



PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

www.pomed.org ♦ P.O. Box 25533 ♦ Washington, DC 20027-8533

The Brookings Institution **Views from the Middle East: Public Opinion in the Arab World**

Monday April 14, 2008, 2-3:30 pm
1775 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC

Martin Indyk, Senior Fellow and Director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, opened the event, discussing the purpose of the polling research and the significance of understanding public opinion of the Arab world. The poll, conducted by the University of Maryland and Zogby International, examines public opinion in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates on a wide range of issues, including U.S. foreign policy and democracy in the Middle East.

Shibley Telhami, Nonresident Senior Fellow at Brookings and the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland, College Park, presented the poll results. He stated that the impetus for the poll was not politically motivated as its process began before the events of September 11th, 2001. The dramatic increase of Internet and satellite television use prompted the poll, studying trends in mass communication and effects on society, religion, etc., although several results were given with regard to more current political issues.

64% and 19% of those polled said they held Very Unfavorable and Somewhat Unfavorable views of the U.S., respectively. 70% of respondents said they had No Confidence in the United States.

When asked what the U.S. could do to improve their perceptions, the majority of citizens in every nation except Saudi Arabia believed two actions would best accomplish this: 1) a brokered peace deal between the Palestinians and Israel based on 1967 borders with Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital, and 2) the withdrawal of troops from Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. **Providing more economic assistance and promoting democracy in the region came in distant third and fourth place, dependent on country.**

In response to the U.S. message of democracy promotion in the Middle East, **65% said they did not believe that democracy was a real U.S. objective**, while 20% stated they believed in the objective but not U.S. course of action to implement it. Only 8% polled believed that democracy in the Middle East was an important U.S. foreign policy objective that would make a difference in the region.

At the close of the event, Indyk and Telhami, along with **David Ignatius**, Associate Editor and Columnist of The Washington Post, fielded audience questions and provided commentary.

Ignatius claimed that the implications of the poll numbers were “really bad”, suggesting that U.S. foreign policy “is in question” as a result.

On the spread of democracy, Telhami noted that “it’s clear people don’t believe what we say” and questions the type of relationships the U.S. is reinforcing in the Middle East by focusing on “military and intelligence institutions.” He continued that “there is a contradiction” in U.S. foreign policy that has “not been resolved” and “we are going to have to reassess this approach.”