Harry Kreisler: Welcome to a “Conversation With History.” I’m Harry Kreisler of the Institute of International Studies. Our guest today is Steven Cook who is the Dillon Fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations, and his new book is Ruling But Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria and Turkey. Steven, welcome to Berkeley.

Steven Cook: Thank you very much. It’s a pleasure to be here.

HK: Where were you born and raised?

SC: I was born and raised on Long Island, New York, a little town called Plainview in Nassau County.

HK: Looking back, how do you think your parents shaped your thinking about the world?

SC: Well, you know, my parents were children during World War II and ended up being Kennedy and Johnson liberals, and I was kind of brought up on the ideas of the positive use of American power but not in that flag waving, nationalist kind of way. And it really was the fact that they were of this generation that helped shaped my values, but what was interesting that helped get me interested in the Middle East was – I was probably in 6th or 7th grade during the Iranian revolution and the Iranian hostage crisis and for the life of me, it was fascinating to me and I became obsessed with the issue because I had been brought up on this idea of the United States saved the world from fascism, we were battling communism, and ask not what you can do for your country – what your country can do – so on and so forth, you understand – and I couldn’t understand why there were millions in the streets in this country called Iran saying death to America. And it was something that really set something off in me, even when I was just a kid in 6th or 7th grade.

HK: When did you make the decision to be interested in international politics and the Middle East? Did that not happen until you were an undergraduate?

SC: No, no, I actually was interested in it. I remember around that time I kept it a deep, dark secret among my friends that one of my favorite programs on television was the news, and my parents were
always talking about politics and international affairs around the dinner table, and I absorbed and enjoyed having the conversation with them. When I got to Vassar College it was a very short time thereafter that I decided that I would be an international studies major.

HK: And then you were on to graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania?

SC: No, no, before Penn – I’m overly degreed. I did a Master’s degree at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, and then after completing that Master’s I did my Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania.

HK: Looking back, who were your mentors that really helped you along on the chosen path of Middle East studies?

SC: Well, I think there have been a number of them that have been quite important to me. As an undergraduate my undergraduate advisor from the political science department at Vassar College, a gentleman named Glen Johnson who’s actually an expert on India, but he was the one who really set me on the path of advanced work. And then while I was at SAIS two gentlemen served as important mentors and sounding boards. One was Michael Mandelbaum who is a kind of generalist in American foreign policy, and the other is a specialist on the Islamic world named Jim Piscatore [sp?]. And then finally, at the University of Pennsylvania my dissertation supervisor, someone who you know well, Ian Lustick [who] was a tremendous resource and I was lucky to have him as my dissertation supervisor. And professionally, since I’ve joined the Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Haass, the President of the Council, who has a strong interest in the Middle East, has been a terrific mentor, as has the former Director of Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations who now teaches at the University of Texas at Austin, a gentleman named Jim Lindsay. All of these gentlemen have different experiences and different expertise on the Middle East or not the Middle East but nevertheless have been – I’ve been privileged, and I’m grateful to them, for their interest in my professional development.

HK: Your studies are in political science and in Middle East studies and your book, which we’re going to talk about in a minute, really is very astute in its use of the tools of comparative analysis. Talk a little about that because I’m interested in what it takes to do this kind of work that you do.

SC: Well, I wanted to be a political scientist with a research interest in the Middle East, and I took that training as a political scientist very seriously, and I think that too often in Middle East studies in particular, they’re not using the tools of comparison or tools of qualitative analysis to good effect. And sure, it’s great to marinate your [?] in a single case but as a comparativist I wanted to be able to draw connections and draw implications of the arguments that I was making to a broader realm of analysis. And so – it takes a lot though, and these cases were particularly challenging because they required not just the kind of research that you’re doing but also research in Arabic, and Turkish, and French, and I actually had to re-teach myself French along the way.
HK: And so, the language skills are absolutely critical, so if you didn’t have these different languages then the possibility of comparing these three different places, Turkey, Algeria, and Egypt, would have not been possible.

SC: Well, I certainly think you could have done it but you wouldn’t have been able to dig as deep into the cases without having those language skills. For me, the Arabic is not a problem, Turkish I need a little bit of help on but was fortunate that I had that, and like I said, I had to re-teach myself French in order to do the Algerian cases. I think that it’s certainly possible to do a comparison but I’m not quite sure whether you can really get down into the nitty-gritty of the cases without – and it hampers your actual understanding of the cases without engaging in this material and the languages that it’s been written [in].

HK: And so, how did your argument emerge? Was it obvious to pick these three countries, and if so, why, and what is the problem you want to tackle here?

SC: Right. Well, I’m glad you asked the question. It wasn’t obvious at all, at the beginning. In fact, I was embarked on the beginnings of another project when this light bulb kind of went on in my head and led to ultimately my dissertation which became this book, Ruling But Not Governing. And what had happened was I had been living in Ramallah in the West Bank doing research on the intersection of religion and mass politics, and after spending about eleven weeks in Ramallah I took a break and was spending some time on the beach just outside of Tel Aviv and reading a detailed account of how the Turkish military had undermined the first Islamist led government in Turkey. And that got me thinking about ideas about the durability and stability of authoritarian political systems, and ultimately ruling but not governing brings these things together, the intersection of religion and politics and questions about the durability of authoritarian political systems. But the book itself is addressed to this question. Why are these regimes that I’m looking at seemingly so stable, and under what conditions can we expect them to either collapse or change? And the interesting thing is, while I was writing this book Turkey changed. And so, that’s basically the genesis, but once I had this idea about the durability of regimes and the connection with what was happening in Turkey, it was – the questions I was asking drove me to Egypt and Algeria, but the universe of analysis also includes Pakistan, Indonesia, Latin American cases – absolutely.

HK: And in focusing on these three countries what you’re looking at is the military and political development, and trying to understand the obstacles to one element of the American ideal for the region, namely democratization. So, what is it about these three military regimes and the elements that they have in common?

SC: Well, these three cases are actually quite different from each other. There’s an interesting mix of differences and similarities, but what is striking – in the differences you have some common themes that are running through them, and one of them is, and I think a key component, is the fact that they’re all military dominated regimes. They’re all founded by military officers, they all went through periods of direct military rule but now although the military has receded and is in the
barracks, the regimes remain military dominated in that the militaries remain incredibly influential in the political systems. And what I discovered in the research was that the political institutions that the military officers either designed or discovered at these founding moments have had, as they have evolved in this kind of path dependent ways that social scientists talk about, a direct effect on the political trajectory of the three states, and that essentially what they do is – although there has been change in the political arenas, they essentially maintain the status quo, so that the regime that came into place in 1952, in Egypt, remains largely the same regime that’s in place these days, it’s just the regime personnel have changed over time. And the question that then that leads us to is, okay, well, the institutional settings of these states are designed to essentially maintain the status quo – that’s certainly the case in Algeria and Egypt – why has it been different in Turkey?

HK: Okay. Now let’s go back a minute because it’s very interesting, the way these three military regimes took the mantle of the liberation movement, and I’m curious about that. Is that a product of the various forms of decolonization and collapse of empire that positioned them to take over, or was it more than in some ways they were the most modern and powerful segment of the society?

SC: Well, I think it’s both. I think they married up this idea of decolonization with the fact that the military had the capacity to organize society and forge these new political systems. Now just to clarify, obviously Algeria was the most colonial – most penetrated country in the world. The French were there from 1830 to 1962. Egypt had a history of colonial penetration, as well. Not as much obviously in Turkey – the Ottoman Empire itself was a colonial power and the Republic of Turkey was founded obviously on the ashes of the Ottoman Empire – didn’t have this problem, although they did have the problem after World War I where allied powers sought to carve up even the Anatolian homeland of Turkey. So, there are quite different degrees to which this issue of colonialism played into it, but…

HK: But there in Turkey it’s the collapse of an empire.

SC: It’s the collapse of empire, exactly. And they in Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and his associates, his comrades in the military, were able to forge the Republic of Turkey based on this idea of a new Turkish man, and that they had the organizational capacity to bring this about. The free officers in Egypt were responding to the predations of the British tutelage and King Farruk’s corruption and were able to weave a nationalist narrative that finally Egyptians – because of course, King Farruk was Albanian in origin – that finally Egyptians ruled over Egypt. And of course, in Algeria the ALN, FLN, the Army of National Liberation, and the National Liberation Front, obviously had much to work with in building a nationalist pantheon based on the colonialism. And to this day the militaries in all three cases remain central to the nationalist narratives of all three countries, and an important source of legitimacy for the place of the militaries in all three countries.

HK: It seems that you watch the Battle of Algiers, or you think of these military men seizing power from King Farouk – the idealism there, the hope for the future – you talked about your parents and the idealism of the period, of the Kennedy administration, what was happening in the world, and so
SC: Right. The first order question for those who are interested in promoting democracy in the Middle East – and I have no commitment one way or the other – I mean, to be sure, wouldn’t it be nice if everybody lived in freedom and democracy, but my interest, the intellectual questions and puzzles for me are why these regimes are as stable, why [is] the authoritarian character of them so stable? And to me, it has everything to do with the founding moments of these regimes and that they’re done by military officers who established institutions that essentially push these countries in a certain political trajectory, and it’s very hard, after five, six decades, eight decades, to alter institutions in a way that would shift the trajectory of their political development. And the officers, to this day – we were just talking a moment ago how they had the organizational capacity. They really were, at one moment, forces for progress and modernization where increasingly they have become, particularly in Algeria and Egypt, conservative elements clinging to an increasingly illegitimate status quo, but nevertheless they have created these systems that ensure that the political order survives.

HK: We’ll talk later about democratization but in each of these cases, in each of these regimes, you lay out the issues that were fundamental in their definition, their narrative, about why they would keep these institutions and keep control. Let’s run through – so that in a way, economic development as an issue became very important for them. Why?

SC: Well, because they became intertwined in the economic development of these countries. And so, both at those early days they were the engines of this economic growth and then subsequently their wellbeing was dependent upon their involvement in the economy. And that’s very, very clear in the Algerian cases and the Egyptian cases, not as clear with the Turks because it’s more a professional military, but nevertheless the military in Turkey is deeply intertwined in the economy through a variety of channels, one of which is its retirement program. Ten percent of their paychecks go directly into investment into a variety of investments throughout the Turkish government. So, a vested interest developed in certain businesses, a certain way economic reform could be undertaken. For example, we talk a lot about economic reform and privatization in places like Egypt and Algeria. There are whole sectors of the Egyptian economy that are off limits to privatization because those are sectors that the military itself controls. The military in Egypt produces footwear, spring water, security services, aviation services, travel services, ovens, they’re the biggest player in agribusiness in Egypt, and that is a way in which – one, they make the argument that it reduces the burden on the Egyptian budget, but it’s also a way for people to make money.

HK: And is this possible because – basically none of these countries are fighting wars, really – well, no, that wouldn’t be true because Egypt was fighting Israel, so I guess the argument – I mean, a lot of their concern in terms of security is really internal security on one level, and then on the other
hand, where they’ve had to fight wars, then there was a resolution of that, and then this kind of consolidation that you’re talking about continued, as is in the case of the Egyptian military.

SC: Right. Turkey is perhaps another – we have to tweak that a little bit, when it comes to Turkey, as I do in the book. It’s the second largest military in NATO and was built to fight the Soviets. But for example, the Egyptians and the Algerians are not there to – those militaries are not there necessarily to fight wars or project power, they’re essentially instruments of political control, and as the officers are the backbone of the regimes and the beneficiaries of the regimes, that’s essentially what those militaries are about. In Turkey as well, even though Turkey can project power and fight wars, the officers are very much interested, and in fact have endowed upon themselves, the right that exists in their own internal service codes to intervene in the political system when they see fit, based on their own interpretations of what is appropriate political development or not.

HK: So, in addition to benefiting from the distribution of resources in these systems, their position to intervene in the context of forces that they feel threaten them…

SC: Absolutely. I mean, the system – the current senior commands are the inheritors of a system that was essentially built in which they become the primary beneficiaries, and thus also the primary defenders.

HK: So, what is another area – we’ve talked a little about the economy, we’ve talked a little about national security and internal security – to what extent, as a result of their initial actions in winning independence, do they dominate the narrative about nationalism and identity?

SC: Well, that’s precisely – and extremely important to all three militaries is their central place in the nationalist pantheon of all three countries. And you see this being reproduced over and over and again, that the sons of the armed forces were able to forge these independent modern states, and they are the backbone, in Turkey the intelligentsia, on and on in which they are placed as central to the independence and then identity of the country. And in places like Egypt, for example, regaining the Sinai is intertwined with this nationalist [...?...], and the heroic role that the Egyptian military after the crushing defeat of 1967 – their heroic role in the crossing of 1973, and their initial victories in that conflict. So, these things tend to reinforce these nationalist narratives that place the military at the center.

HK: And when speaking of Egypt it’s very clear from your analysis that external actors – but not ready to go to the positive ways in which external actors can make a difference. But for example, in the case of Egypt, the military aid given after the settlement with Israel, after the ’73 war and the return of the Sinai, becomes a critical element in their aggrandizement of power, that is the Egyptian military.
SC: Right. Essentially the $1.3 billion that the United States has provided each year since then is a critical component that helps make the Egyptian military run, and has been important as a result in maintaining the stability of these authoritarian political systems. We have indirectly played that role.

HK: You talk about the codes, the normative system, that are kind of a hidden element of their ability to dominate the system. Talk a little about that. What do you have in mind there?

SC: Well, I became fascinated, in the process of writing this book, with what social scientists call informal institutions. Those are those unwritten, uncodified norms, rules of the game, and one of the ways I describe it in the book – and then I had a funny article about this in Slate.com – was about traffic in Cairo. And to the uninitiated traffic in Cairo looks very dangerous, but in this chaos there’s actually order, it’s just a matter of understanding the rules of the road. I didn’t open a book, I didn’t go to driving school, but after living in Cairo for a time I understood when I could cross the street and when I couldn’t cross the street, because nobody follows the traffic lights or the actual written rules. There’s this whole informal rules of the road that once you learn that you can wade into traffic and live. And it’s sort of similar in the way in which you have to look at politics in these countries. There’s a whole series of informal institutions that condition the behavior of political actors in these systems, and importantly the kinds of patterns of civil/military relations in these countries condition the way in which civilian politicians and civilians approach certain issues. A great example of that is in Turkey. There was, at one time, in the Turkish constitution, an article that enjoined the civilian leaders to make the recommendations of the military dominated national security council a priority. These things are just recommendations, but only rarely did the civilians not follow those recommendations, because had they not it would have been at their peril given past patterns of civil/military relations. It was nothing written and everything on that national security council which had five officers and the top civilian leadership in even numbers, and the president of the republic who was a civilian, there was nothing that said that the balance of power was tilted in the military’s direction. In fact, it was done by consensus, but based on the past patterns of civil/military relations coups in Turkey, in 1960 and 1971, 1980 and 1997, the military generally had the upper hand in those types of meetings, and thus the civilians gave priority to the recommendations of the officers.

HK: You turn to an Italian political theorist to understand some of this, because bottom line, what you’re unraveling and you’re explaining to the reader is that a lot of institutions that appear to be the road to democracy as we understand it in the United States aren’t that at all. They are a way of sort of enhancing and consolidating power. Tell us a little about that and the ideas of Gramsci.

SC: Sure. I owe my delving into Gramsci, and as I like to say, marinating myself in Gramsci, to your old friend, Ian Lustick.

HK: [laughs] I noticed that.
SC: And Gramsci was really enlightening because we have, when we talk about things like civil society and elections, a kind of Topelian [?] view of these things, and Gramsci had a much darker view, in particular of civil society. But what he demonstrated was that these kinds of things are – a relatively freer press, regularly held elections, parliaments – these are things that can actually serve as the outer perimeters of defense for regimes in two ways, by deflecting and defusing opposition to the regimes themselves. In essence, what he was saying was the defenders of these regimes respond to demands from below while maintaining the authoritarian core. So, it mattered little – so, yes, let’s have regularly scheduled elections – and that happens throughout the Middle East – and that was a way of accepting…

HK: Coopting.

SC: Right, co-opting and taking account – I think is exactly the words that Gramsci used, take account of these demands from below without actually altering the nature and character of the regime. And we’ve seen this happen in this push for democratization that the Bush administration undertook starting in 2003 where you had Middle Eastern leaders maneuvering these positions, and legalizing political parties, and holding new elections like they did in Saudi Arabia, but in the end it never altered the character of the regimes and a good argument can be made that it helped entrench the power of these regimes.

HK: Now the new actor on the horizon, really, in all of these countries are the Islam cist parties, and ironically they seem to represent at one level the new wave of democracy in the sense that they try to use the institutions of democracy to actually gain power. Talk a little about that, and this is true in all three of these countries.

SC: Sure. First, the Islamists have been on the scene for quite some time but have become adept at trying to use the pseudo or quasi democratic institutions of the state, these things that leaders have used to actually consolidate their power, but to inject them with meaning and power in order to advance their own agendas. What I bring out in detail in Ruling But Not Governing is this kind of battle between Islamists who want to empower these empty institutions and those of the defenders of the state who want them to remain essentially hollow – they want it to be a democratic façade, because the democratic façade actually serves their interests, whereas the Islamists, these dedicated opposition movements, want to use those things and use the discourse of reform and democracy to advance their own particular agendas. And that’s where you get this kind of clash between Islamists and the military. It’s not always a violent clash, this is really a political struggle and it’s been going on for some time, and you get a kind of syndrome, a pattern of politics in which the Islamists are permitted to do that for a period of time until they accumulate a certain amount of power, and then the defenders of the regime state – then it’s too risky for them to have them in the political arena and they push them out, and then the process starts over and over again.

HK: And you say that “Islamic parties seek the transformation of society through a long-term strategy that emphasizes Islamic values and provision of services as mechanisms of mobilization.”
So, it’s a real – their power, in a way, the hope for their power comes from mobilizing people, providing social services, and so on.

SC: Well, it’s clear in all three of the cases that the Islamist movements, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the FIS in Algeria – and in this book I talk about the Refah party which is the predecessor to the current Islamist group in Turkey, which is called Justice and Development – all to tremendously successful effect use the provision of social services as a mechanism of political mobilization, so that at that moment when they were able to participate in the political arena and run in these elections, those people who benefited from their services became the foot soldiers in their movement, and they were able to, certainly in Algeria and certainly in Turkey, to score some significant political gains.

HK: And I think you’re suggesting here that there is a real misperception on the part often of the United States – I remember – I think it was in Algeria that you referred to really the misperception of whether this actually – the goal here was violence or not, and so on. So, there is a tendency to misinterpret their goals, on the one hand, and then to misinterpret the reaction of the military regimes on the other.

SC: Well, certainly. I think that it’s the case that first, in the United States the U.S. Government tends to lump Islamist groups altogether and don’t differentiate them. Certainly the Turkish Islamist groups which have never taken up arms against the state are different in a whole host of ways, but that’s a particular one, than the Muslim Brotherhood or the FIS was in Algeria. And in Algeria we can’t go back in time, we don’t live in a counterfactual world, but there was reason to believe that once the FIS entered into parliament, should that election have gone through, that the FIS was truly a front.

HK: And this is the Islamic party…

SC: The Islamic party in Algeria. It was truly a front and would probably fracture once it entered parliament, and then the other parties would have still been able to work as a majority. But that is not the way in which the military has viewed this. In Algeria they view a grave threat to the political order that they created in 1962, and thus nullified those elections. We tended to follow the French lead on that, which was to support the officers, and we did. And that’s essentially our policy in Egypt, which was – Mubarak, the old soldier, is always going to hold the line on the Islamists, and that’s where our interests lie.

HK: Now it’s interesting here because the misinterpretation of these Islamic parties, in addition to our support for the military, seems to come from an uncertainty about whether Islamicist parties can use democracy effectively rather than just using it to take power and then set up a regime governed by Sharia, and so on. Talk a little about that, because you’re really suggesting implicit in what you’re describing and analyzing is that they can democratize – they can use democracy and there is hope for them evolving through democracy.
SC: Well, it’s certainly one possibility. I think the uncertainty in the U.S. Government, and the
trepidation about this, is well founded. Certainly in the case of Turkey this is an Islamist movement
that has sought to use the quasi or semi-democratic institution of the state to advance an agenda, but
in 2002 the Justice and Development Party, which is the inheritor of a number of Islamist parties,
has used that power to make Turkey more democratic, more pluralist, more modern than it’s ever
been before. The book remains out on an organization like the Muslim Brotherhood, which has
become quite adept in the discourse of democratization and reform but, to my knowledge, has never
repudiated its ultimate goal of building an Islamic state under its particular interpretation of Islamic
law, which would be counter to basic principles of democracy. Now I’m not suggesting that there’s
no room for evolution within these organizations, and there’s certainly some evidence of it, but what
hamstrings the U.S. Government when it wants to promote democracy is that the downside risk of
that is too great for the United States should they come into power and it be one man, one vote, one
time. Can they evolve? Absolutely, there’s no reason to believe that they can’t, but I’m also suspect
of arguments that say, well, just by the dint of their participation in elections, and should they
accumulate power and come to power, that this will moderate them because the burdens of power
will moderate them. I don’t think there’s any evidence of that. We have cases where Islamist groups
have accumulated power and participated in governments, like Hezbollah in Lebanon, or Hamas in
Palestine, and there was no incentive for them to actually moderate. In fact, there was every
incentive for them to continue to pursue the agendas that they are now pursuing.

HK: And in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, their evolution is a link to the al-Qaeda
narrative, basically, in the sense that al-Qaeda is a break-off from the Muslim Brotherhood, people
like Zawahiri, when linked up to the globalization activity that resulted from the Afghan war.

SC: Well, certainly. First, let me just say that the Muslim Brotherhood itself, the Egyptian branch
of the Muslim Brotherhood, has never engaged – shouldn’t say that – hasn’t engaged in violence
since at least the 1970s, and even prior to that there’s…

HK: So, the military reaction worked, in a sense, in that…

SC: Well, I think that the crackdowns of the 1960s convinced – the crackdowns on the Muslim
Brotherhood in the 1960s convinced them that they had to dismantle their paramilitary apparatus
because it wasn’t profitable for them, rather their historic mission of Islamicizing society from below,
which served them in the long term, rather than taking on the state and the military directly. But
you raise an interesting point. Iman Zawahiri, who is al-Qaeda’s number two, broke from the
Brotherhood at a very early age because they weren’t radical enough for him, and Sayyid Qutb Orut
[?] was a Muslim Brotherhood radicalized in Nassar’s prisons and developed the concept that
motivates a lot of jihadis now, which is that even in Muslim societies, modern Muslim societies can
live in a state of jahiliyyah, which is ignorance, and are thus ripe for jihad, and that provided a
pretext for organizations like Zawahiri’s al-Jihad, which was prior to al-Qaeda or the Islamic group,
to take on the Egyptian state, because they felt that Egypt was in a state of jahiliyyah or ignorance.
And this has been something that, as I said, is a motivator for members of al-Qaeda and the international, transnational jihadist movement.

HK: If we look at the policy question of how the west can influence positive change, you implicitly compare what the EU is doing, and here you talk a lot about the process of enlargement. Turkey’s hopes of entering the EU have led it under the Islamic party to institute a number of reforms across the board that appear to be undermining the elements of military authoritarianism. So, talk about that model, and also, compare it a little to the U.S., because our efforts at aid, for example, to the Egyptian military have not been tied to incentives that would lead them to change.

SC: I think it’s important to recognize the role that the EU has played in Turkey’s transition, which is not yet complete, but given what I lay out in the book about the institutional settings of the three cases the Turks left to themselves would never have been able undertake the thoroughgoing reform that they did. They needed an anchor and that anchor for reform was in the incentives of EU membership, which permitted the Islamists to lead a coalition of conservative Muslims, big business, urban cosmopolitan elites, and your average Turk, who for all different reasons wanted to be in the European Union, and that allowed them to carry out these very successful reforms that they undertook between 2002 and 2004. What was so interesting about the EU – because this is not to suggest that the EU hasn’t engaged in kind of double standards in dealing with the Turks and been not so great with the Turks all the time – but the EU altered the interests of Turkey’s Islamists who had previously railed against the west and constrained the ability of the military to act. Now how did that happen? Well, what is it that the Islamists in Turkey want at base? They want a truly secular political system, one like we have here in the United States where you can pray however you want, you can wear religious garb, which you can’t do in Turkey because their secular system does not separate mosque and state. It injects the government into religion, to police religion, to make sure it doesn’t threaten the republican order. The Turks saw Brussels as the way of forging a truly secular political order. The popularity of the EU process in turn constrained the military from undoing these reforms. This is very, very important. Now how do we take that story and gain some insight from that, the particulars of that story, into U.S. policy in the Middle East? It’s clear that the push/pull dynamics between the EU and Turkey are different than the push/pull dynamics between the United States and the Arab world. We’re not going to offer Egypt to become part of our own exclusive club of states, Egypt’s not going to be the fifty-first state, we’re not going to add a star for Egypt, but there’s something – if you take it up a level of abstraction there’s something to the idea of incentives, and there’s something that U.S. policy has never tried before. You mentioned our aid to Egypt. Our aid to Egypt is predicated on security, not predicated on helping to create an environment conducive to change. And so, my insight is, well, why not try incentives?

HK: Now the contradiction that I see in this for U.S. policy is the following. On the one hand, we can bring the fruits of globalization, maybe not becoming the fifty-second state – presumably Israel would be the fifty-first state but [laughs]…

SC: Well, you can’t forget about Washington DC.
HK: Yeah, okay, Washington – so fifty-third state, the benefits of trading in the American market – so to a certain extent there are incentives presumably that we could offer. But on the other hand, because of our heavy emphasis on security and our role as the only global superpower with an unequaled military potential, the other side of American policy is military aid, so that we’re torn between these two tracks, whereas the EU has only one track.

SC: Right. And it’s true, it is a problem with this, and it was a problem with the way in which the Bush administration approached democratic change to begin with, and it raises a question of whether we should actually even be in the business of promoting change, if what we’re truly interested at core – our core interests in the region, free flow of oil, Israel’s security, and preventing any other state from dominating the region other than ourselves – whether we should actually be involved in it. And that’s a question I think policymakers need to answer, which they haven’t done. The problem that the Bush administration ran into was this. They were never able to answer the question, how they were going to protect their security interests in the short and medium term for that long-term where they had a hunch that more democratic countries in the Middle East would be better partners for the United States, never been able to figure out how that was supposed to happen, and the democracy promotion policy unraveled when the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt did well in election, and Hamas won an election.

HK: In Palestine.

SC: In the Palestinian areas. And my insight into incentives is this. We probably – I’m not sure it’s as much of a contradiction, because we wouldn’t incentivize the entirety of the military aid, we would say to the Egyptians, “You get $1.3 billion from us.” That’s safe. But the Egyptians complained bitterly that that $1.3 billion is the same $1.3 billion that they got in 1981. As a result, adjusted for inflation it’s really worth half, so if they wanted another billion to rebalance that aid, well, we would say to them, “You have access to another billion dollars in aid but there are some things that you would need to do in return, or to do before you got that money.” Now that sounds terrible to some people but it’s something that we haven’t done before and we should do. It strikes me as better than cutting aid, strikes me as more productive than necessarily building civil society or promoting economic reform, and it certainly seems to me potentially more productive than invading a country in order to make it a democracy, like we did in Iraq.

HK: There’s an irony here because you have laid out, following Gramsci, that the extent to which institutions can be co-opted by the military, and so can we keep up with the facades of democracy, on the one hand, and on the other hand, as democracy becomes real the beneficiary may be groups within the society that we see as opposing our interests. So, there’s a real contradiction there.

SC: Absolutely. In this whole policy, this whole idea of democracy promotion – as I said, the architects of the policy, the defenders of the policy, the people who would like to continue to do it – and again, I approach this issue from both my interest in the durability of regimes and my
intellectual interest in this question of transitions democracy – but we need to ask ourselves whether that’s worth it. For the time being, groups that don’t like us may come to power. Is the risk to our core interests in the Middle East worth it for that longer term when we think consolidated liberal democracies in the Middle East will emerge and be better partners for the United States? I would think that it’s going to be a long time, that short and medium term, and policymakers need to ask themselves whether the risk – and that’s really taking a leap – to our core interests, as I said, free flow of oil, Israeli security, preventing other states from dominating the region, combating terrorism, whether those things are worth it to promote – for very uncertain processes of transitions democracy. We know it’s not linear and we know these states can be violent and people come to power who are not our friends.

HK: And this analysis, and this dilemma that you’re posing really – it’s not just in these three countries. You talk in the book about Pakistan, you just mentioned Hamas – because in both cases we’re seeing that there is – well, in the case of Pakistan, a military that wants to hold on to power, and forcing elections may not lead to the outcomes we want, on the one hand, and the same was true in the case of Hamas, where we forced an election with the result that Hamas won.

SC: Right. Well, I think the Hamas case is so interesting because it was the event that essentially unraveled the Bush administration’s robust efforts to promote democracy, and you hear a lot about it afterwards, and the pressure was certain taken off people like Hosni Mubarak or the King of Saudi Arabia. And the election – the reason why we had that election in Palestine had everything to do with Iraq. The President needed to demonstrate here – this was a domestic political issue – needed to demonstrate to the American people that his policy in Iraq was paying off in terms of helping to transform the Middle East, and thus the administration insisted over the objections of the Palestine Authority and the Israelis that they stage these elections in which Hamas came to power, then Hamas came to power. They didn’t know what to do, so they said, “Well, it was a free and fair election but it’s a terrorist organization so we can’t deal with it,” which further diminished the Bush administration’s credibility on the question of democracy promotion and, I think, was fatal to this project, at least in the short run. As you mentioned, Pakistan, too, is closer to the cases that’re within my universe of analysis because you have this military establishment that has an abiding interest in the political development of the country. It strikes me though that the difference between Pakistan and a case like Turkey, for example, goes back to this question of informal institutions. Whereas the Turkish military has been able to cow civilian politicians into doing things or not doing certain things, Nawaz Sharif and the late Benazir Bhutto wanted to do what they wanted to do regardless of what the threats were from the military, so they were never able to really tame the civilian arena, whereas the Turks, for example, were able to tame the civilian arena. But in many ways Pakistan is very similar to both Turkey and Egypt. When Pervez Musharraf, for example, came to power in 1999 he did everything possible to replicate the worst aspects of the Turkish national security state. He spent some time growing up in Turkey and was quite enamored with Kemalism. These days where he’s taken off his uniform but puts on a civilian suit, it’s reminiscent of the situation in Egypt.
HK: Well, on that note I want to thank you very much, Steven, for being with us and…

SC: It’s my pleasure.

HK: …I think people are going to want to read your book for insight into a set of problems that aren’t going to go away, both within these countries and as American policy tries to address them. So, let me show our audience your book again, and thank you very much for being with us.

SC: My pleasure. Thank you.

HK: And thank you very much for joining us for this “Conversation With History.”

[End of Interview]