few other Board members so, Mary Catherine Toker, Ann Korologos, Gail Leftwich Kitch, and our pro bono counsel, Sarah Kahn. We have number of diplomats and lots of other important people I will not mention, you will forgive me, because we want to get on with the program. Before I turn it over to Robin, I also just want to mention some exciting upcoming events that we have this month. We're going to have an event on Pakistan with Pamela Constable of *The Washington Post* who just wrote a new book and that should be very timely and very exciting. In November, three extremely exciting events that you have to mark your calendar—the first one is our Celebrating Women Leaders Dinner with Senator Dianne Feinstein, it's on November 3<sup>rd</sup>—it will be really fantastic. Then we have two of our wonderful Embassy Series events. November 16<sup>th</sup>, we have an event on Turkey with the Turkish Ambassador and on November 29<sup>th</sup>, right after Thanksgiving, we will be with the Brazilian Ambassador so we hope you will be able to join us for all those events. Now over to an old friend of mine who is just the top foreign correspondent, has covered and lived all over the world, and is so articulate. These are the issues of the day and its changing by the minute both in the region, here, and at the UN as we speak, so it could not be more timely. It is with great pleasure I turn the floor over to Robin Wright. *[Applause.]*

**Robin Wright:** I'm delighted to be here tonight and I want to thank Diana and John for this extraordinary evening. I have to say I had so much fun with them this summer. We were acting in a

Shakespeare play and to see John Negroponte in Elizabethan gear, including tights, is an experience to remember. I have the pictures to prove it, which I put on my Facebook page, and are among the most popular things that I've ever posted. I first went to the Middle East, landed, by coincidence on October 6, 1973, which is the day the fourth Middle East War broke out. And as a young correspondent I thought of course I was capable of covering this extraordinary moment. Looking back I think, my God they were crazy to send me. I've covered all six wars in the region since then as well as the two intifadas, the Iranian revolution, the hostage crisis, and virtually every trauma, ordeal that's happened ever since. The idea for this book, which is my seventh, was to write about what had happened in the Islamic world in the decade since 9/11. I had a wonderful time for two years wandering, not just the 22 nations of the Arab world, but most of the 57 nations of the Islamic world, trying to figure out what had happened. I kind of tripped over and over and over on an extraordinary array of young people, women, cultural forces—civil society actors who had emerged and were beginning for the first time to make a difference. Anyway, I've had a wonderful time the last two years and the bottom line of my book is that something very different is happening today and it reflects what I call a counter-jihad. It's a moment that embraces a lot of different things. We're all familiar with the uprisings on the streets of Cairo and Benghazi and Tunis and so forth, but what I think is happening is kind of broader, it includes three different phenomena. One is the challenge to the political status quo. For the first time in the last block of countries to hold out against the democratic tide, the most volatile region of the world, you have people proactively imaginatively, creatively, challenging the geriatric autocrats who have prevailed for decades. They are doing it—again in the world's most volatile region, for the first time in every instance whatever the form of government, military dictatorship or monarchy, dirt poor countries like Yemen or oil rich sheikhdoms—through peaceful civil disobedience. Now in some cases it has deteriorated into military conflict—in Yemen we're beginning to see a civil war—in Libya—we saw—but in each case it began with peaceful civil disobedience and this is such an extraordinary turn of events.

It's happening, I think, for four reasons. One is that for the first time you have the largest baby boom generation, proportionately, in the world in the Middle East, two-thirds of the 300 million Arabs are under the age of 30. You have at the same time the majority of people, for the first time, who are literate and that includes women. They may not have high school educations or college degrees, but they all have a sense of a different future, whether it's women wanting to be players more than just inheriting the roles of their mother. They want to be able to have a choice whether it's in marriage, think about possible career, being more of an activist. There's a whole new dynamic. The third factor is that you bring that together with the tools of technology. We all know about Twitter, Facebook and so forth but for example, Al Jazeera we all know about emerging in the mid 1990s as the first satellite channel that offered a different vision. It circumvented state control of television and radio and the print media and in Arabic, not English of CNN, spoke to the people about what may be happening on the ground. Today, you have over 500 independent satellite television channels and it's important not just for the alternative ideas and coverage they are offering, but the whole idea of diversity. That there is not one truth, one way but there are lots of different ways of covering the same thing. So the whole principle of diversity has been introduced over the last 15 years. The fourth factor is that Muslims generally, and Arabs specifically, have paid a far greater price than we have for the extremism of al Qaeda and its affiliates. You take a place like Iraq where 200 Americans, plus or minus, have died from suicide bombs, over 12,000 Iraqi have died from suicide bombs, over 30,000 Iraqis have been injured by suicide bombs, and that something you know, they are paying a price for this. Whether it's the bombings in Casablanca 2003, the bombings in Riyadh in 2004, you've begun to see the Arab world rejecting al Qaeda and its affiliates because they're paying a far greater price with uncertainty, unemployment, instability and a sense of a future, the security crackdown. So these four factors come together and have changed the kind of dynamics on the ground.

The second factor, I think its part and parcel off the last element, is this rejection of violence as a tactic. Throughout the region there is a desire for the kids to have laptops rather than rifles. That al Qaeda has not provided solutions to any of the problems of daily life, be it education, health care, employment, housing. When it comes to the realities that all of the people in this region face they don't find the

extremists offering them anything. So there is a rejection that's quite indigenous of them that has nothing to do with us. The third part of this counter-jihad is the rejection of Islamist ideologies, particularly the kind of Islamic republic theocracy of Iran. This is really important because in 1979 Iran introduced Islam as an idiom of modern world expression. It changed the world's political spectrum that have been defined predominantly by communism and democracy and it introduced a third way. Now the message is we are not interested in that model whether it's Shiite or Sunni. So all three phenomena have emerged to kind of change the dynamics in the region.

Now, what interests me as much as the politics of the region is the cultures of the region and how that reinforces what's happening today. In many ways it proves the longevity, the dimensions, the scope, the depth of the change that's taking place. I devote about third of the book to this wonderful array of actors. One of my favorite, as Diana mentioned, is the issue of hip hop. Rap has become the rhythm of resistance in the region and in ways that mirror the emergence of hip hop in South Bronx in the 1970s as a rejection of gang violence. They were still angry, they still had a message but the challenge was to find an alternative way that didn't engaged in violence and hip hop emerged. The same thing is happening in the region and you saw it play out in Tunisia—Didi Cutler went to hear the Prime Minister of Tunisia this afternoon at Georgetown—and it is really interesting that the turning point for most people in the region, I began my book this way, is a young street vendor. December 17, last year he was confronted by an inspector who yet again demanded a bribe that she demanded frequently. When he refused to pay this time she confiscated his fruit and electronic scale but he was so angry that he went to try and get reimbursed. He went to government office, government office, government office. When he was frustrated, in fury he went down to the governor's office—this one remote Tunisian town, this capital to one of the 23 governances in Tunisia—and he covered himself in paint thinner and set himself on fire. This was the moment that changed everything and, believe it or not for all the billions that have been spent by lots of governments, or the money spent by NATO in Libya, the bribe that started all of this was \$7. The interesting thing about this—and this is where the culture and the politics merged—is that a month before the young man's name, Mohamed Bouazizi, the fruit vendor set himself on fire, a young Tunisian rapper named El General had posted an angry hip hop song on his Facebook page. Hip hop was illegal in Tunisia, it couldn't be recorded, couldn't be performed on state media and no outlets and so he put it on his Facebook page. The words were angrier than any politician in the 23 years of President Ben Ali's rule and it challenged the government. It talked about the people who were living off garbage, talked about the police who were involved in bribery rather than principle, talked about a constitution that failed people, it was blunt in wonderful ways. He did a video of this, his face was always shadowed and he put that on his Facebook page a month before the fruit vendor set himself on fire. After Bouazizi, and the beginning of the protests that started in remote Tunisia and worked their way through cities up to Tunis, and eventually in thirty days ousted a president, people sang El General's song—then in Egypt at Tahrir Square, and then in Bahrain. So you see this wonderful intersection of culture and politics and it plays out in lots of other interesting ways as well.

One of my favorites is the new Muslim comedians who are telling jokes against extremism and it's wonderful. There is today a Jon Stewart of Egypt, his name is Bassem Youssef and it is all on the internet and he does his mock news show with his mock reporters. He did a wonderful piece during the uprising in Egypt in which he reported on—actually it's a true story—who protested the protesters because they were blocking the streets and preventing the pizza from home delivering to their apartment. [*Laughter.*] There is a comedian in Saudi Arabia today, who again uses comedy to challenge the regime to introduce cynicism and skepticism and challenge and he calls himself, now think about this, the Jerry Seinfeld of Saudi Arabia. [*Laughter.*] I'm not a great joke teller so I want to tell you the opening joke by one of my favorite comedians who is an Iranian born comic just to show you how they're dealing with subjects that we would never anticipate. He gets onstage and says:

*You know one guy can really screw it up for the rest of us. Look at the Christmas Day bomber—the guy who tried to blow up the Northwest flight from Amsterdam to Detroit. This Abu Abu Mustafa Bubu, or whatever his name is. I say this guy is crazy. Come on, any man would back me up. After all where was the bomb? Right, in his underwear, I*

mean really. [Then he switches to a Middle East accent and pretends to be the normal hijacker in his final conversation with his terror master]. "Excuse me, I have one last question for you. You say my reward in heaven will be 72 virgins so do you think maybe we could put the bomb someplace else. [Laughter.] I mean I really think I'm going to need my penis." [Laughter. Applause.]

So you know this is not what we think about what Muslims think about extremism. It is wonderfully imaginative what is happening. The interesting thing is that this is a role where you look at what American Muslims—this kind of bridge that we've created because many of the Muslim comedians came from the Middle East, like Maz Jobrani, who tells this joke. He came here learned stand up and performs now. There are two of my favorite groups called Allah Made Me Funny and the other one is called the Axis of Evil Comedy Tour. There's a third one called Arabs Gone Wild. They now are running workshops in Amman and Cairo and believe it or not Riyadh and teaching stand up. It's not like humor was never a part of Islam, I mean the prophet Mohamed was thought to be something of a punster. They are learning comedy as a tool in challenging the local environment and again in introducing what comedy is all about. That's another of one of my favorite cultural phenomena.

A third one is the playwright and the playwrights are all—several of them are taking the word jihad and incorporating it into their titles. One of my favorite is by an Egyptian play write named Yussef El Guindi, whose play is entitled *Jihad Jones and the Kalashnikov Babes*. [Laughter.] and it's a parody on stereotypes of Muslims. I read the script on the quiet car between New York and Washington and I was laughing so loud the people were giving me dirty looks, I couldn't contain myself it was so funny. Another one of my favorites is by an Indian Muslim playwright—and India has the third largest Muslim population in the world even though it's a minority of 164 million people—and it's called *Til Jihad Do us Part*, a play on marital vows. It's a romantic comedy and it's all about how jihad is really about learning how to be a good partner, a good spouse, have a good marriage, and develop trust. It is, again trying to take the idea of jihad away from the extremists and reclaim it for what it originally was. The third one I'll tell you about is a documentary that's a wonderful piece that I actually downloaded from Netflix called *A Jihad for Love*. It tells the story of Muslims in 12 countries, and the documentarian went to all of these secretly—Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, where young Muslims wanted to remain true to their faith but they also wanted to remain true to their gender identity and they are gay and lesbian. And all of them face the challenge of the death sentence or horrific punishment and it's a very moving piece about trying again to be 21<sup>st</sup> century. [Inaudible.]

So, I don't want to talk at you forever, I want to leave time for subject questions. But I'll talk about two other things I think are really important. At the end of the book, I talk about the great challenge we all face at this turning point. I don't like to call it the Arab Spring because I think it belittles what is happening. We've already had an Arab Spring five or six years ago with the Damascus Spring the Cedar Revolution in London and so forth. This is arguably the most important turning point in the last block of countries to hold out against democratic tide in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, in—along with the debt crisis we'll find this point in history and arguably the next decade. But the timing is awful, because it comes at time that we can't help—there's neither the will nor the resources. The European Union can't help, it can barely help themselves. I often laugh today because Turkey is the most important country in the Islamic world and it grows exponentially every month. I keep thinking about how the Europeans must rue the day that they didn't allow this healthy economy in to bailout Greece and the irony there. Anyway, this is the challenge. This is not just about wanting free elections, honest elections, accountability and so forth. This is also about wanting a sense of future that people want whether it's a job or something that guarantees them a better life. And the reality is there's not a single country in the Arab world that can afford this transition, not one, except that ironically may have the ability, the better chance of all of them, is Libya. This country has a small population 6.5 million people, a lot of oil, but you look at Egypt next door, 85 million people and very limited resources and what's it going to do? Most of our aid, \$1.3 billion every year goes to the military and we have very limited resources that go to civil society groups, those women empowerment groups and all those who are trying to facilitate this

change. That's not going to change anytime soon. And the real danger is that at this epic moment it's the first hopeful sign in that part of the world. I'm the ultimate pessimist, I'm the one who says not is there glass half full or glass half empty, I'm the one who says is there really any water in the glass at all? For the first time I've kind of thought—oh gosh something good is happening. My great fear is that this moment will be derailed, diverted, undermined because we can't help them. They will, because of economic exigencies and desperation, turn to strong man or the kind of illiberal forces. There are lots of them kind of on both sides, right and Islamists that could offer an alternative. So, for me this is the beginning of the beginning. This is a process that's going to play out over the next generation and I think they are two trends that will kind of define the next decade and they will often seem to conflict. We'll have a hard time in the West fully grasping them. One is the fact that people are going to look for more political openings, a sense of justice that's why Hosni Mubarak's trial is so important. For that the first time people have a sense that they will be held to account, and it sends a message that's important to other leaders. The independent press, the diversity of ideas, the budding openness that we are seeing, that's one trend. The counter to that is the thing that we won't fully understand and that's the growing, even more than the past decade, turning to Islam. But it will be different this time. It will be more of the desire to use Islam as a means to an end rather than the end goal in itself. It's the milieu in which people who are undergoing this incredible change will feel comfort. It's like many of my friends who now have put on hijab in Egypt. Forty years ago women, very few women, probably less than 5% even 2% wore the hijab, the Islamic head scarf. Today over 80% of women wear the head scarf. But, it's not because they are fanatics or wanting an Islamic regime or are going to vote for the Muslim Brotherhood. It's because they feel this is a space where they're comfortable making greater strides whether it's in getting an education, playing a role in society, turning out in Tahrir Square. It's the safety of creating an alternative in their personal or their marital or their social environment. I think we are going to see more of this. We are often going to be confused particularly even a decade after 9/11 where I think actually more Americans are afraid of what's happening in the Arab world than the immediate aftermath of 9/11. We're going to find these two trends seeming to be contradictory.

The final thing I'd say is on US policy. I think the United States, in February—and I write about the critical 11 days when the Obama Administration made an important change and turned around in response what was happening on the ground, recognizing the power of the people. Beginning of February, President Obama came out and said, yes we believe there needs to be political change and we see the will of the people expressed and we honor that, but backed a transition that played out that allowed Hosni Mubarak a graceful exit at a time of elections in fact scheduled for September. By the end of 11 days, the overwhelming turnout in the streets led the Administration to abandon a stalwart ally of 30 years, who had been pivotal to our region ambitions, Arab-Israeli peace, counterterrorism and every goal we had in the region, we walked from it. I mean unbelievable. So, I think one of the most important turning points in US policy was in February 2011. I also think policy is still seriously inconsistent. When it comes to across North Africa into Syria, Yemen and so forth, we take a principle stand. When it comes to the Gulf, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain particularly, where we didn't do much when Saudis sent in a thousand troops to quash the Bahrain uprising, that we're seen, in the region, as hypocritical. Now, yes I can see every country in the region is different, different circumstances, but there is a principle we didn't use. When it came to Eastern Europe we had a common set of values and I think we're going to pay the price particularly on Saudi Arabia.

Let me tell you two little factoids about Saudi Arabia which really interest me. One is a microcosm of the region, when people say no Saudi Arabia you haven't seen an uprising, it's true. But the reality is the average age in Saudi Arabia is 25 years. The average age of a cabinet minister in Saudi Arabia is 65. The King is 87, his heir apparent who is not well is 83, the third in line is 78. There is not just a generation gap in Saudi Arabia, there's a three generation gap and this really is important. There will not be a Tahrir Square moment in Saudi Arabia but there are pressures. And that is partly why the King, who is more a reformer than his brothers, introduced the idea of women's vote—which, frankly, he promised six years ago and it is going to be four years when he'll be 91, maybe. The vote is for a counsel that is half elected, half appointed and the majority will have to get some appointed to join

those elected to make a difference. The King will really continue to be an absolute monarchist. So that's one kind of reality.

The other reality, according to the International Finance Institute, is that Saudi Arabia ten years ago broke even when the price of oil was \$23, no profit, but broke even. Last year it broke even when the price of oil was \$68. The King, to preempt an uprising or opposition injected \$136 billion into the economy to create jobs, offer debt relief, provide housing loans, create sport and literacy clubs for the young in a population that's less than 25 million real citizens. Today, because of that, the price of oil to break even for Saudi Arabia is \$86 a barrel. If that continues over the next four years the price of oil to break even for Saudi Arabia, no profit, will have to be \$110 a barrel. Who is going to pay that? We are. So when we talk about US policy in Saudi Arabia, there is literally a price to be paid in blood and all this. Anyway so I probably talked too long.

**Ms. Ellis:** Okay, that was fantastic. [Applause.] So, I'm going to open it up and take some questions and we will, with Robin's indulgence, I'm going to ask one question and then I will try to get to everybody. Please keep the questions short. I'd like to turn to the issue of the raised expectations. You talked about the youth, you talked about the women, you talked about unemployment, the fact that there is no money to help out, the military is still ruling in Egypt and all this stuff. Is this going to turn into an explosive situation? How much time does one really have and what can the United States do about it?

**Ms. Wright:** That's the key question, how long do we've got? I'm not sure we know. But I think that in this part of the world there is less of a cushion than there is elsewhere. One of the most poignant stories I heard about a camel driver down at the pyramids. The camel driver said, "Look, I can't feed my family anymore and I can't feed my camel. So, I'm probably going to have to feed my camel to my family." I've actually had camel meat and it's, you know. But the whole idea is that then there is no job. That's the kind of crisis we all face. I don't think we realize how bad this hopeful moment could get. We kind of blithely think, oh well, 18 days and they got rid of Hosni Mubarak, and we celebrate that and we think there is an Arab Spring. I don't think we have a lot of time. The interesting thing is that there have been some polls taken that we're at a moment where there's still a lot of political openness. For example there's a poll, taken by the International Peace Institute, a couple weeks ago and it found that despite all of our fears about the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt that today no party gets over 3%. Three months ago 34% of Egyptians didn't know who they were going to vote for, today that is 62%, and it's actually grown. The parliamentary elections are at the end of November. Now that the Egyptian military has not done very well in providing the time necessary for new parties to write platforms, prepare candidates, register, campaign, learn the whole craft of politics. We go through elections that last forever and this is a large population and they don't have the access we do. The danger is, the kind of two forces, whether it's the old party and the military or the Muslim Brotherhood, although the Muslim Brothers has now broken up into four factions. I'm not convinced that they are going to do overwhelmingly well.

One more point, we often think that the vote is going to determine what happens next and it will. But to me, the most important thing that is going to happen next is the writing of the constitution. In Iran, which I covered from the revolution and all of that, I've gone to Iran almost every year since 1973. When the Shah left, Khomeini came back and said no clerics in politics, he returned to Khonj, the rest of the clerics returned to their seminaries. You had technocrats like Abolhassan Bani-Sadr take over. They talked about writing a constitution that was modeled on French and Belgium law, and it is, largely. But, there were roughly 6,400 amendments offered to the constitution, the coalition that had protested and ousted the Shah began to crumble over issues of what the constitution would look like. Two of the groups became quite deadly in challenging the others and in that year and a half over 1000 officials died—we're not talking about low-level officials, a president, a prime minister, 27 members of parliament, judges, across the board. That's the moment that Ayatollah Khomeini said the clerics have to come back and play a role in supervising this political chaos and that's when Khomeini came back from Khonj to Tehran where he implemented the idea that he talked about earlier of a supreme leader

but a more activist supreme leader. They introduced a parallel political structure to mirror the traditional ones that were modeled off French and Belgium law, presidential, legislative and judicial branches with a council of guardians that could veto legislation with a supreme leader that could overrule the President, with Islamic courts that could overrule the civil and just charged people with unIslamic activities, which you know is anything. You've seen this play out for 32 years in a way that the religious institutions have overwhelmed the secular branches. That is why I worry about this transition, when you ask how long it will play out, how long it will take. We are going through a number of stages.

**Ms. Ellis:** Okay, we are going to take three questions at once. I will remind you of the questions I have Marcia, Deborah and Susana. Please identify yourself and keep the questions brief so we can get to as many as possible.

**Question:** Marcia Wiss, I'm just asking what do you see forecasting the status of women? I think there was a really interesting comment about the hijab which you see whenever you travel throughout the region, all over the place, where you didn't see before as being more of a comfort zone.

**Question:** Deborah Lyons, Canadian Embassy, thank you so much. I think the young people you spoke about, the majority of the population, in order to turn this into this Spring and this revolution into something that's sustainable it's got to be about the economy, it's got to be about jobs like it is in all of our countries. If you're advising the Western leaders, what do you say to them about how should we be engaging in a trade strategy, a commerce strategy that starts to build some sort of infrastructure there that allows those people to have jobs.

**Question:** Susan Florian, thank you for your great work. Thank you for your brilliance. Thank you for your comments. I'm a little conflicted about your interpretation of the headscarf going from 5% of women to 80% of women. I'm hoping you will elaborate a little more on that.

**Ms. Wright:** Let me address the women's issue first and I don't know what you mean by conflicted—whether it's good or bad, but I'll tell you one of my favorite stories. It is about a young woman named Dalia Ziada who wears what I call the pink hijab, and that's one of the things that has changed. Women wear headscarves, it's quite fashionable. They wear it in different styles. It's quite funny, there is one where the women wrap their scarves up in the back into a big bun, they have a little book that tells you the fashionable way to wear a hijab now, this one is called the Spanish wrap and its modeled on the Flamenco dancer. Dalia became an activist when she was eight years old and this addresses the point about how long this wave of change has been coming. Her mother said to her, "dress in your fanciest dress and we're going for a commemoration." It was her circumcision. Over 80% of women in Egypt are circumcised, female genital mutilation. It is Christian and Muslim and it is regional, it is cultural, it is that part of Africa. The Christian Coptic condemned it. The head of Islamic, the Grand Mufti, the head of Al-Azhar University, the older educational institution condemned it, issued fatwas against it and yet it continues. Again, it shows you why culture as an influence is really important particularly because it goes back so long. She was so traumatized by this that she started arguing with her family, first with her father and uncles to protect her sisters and cousins. She failed time and time again. With her last cousin, she stayed up all night with her uncle and she said this to him, "if you do this to her I will cut off her finger." He said, "why would you do that? That will maim her for life." She said, "Duh." She thought she failed again and the next day he called her and said, "you convinced me, I won't do it." So she decided if she could change one person's life she would then start campaigning. She became, as a teenager and then in college, very active on issues of female genital mutilation. Then she became very active on human rights. She heard about a comic book called the *Montgomery Story* which was about Martin Luther King's walk to freedom and civil disobedience in the American South. It had recommendations in the back about what to do. By then, she had become a blogger and she decided to translate this comic book into Arabic and she relayed it to her blogging friends from Morocco across to Yemen. Then, she decided Egyptians don't really know what a human right is, so she started the first Arabic human rights film festival. She is 26, lower middle class, hijab-wearing, pink hijab-wearing. The

government tried to ban her. The censorship board said she couldn't have permission. She went to the censorship board, waited at the elevator, rode up with the director and argued with him. He finally said, "Okay, I'll give you permission." Finally, the theatre where she was supposed to show all these films lost its permit—isn't that strange? She and her friends hired a Nile riverboat cruiser for tourists and they all got on board and when they took off from the dock she showed her films. That generated a new idea of a new filmmaker in Egypt. The second year she showed a couple of films by local filmmakers. One was just a minute long and it showed flowers budding and each one, just as it came into bloom, being snipped and in the background a young girl screaming. One minute, very powerful in relaying a message. So, Daliha, of course was at Tahrir Square every night and because she had a job she felt safe in this space, staying all night, a lot of men. She would text me, "we have 10,000 today." It was extraordinary and we skyped every couple of weeks. The week before last we were talking and she announced at the age of 29 that she is running for Parliament. She teased me and said this will be my first step on becoming the first female president of Egypt. Now she won't be, but the whole idea, where is this coming from, how long has it been coming, how has it been coming, is illustrated in this story of this extraordinary young woman. They are everywhere, everywhere you turn. It's the Wael Ghonim the young Google executive. The people that are involved in lots of subtle different ways that we weren't watching, not paying attention to.

The economy, you need to get trade officials who know more about trade agreements and so forth to talk to you about that. In Libya, for example, we can use our technical expertise to help the Libyans get oil back online faster. The healthier the economy in any country the more progress it will make. I mean, what an irony if Libya, of all places, becomes the model of what works. There you had a place where for five months you had a transitional national council that's also had to work on issues of dealing with foreign governments as well as garbage collection and how do you bring together rival factions. There are 140 rival tribes and clans in Libya, 30 of which are important, you have a lot of different militias that were all involved based on where they were geographically in taking on Muammar Gaddafi's forces. And each one of them wants a bit of the spoils. So there are a lot of things. But how interesting that Libya might be a place. But there are some, I'm sure, creative ideas. I'm not a trade expert whether they are free trade agreements that are very hard to come by, or the kind of perks you can get to help. Aid is something that *The New York Times* reported yesterday is going to take a hit anyways. So that's not an alternative that's where we have to start being creative about what resources we have and how we can help. And private investment is going to be really important.

**Question:** Cynthia Schneider, I love your book, I love everything you do, and I so agree about all these things. I actually asked, we had the Prime Minister of Tunisia at Georgetown today and I asked him about El General. He did pretty well actually, he's 84, so, I thought he couldn't talk about hip hop but I was talking about how youth culture can bring the country together. He said we welcome everything. What I wanted to ask you was looking reflexively back at US policy. You strike me as such a rare person who understands the importance of cultural in these countries and connects it with political developments. In my limited perception, the way we do foreign policy in this country is the culture is way over there and gets no money and serious people who do politics over here would never pay any attention to culture. They all pay attention to you. How do you see that going? Because then obviously, the problem with that then we don't understand the Egyptian revolution we don't understand the countries on the brink of explosion and it's actually a security risk. Do you see that evolving?

**Question:** Ginny Mulberger, thank you again. You talked about the inconsistencies about the way we apply the principles across the regions, you use Saudi Arabia as an example. Yet, we discussed there are difference, and certainly the region is very different from Eastern Europe and how it evolved. How would you apply policy for Saudi Arabia in this instance which has been a stalwart ally yet under a monarchy.

**Question:** Mary DiAngelo from the Women's Foreign Policy Group. You say the Pink Hijabis want to change the, what we in the West perceive and also many Muslims perceive as the hijab as a symbol of

a backwards society. But at the same time you cite her as saying she wears the hijab for going out at night and being able to work and so forth. How does she and women like her reconcile those two conflicting symbols?

**Ms. Wright:** This is something she prefers to do, but she also believes that this also gives her greater latitude to do what she wants. It's maybe not the way we think but it is the way a growing number of, particularly of young women, feel. My only point was that we have to stop talking about head covering as defining a woman's values and political goals or personal goals. I was talking with somebody yesterday in New York about Jackie Kennedy wearing her mantilla to church or the nuns wearing habits, this is something not that long ago in Western culture as well. I've never quite known why women's hair is such a seductive thing or corrupting force in society. Anyway, it's something that is common beyond the Islamic world. It's just something that we have to kind of think about in a different way.

**Ms. Ellis:** The other two questions, one is on culture and the impact on policy.

**Ms. Wright:** On Cynthia's question—what was really interesting to me is that in 2009 during the Iranian presidential election which was widely believed to be fraudulent, that a septuagenarian cleric who had been speaker of parliament in the early stage of the revolution was distributing—remember Ayatollah Khomeini said music was banned and Western music was Westocercation—and this man who had been a protégé of Ayatollah Khomeini was distributing CDs with pro-democracy rap groups as a campaign tactic showed you how much had changed. They get it, but I'm not sure when it comes to US policy, this is their world and we're not trying to reach out and influence in any way. I think that in many cases there are times we are going to have to step back in the next decade and for all our temptations to say "oh we know better" or "oh we can help you" or "we want to make sure our guys win or do well." We are often going to need to step back and let them do it and make their own mistakes and learn from them, to be a credible transition we're going to have to play a different role than the past. Now, I think on the economic issues is where need to continue to play a role. When it comes to politics, you know, we have to not succumb to our hysteria about will the Muslim Brotherhood prevail? Because at the end of the day, in this environment, the Muslim Brotherhood will have to deliver if they do well and I don't think they will get over a third of Parliament. They will have to deliver on job creation and garbage collection. And whoever wins is going to get stuck, you know, you think Obama's got it bad, oh my God. Whoever wins these elections faces horrible problems and they may fail in the process. Well, you know what, let them fail.

**Ms. Ellis:** Saudi Arabia was the other question.

**Ms. Wright:** Yeah, what do we do about Saudi Arabia? Look, there are lots of degrees of things we can do with Saudi Arabia. My sense is from talking to a lot of my friends at the State Department, that Saudi Arabia is the alpha in this relationship now. We have not made the point, we say we have, that we've talked to them about reform and so forth. I don't know whether either party, Saudis are rarely candid, but I'm not sure how candid we are with them. I think there are things, like with Bahrain, with the Egyptians, with all these players, that we can cut off. We have \$1.3 billion we give to the military in Egypt and we can signal them. And we're not happy that they have not lifted martial law as they promised, made it difficult for a lot of the pro-democracy groups by, so we don't give them a weapon they want or we cut off \$1 billion or we slow down delivery of funds, a lot of its already committed, you can't change overnight. But we do things that are kind of signal that we are not happy. On Bahrain we have the 5th Fleet there and we have some maneuverability, sometimes its token gestures that say we are aware and we're not keen on this. I think they are creative imaginative ways that we can signal our values.

**Ms. Ellis:** Okay, we are going to have to stop here, I'm sorry for those I didn't get to. But, Robin will be signing books and she will be happy to answer your questions over there. Please join me in thanking Robin. [Applause.]