

THE HONORABLE JANE HARMAN
REMARKS
NATIONAL CONVERSATION:
THE ISLAMISTS ARE COMING:
WHO THEY REALLY ARE
APRIL 18, 2012

- Good Morning. I'm Jane Harman, President and CEO of the Wilson Center.
- Welcome to the seventh in the Wilson Center's series of National Conversations. Today's format is slightly different from the previous ones. This conversation was designed to coincide with the launch of a very timely book that was edited by Robin Wright, a joint fellow at the Wilson Center and the United States Institute of Peace.
- The book, *The Islamists are Coming: Who They Really Are*, is a collection of 15 chapters written by the best scholars in the field on a defining issue in the future of the Middle East. In the wake of the Arab Spring, this book is the first to survey the rise of Islamist groups—more than 50 diverse parties with millions of followers that will do more to shape the world's most volatile region than any other political bloc.
- It's a pleasure to have so many dear friends, members of our Board, including the Chair, Ambassador Joe Gildenhorn and his wife Alma, and members of the Wilson Council, the Wilson National Cabinet, and our Wilson Alliances in attendance.
[Development will confirm in the morning that the Gildenhorns will be there.]
- For those of you new to the Wilson Center, let me add a few words on the Center itself.

- Congress created the Center in 1968, with a view to honoring President Wilson with a living memorial rather than another statue or monument on the Mall.
- Wilson is our only President to have earned a PhD. In his day, he was a leading political scientist before becoming President of Princeton, Governor of New Jersey and a two-term President.
- The Center brings together the two passions of Wilson’s life by aligning scholarship with good policy.
- I hope that the irony is not lost on you that the Wilson Center – named for a president who happened to be a member of the Democratic Party—is housed in the Ronald Reagan building. I only wish that we had more bipartisanship like that going on about a mile from here.
- Our charter forbids us from advocacy—but not from creating a platform that I call a “safe political space” to engage a diversity of views to explore the toughest issues.
- We started our National Conversations when I joined the Center as its new president just over a year ago. Our aim is to provide a space where we can discuss domestic and foreign policy issues in a non-partisan atmosphere and look for solutions.
- Today’s conversation deals with one of the most pressing issues that the United States is now facing in the Middle East. The United States embraced the aspirations of those who inspired the Arab awakening and it condemned the use of force against demonstrators in Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, and Egypt—just as it condemns the continuing violence against Syrian demonstrators today.

- A fundamental change is taking place in the Middle East and North Africa. To those of us who followed developments and had a chance to observe many of the countries of the region firsthand—as I did during my years on the Hill—it did not appear that octogenerian rulers would ever give up power. And few would have predicted that within 16 months after the beginning of demonstrations in Tunisia, these leaders—in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya—would be swept away and that we would witness the emergence of new and hopefully more democratic regimes in these countries.
- At the same time, few foresaw that from these upheavals, Islamic parties would emerge as the leading players in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya and that Islamists would be a noticeable presence in the parliaments of Kuwait and Morocco, as well. This reality that we face today is the subject of today’s National Conversation.
- These Islamic parties, long operating underground or semi-clandestinely, are now in power or coming to power. That requires addressing the fundamental problems of governance: creating jobs, dealing with corruption, encouraging investment, managing foreign policy, and answering a universal demand for representative government and better standards of living. How will they handle their new responsibilities? This is the question that, over the last few months, has been the focus of our attention here at the Wilson Center.
- I was in Tunisia during the elections for the Constitutional Assembly. It was moving to see people participate in the first free and fair election the country had witnessed in at least 40 years.
- I met with Rachid Ghanouchi, the head of the Ennahda Party, both in Tunis and during his recent visit to Washington, when he spoke

to a small group of people at the Wilson Center. My colleagues and I pressed him hard on women's rights in Tunisia, and he assured us that Ennahda will not tamper with Tunisia's personal status law—the most progressive in the region.

- I also visited Egypt and talked to the young people from Tahrir Square and marveled at their dreams for a free, just, and prosperous Egypt. I spoke to the members of the Freedom and Justice Party during their visit to Washington a month ago and expressed our concerns for the rights of minorities and women and the aspirations of the young people who were instrumental in overthrowing the *ancien regime*.
- My colleagues at the Center have attended meetings with the representatives from Libya; they have had conversations with men and women in Yemen, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Morocco; and they continue to follow developments in the region very closely.
- To mark International Women's Day, we asked women in the region to assess how women are faring a year after the Arab awakening under the Islamists. You can find a summary of their views on our online publication.
- The book whose publication we are marking and which we are discussing today is another product of our recent efforts and those of the United States Institute of Peace. The authors have all spent a lot of time in the region over the past crucial year of change, and their on-the-ground perspectives are part of what makes this collection so useful and unique.
- To celebrate the launch of this book today, we have brought together some of the world's leading experts on Islamic movements to help us understand the new order that is taking shape in the region.

- Robin Wright is the supremely qualified editor of the volume. She has spent years in the region. She was the first to recognize—and to layout in her book *Rock the Casbah*—that a new generation with new voices was emerging to challenge the old order in a serious way. The book was written, in part, at the Wilson Center.
- Robin, who will give the introductory remarks and take part in the panel, will say more about *The Islamists are Coming*. We are fortunate to have a truly expert panel and one of the best journalists in the business as moderator. All four of the panelists, Nathan Brown and Samer Shehata, David Ottaway, and Robin Wright are current and former Wilson Center fellows. You should already have the panelist's bios, so I will be brief.
- David Ottaway, a former *Washington Post* correspondent, has written extensively about the region. He just returned from Saudi Arabia and Tunisia and is off to Algeria to be present during the upcoming elections. David's latest publication is *Tunisia's Islamists Struggle to Rule*. You can find it on the Wilson Center website.
- Nathan Brown is professor of political science and international Affairs at George Washington University. His most recent book is *When Victory Is Not an Option: Islamist Movements in Arab Politics*.
- Samer Shehata is an assistant professor at Georgetown University and his forthcoming book is *Islamist Politics in the Middle East: Movement and Change*.
- The session today will be moderated by Steve Inskeep, host of Morning Edition, the most widely heard radio news program in the United States. Steve has traveled across the nation and around the

world for Morning Edition and NPR News. From the Persian Gulf to the wreckage of New Orleans, he has interviewed presidents, warlords, authors, and musicians, as well as those not in the headlines. We are delighted to have Steve with us.

- Let me now call on Robin Wright, distinguished scholar and rock star at the Wilson Center, to give us some opening remarks.