



ARAB UPRISINGS

The State of the Egyptian Revolution

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POMEPS BRIEFINGS **6**



Contents

The next phase of the revolution	5
Once more to Tahrir	7
Tahrir turning points	9
Why Egyptian progressives should be chanting ‘economy first’	12
What have workers gained from Egypt’s revolution?	14
Will Egypt’s Activists Boycott the Election?	18
The mind of Egypt’s military.	21
What’s behind the Egyptian military’s attacks on civil society?	24
How Mubarak’s trial brings justice to Egypt.	25
The Muslim Brotherhood as helicopter parent	28
Inside Egypt’s Salafis.	30
Egypt’s democratic Jihadists?	34
Egypt’s Wild West.	36



The Project on Middle East Political Science

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Online Article Index

The next phase of the revolution

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/01/the_next_phase_of_the_revolution

Once more to Tahrir

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/07/08/once_more_to_tahrir

Tahrir turning points

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/01/tahrir_turning_points

Why Egyptian progressives should be chanting ‘economy first’

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/18/why_egyptian_progressives_should_be_chanting_economy_first

What have workers gained from Egypt’s revolution?

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/20/what_have_workers_gained_from_egypt_s_revolution

Will Egypt’s Activists Boycott the Election?

http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/09/06/will_egypts_activists_boycott_the_election

The mind of Egypt’s military

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/23/the_mind_of_egypts_military

What’s behind the Egyptian military’s attacks on civil society?

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/18/whats_behind_the_egyptian_militarys_attacks_on_civil_society

How Mubarak’s trial brings justice to Egypt

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/17/how_mubaraks_trial_brings_justice_to_egypt

The Muslim Brotherhood as helicopter parent

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/05/27/the_muslim_brotherhood_as_helicopter_parent

Inside Egypt’s Salafis

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/02/inside_egypts_salafis

Egypt’s democratic Jihadists?

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/13/egypt_s_democratic_jihadists

Egypt’s Wild West

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/08/24/egypts_wild_west

On January 25, Egyptian activists inspired by the fall of Tunisia’s President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali took to the streets chanting against President Hosni Mubarak. Eighteen turbulent, astonishing days later, the Egyptian military removed Mubarak from power. Seven months after Mubarak’s fall, however, Egyptian activists are frustrated and the success of the revolution remains unclear.

The January 25 revolution did not come out of the void. Many of these activists had been protesting for years, as part of the demonstrations in support of the Palestinian Intifada and against the U.S. invasion of Iraq to the Kefaya movement against the succession of Gamal Mubarak and the April 6 Youth Movement in support of labor protests. Those protest movements shattered taboos against criticizing the regime, transformed Egyptian public discourse, and introduced a generation of impatient, frustrated youth to the possibility of political action. Innovative forms of collective action and social networking, such as the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook group, brought massive social discontent into the public in new ways. But the activists had largely failed to force meaningful political change, and after absurdly fraudulent Parliamentary elections in late 2010 the Egyptian regime seemed firmly in control.

What made January 25 extraordinary was not that Egyptians protested against the Mubarak regime — that had been happening for a decade. What made it extraordinary was that for the first time, hundreds of thousands of ordinary, non-activist Egyptians joined them on the streets to demand the overthrow of the regime. In the months since Mubarak fell, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has ruled without any civilian institutions. Its behavior, as recounted by [Hanna](#) and [Aziz](#), has been erratic and frustrating to many Egyptians. It antagonizes protestors, with nigh-indefensible use of military trials and security forces repressing demonstrations, but repeatedly responds to their demands if enough people come into the streets. It promises early elections, but leaves the actual election law and procedures in an ambiguous state of uncertainty. It rejects the call for drafting a new constitution before elections, but then reverses itself to accept the idea of “Supra-Constitutional Principles.” For most Egyptian activists today, the SCAF has become the face of the counter-revolution.

But even as the SCAF infuriates activists, who have long since abandoned the slogan of “the people and the army are one hand,” it remains by far the most popular and trusted institution in the country. Activists, as discussed by [Strasser](#), [Hellyer](#), and [Lynch](#), have struggled to retain a comparable level of popular sympathy. At times they have broken through to rekindle massive demonstrations, especially with a glorious showing on July 8. But most of their recent calls for “million man marches” have produced only tiny demonstrations by dedicated activists comparable to pre-revolutionary days. The decision to occupy Tahrir Square after July 8 proved disastrous, alienating most of the Egyptian public. The march on the Ministry of the Defense was met with violence by the locals in Abassiya. Most of the activist groups decided to leave Tahrir before Ramadan, while the rest were cleared away — quite brutally — by security forces.

Activists have therefore struggled to find a workable strategy. The masses that joined them to overthrow Mubarak have proven less interested in the cacophony of issues that now motivate the activist groups. Some (see [Beinin](#) and [Fadel](#)) propose refocusing on economic and social issues. But most remain primarily focused upon their own issues — the right to protest, military trials for protestors, baltagiya attacks on protests. Their anger and dismay with the SCAF is increasingly affecting the prospects for a legitimate democratic transition. The same activist groups which detest the SCAF repeatedly push for policies which would perpetuate its place in power — from “Constitution First” to demands to delay the election to give them more time to organize to an appeal to draft an entirely new election law. There is a growing risk that these groups will boycott the upcoming elections (see [Lynch](#)), which would badly stunt their legitimacy.

Islamists have done well in the new Egypt, but face many problems of their own. Perhaps the most surprising development has been the meteoric rise of politically engaged Salafi groups (see [Bohn](#)) and even former jihadist organizations (see [Ashour](#)). The massive Islamist rally on July 29 in Tahrir Square (see [Lynch](#)) shocked Egyptians and the international community alike — and even surprised the Salafis themselves. The Muslim Brotherhood has relentlessly organized for the upcoming elections (see [Brown](#)), but has shown signs of strain. It has lost many of its best youth activists, struggled with the new Salafi challenge on its right flank, and has been uncharacteristically clumsy in its political maneuvering.

Where is the Egyptian revolution today? Hosni Mubarak, his sons, and top former regime officials are on trial (see [Browers](#)). Parliamentary elections are scheduled for November. Changes have swept the country at all levels. But people nevertheless feel despondent. The economy continues to struggle. Violence in the Sinai rattles nerves. The SCAF remains inscrutable and unaccountable. And activists find themselves under pressure. This briefing lays out the best of the Middle East Channel’s reporting and analysis from the last few months to show where Egypt has been and where it might be going.

Marc Lynch, Director of POMEPS

The next phase of the revolution

By H.A. Hellyer, June 1, 2011

A wide array of political groups and young-people movements called for the second “Day of Rage” last week — the first being the first Friday during the 18-day uprising that led to the overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. A small, but vocal minority were calling for a new presidential council to replace the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) until elections could be held later in the year, as well as demanding a constitution be drawn up now, not after the elections. Far more wanted a trial for Mubarak and his clique, as well as a restraining of the military against those who decided to protest and an end of military trials. On Friday, May 27, all of these demands and many others were present in Tahrir.

The day went without violence, and most left the square in the early evening, satisfied that they had made their point and that they had renewed their commitment to the revolution. But the day raised key strategic concerns for the future of the revolutionary forces and their success for a changing Egypt. The first relates to perceptions of the revolutionary forces by the wider public — and the second is the possibility of deepening splits among those forces.

There is a grave perception problem within wider Egyptian society of the revolutionary forces. One of the revolution’s most significant achievements was its ability to unite so many disparate sectors of Egyptian society in a common cause; that unity is one of the counterrevolution’s most cherished targets. Counterrevolutionary forces, as well as those who were ambivalent toward the revolution, are already trying to perpetuate the impression that the revolutionaries and the wider population are miles apart. They do so by portraying minorities within the revolutionary camp as being the majority — or simply misrepresenting them altogether. For instance, many within the ultraconservative Salafi movement portrayed the protesters last Friday as having been irreligious and morally corrupt (potentially damning in a conservative

country like Egypt). The imam for Friday congregational prayer disputed that misrepresentation on May 27, as did the thousands in Tahrir Square who followed him in prayer; but the potential for damaging the revolutionaries’ reputation was real.

Other portrayals are misleading on the basis of focusing on minorities within the revolutionary camp. Many within the media portrayed large portions of the revolutionaries at large as wanting to install a president council to run the country instead of the SCAF, as well as wanting to install a constitution prior to elections — two demands that would probably be opposed by the majority of Egyptians, who would rightfully view them as undemocratic. On May 27, only a minority in Tahrir Square pushed for either of those demands — but that minority was presented unrepresentatively, which then opened up the revolutionaries to accusations of being yet more detached from public opinion.

Perhaps the most dangerous perception issue is not about the demands of the revolutionaries, but the priority in which they are perceived to rank them. The military trials for civilians, the lack of speed in bringing regime stalwarts to trial, and the treatment of protesters by the military when they are imprisoned are incredibly unpopular across the revolutionary camp. But by and large, they understand that the military is a vital institution for the overall steadiness of Egypt and that the Army enjoys great popularity with Egyptians at large. As such, they have been trying to differentiate between the SCAF and the military — reserving their support for the latter and their harshest criticism for the former. Nevertheless, a minority portion of the revolutionaries, active particularly in the media, has focused increasingly heavily on its discontent with the SCAF — to the point where opposition to the SCAF for this portion is perhaps highest on its priority list.

While average Egyptians might view complaints about the SCAF sympathetically, these are still not foremost on their minds. The majority of Egyptians are primarily concerned with economic recovery (more than 40 percent live around the poverty line, and their lives are getting harder) and security (the police may have partially returned to the streets, but they are certainly not doing their jobs). Neither issue is perceived as being at the *top* of the protesters' list of demands, even if they might be on the list. Similarly, most in Egypt support the idea of a minimum wage, but it's not at the *top* of the list for the protesters.

It is also not clear that wider Egyptian society (including within the military itself) distinguishes the SCAF so clearly from the Army — and the Army enjoys a significantly high degree of popular support, in spite of its many shortcomings (which seem to increase weekly). It may be that within the revolutionary camp, feelings vis-à-vis the military may also be complex, especially as the military's mistakes increase; but increasingly, the media is portraying the protesters as taking a direct, confrontational posture — a posture that is starker than public opinion would, at least at present, advocate.

These are all PR problems par excellence: ones that could be exploited in the elections to portray those political forces who support the protests as being, at best, aloof from average Egyptians and, at worst, acting contrary to their best interests.

There is a major political force that rejected May 27, and its organized opposition to it could lead to an even more significant problem for the revolution: disunity. The Muslim Brotherhood practically attempted to portray May 27 as almost counterrevolutionary and reaffirmed its support for the military and the SCAF, even while issuing demands that are similar to the majority of the revolutionary forces. Many liberals in Tahrir Square

were pleased that the Brotherhood was officially absent (although many of the Brotherhood youth were there). However, its absence does not come without a price. The blame for this separation certainly falls on the Brotherhood's leadership — progressively, it has taken political positions that have been arrived at independently, rather than in concert with other revolutionary forces. For example, it actively boycotted the May 27 protest and in its aftermath officially withdrew its youth movement representation from the wider Revolutionary Youth Coalition (the Brotherhood youth movement had disobeyed direct instructions in participating). But the rest of the revolutionary forces cannot forsake the Brotherhood if they want the revolution to succeed. A forsaken Muslim Brotherhood by the rest of the revolutionary forces is one that is, by default, closer to the ultraconservative, Salafi trend, which is hardly positive for the success of the revolution. In any event, the Brotherhood at present commands more support than any, and possibly all, of the other anti-Mubarak political forces.

May 27 was not a failure — but it was not a success either. If the next protest is to be truly successful, it will need to emphasize the unity of the revolution — the unity of the revolutionaries with the grassroots and the unity of the liberals with the Muslim Brotherhood, against the forces of the counterrevolution. Otherwise, while such a protest might not be a failure, it certainly will be laying down the basis for failure in the months to come. Those gaps have to be closed. The future of Egypt — and thus the future of many in the region who will look to Egypt as a model — depends on it.

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Once more to Tahrir

On a hot summer day, Egypt's revolution grinds on

By Max Strasser, July 8, 2011

CAIRO — Under a baking hot Egyptian afternoon sun, old women in full face veils mingle with teenage boys in designer jeans. Coptic Christians stand next to conservative Muslims, chanting together that they want freedom. Factory workers from the Nile Delta sit in tents, reading pamphlets passed out by web-savvy activists. The whole country is watching. On a Friday 147 days after Hosni Mubarak resigned from Egypt's presidency, tens of thousands of Egyptians are again taking to downtown Cairo's Tahrir Square to pressure their government to listen to their demands for change. Many are saying they will not leave the square until their demands are met. Meanwhile, other cities around Egypt are seeing similar protests.

If the scene is reminiscent of last winter's dramatic three-week uprising — scorching heat aside — it is not by coincidence. July 8's protest is an extension of the revolution, which many Egyptians believe has not yet been brought to fruition. The feeling has been reinforced in recent weeks by the perception that justice is not being served for dozens of corrupt officials who ran the country and then ordered the killing of protesters during the uprising. "Revolution First," reads a common protest sign in Tahrir.

"They don't care about change," Mohamed Said, a young electrical engineer, said of the military junta that now runs the country, as we stood in one of the square's few shady spots. "They just care about holding the situation together. But if we pressure them, they will respond."

During the 18 days that captured the world's attention, demonstrators around Egypt chanted what is now the iconic slogan of the Arab Spring: "The people demand the removal of the regime."

Five months later, the regime's figurehead is gone and some changes have occurred, but many here believe that

the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) is happy to keep most of the characteristics of the regime in place, from university presidents with ties to Mubarak's corrupt National Democratic Party to a new foreign minister who was a longtime Mubarak sycophant to continuing censorship of the media.

With everyone from trade unionists to ultraconservative Salafists participating in the protest, a single, unified list of demands is hard to find. In a statement released on July 4, the Coalition of Youth of the Revolution, which speaks for some revolutionaries, announced a list of ambitious demands that included economic concerns — like raising the minimum wage and increasing spending on health care and education — in addition to demands for political change, like cracking down on corruption and prosecuting police officers who violated human rights. When the Muslim Brotherhood announced its participation, the group dropped its economic and political demands and focused on reform of the security forces.

That might not be a problem. "I don't think we need to have a particular focus," Alaa Abd El Fattah, a prominent Egyptian blogger and longtime anti-regime activist, told me. "We are returning back to the slogan about the fall of the regime. Initially, when we toppled Mubarak, we felt that the rest of the job would be easy. Now it is obvious that the regime is regrouping and the SCAF has finally chosen a side," i.e., the regime's.

Euphoria followed Mubarak's resignation on Feb. 11, but since then the pace of change has been slow. In March, the much-despised domestic torture and spying apparatus was officially dissolved, but many of its ranking members kept their jobs — the institution was simply rebranded under old management. In April, Mubarak's ruling party was disbanded, but many of its cronies maintain their positions in influential institutions and some party members are

regrouping and forming new political parties. Mubarak and his sons have been detained for investigation on charges of corruption and killing protesters. The two sons are in jail, but Mubarak is said to be in a hospital in the Sinai resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh. (The ex-president allegedly had a heart attack after the investigation began in April. His defense lawyers claimed last month that he has cancer.) Many doubt he will ever stand trial.

The past few weeks have seen a surge of frustrations for pro-change Egyptians.

The most worrying issue has been a trend of postponements and acquittals in trials of former regime officials. On June 26, the trial of Habib el-Adly, the former interior minister responsible for the domestic security services and one of the most hated figures in the deposed regime, was postponed until late July. On Tuesday, July 5, a criminal court acquitted two former Mubarak-era ministers on corruption charges. A day later, seven police officers accused of killing protesters in January in the canal city of Suez — seen in Egypt as the beating heart of the revolution — were released on bail, prompting violent clashes between the families of murdered protesters and security forces.

“The judgment is slow, and that’s not what we need right now,” said Mohamed Mohsen, a middle-age employee at an import-export company, attending the protest. “We are in a revolution. A revolution demands speedy judgment and special judgment.”

Previous major protests have been preceded by concessions from the SCAF and the government. This time the concession came too little too late. On Thursday evening, just hours before the protests were set to begin and after some had already set up their tents, the interim interior minister announced that later this month there will be a major shake-up at the ministry, with hundreds of police officers to be fired. That’s barely a beginning, though. “Reform begins when those who were implicated in torture, murder, and corruption stand serious trials,” Fattah, the blogger, said.

The issue of justice for the families of those killed in the uprising, who are widely venerated and considered martyrs, has helped push frustration to the surface. On June 28, amid somewhat confusing circumstances, relatives of the martyrs clashed with the Interior Ministry’s security forces. More anti-regime forces arrived for the fight and a downtown battle of projectiles (rocks and glass bottles from the protesters; tear gas and, according to human rights organizations, live fire from the police) lasted for more than 12 hours.

“It’s the martyrs that brought people here today,” Said, the electrical engineer, told me. “If this were a protest just about the Constitution, it would be very different.”

Expectations for Friday were high. “May God protect the youth tomorrow who are fighting for justice for the martyrs,” Shaaban Hassan Al Magali, an elderly man who works odd jobs in downtown Cairo, said to me the day before the protests. “This is our country, and there must be justice for those who died for it.”

By Thursday afternoon, the small tent city that has been in the square since the clashes on June 28 had doubled in size. Over the past few days the area in and around Tahrir Square had seen an explosion of graffiti that reads “Take to the streets on July 8: The revolution is still on.”

But not everyone in Egypt is happy about a continuing revolution. “There are too many protests. Every week they are in Tahrir, and no one even knows why,” said Gameel Ali, who runs a small vegetable stand in downtown Cairo not far from the square. Ali says that when there are protests he has no business.

That sentiment is fairly common. Many Egyptians believe that ongoing political uncertainty contributes to the country’s current economic hardships, an argument that the state-run media, on which many Egyptians still rely for news, has eagerly promoted. Over the past few days, a previously unknown group calling itself the People’s Committee to Defend Egypt has been passing out fliers in subway stations and at busy street corners arguing that protesters against the military are destroying Egypt.

But the protesters don't necessarily need a majority of Egyptians to join them in the street in order to have their message heard by the SCAF and the interim government. According to a poll conducted this spring by the Abu Dhabi Gallup Center, only 11 percent of Egyptians participated in the 18-day uprising. But they were still able to topple a president who had been in power for 30 years.

Friday's demonstration suggests that the street can still put pressure on the SCAF. "The Egyptian revolution is now

going through a critical moment, a real fork in the road. It can either win and accomplish its goals or (heavens forbid), it can also lose, leaving the old regime to return in a slightly different form," Alaa Al Aswany, a bestselling novelist and respected public intellectual, wrote in a recent op-ed. "Only those who made the revolution can protect it."

Max Strasser is a writer and editor based in Cairo.



Tahrir turning points

By Marc Lynch, August 1, 2011

Al-Shaab Yureed Tatbiq Shari'a Allah! The people want to implement God's Sharia! That chant rang through my ears as I struggled through a jam-packed Tahrir Square on Friday, as hundreds of thousands of Islamists packed the symbolic home of Egypt's revolution to demand that their presence be known. Two days later, the ill-advised occupation of Tahrir Square by mostly secular and leftist political trends that began on July 8 largely ended, as most groups decided to pull out and then security forces cleared the remains. Feelings are running raw in Egypt as the revolution approaches yet another turning point. The galvanizing events of the weekend mark a new stage in one of the most urgent battles in post-Mubarak Egypt: who owns the revolution, and who may speak in its name?

Friday's demonstration was originally planned as an Islamist show of strength, defined by demands for "identity and stability," support for the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, and rejection of liberal efforts to draft "supra-constitutional principles." The "Day of Respecting the Will of the People" brought together an "Islamic Front" uniting most of the major Islamist trends including the

Muslim Brotherhood, the Gama'a al-Islamiyya, several Salafi parties, and others. Its planners saw it as a response to the July 8 protests, which launched the Tahrir sit-in, and to a series of political gambits launched by liberals and secularists which, in their view, were meant to sidestep the will of the people as expressed in the March referendum.

In the days before the demonstration, a group of political activists brokered an agreement to focus on the unity of the revolution rather than on divisive demands. This was a noble effort, but it proved impossible to maintain in the face of the enthusiasm of the mobilized Islamist cadres. Many of the political trends felt betrayed by the slogans and behavior of the Islamist groups, and pulled out of the demonstration in protest only to return for a counter-demonstration in the evening after most of the Islamists had departed. The days since the rally have been consumed with furious arguments and counter-arguments. Islamists argued that there should be nothing divisive about demanding Sharia, and the fact that the tense Friday passed without any of the feared violent clashes proves that they lived up to the most important part of the agreement.

The arguments are about far more than the question of who violated which agreements. The Islamist demonstration directly challenged the claim of the secular political forces to embody the revolution or the will of the people, and marked a significant escalation in an ongoing battle of narratives and identity. Why should a coalition of a few dozen small groups of activists have a greater claim on revolutionary legitimacy than the millions of ordinary people who made the revolution? Did the 77 percent yes vote in the referendum on constitutional amendments truly reveal, as so many argued, that the silent majority rejected their revolutionary vision? The show of massive Islamist numbers was meant to show that they, not the political trends, represented the Egyptian people. I overheard a number of proud and excited Salafis on the square marveling at their own presence and their numbers. That the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated its well-honed organization skills came as no surprise, but the ability of the usually disorganized Salafi trends to organize transportation for a large number of members into Cairo could not be dismissed.

The Western media coverage of the Islamist rally was misleading. I can't say that there were no chants or slogans about Osama bin Laden, since it was a long, crowded day in Tahrir. But bin Laden had virtually nothing to do with the day's message. The closest thing I heard to supporting terrorism was a surprisingly huge number of posters and chants for the repatriation of the blind sheikh and convicted terrorist Omar Abd al Rahman, a pet issue of the Gama'a al-Islamiyya. Nor is the frequently repeated claim that the Islamists avoided Egyptian flags accurate; in fact, there were thousands of Egyptian flags throughout the square. And while there were not nearly as many women as in earlier rallies, there were plenty there — including a group of women wearing niqab who reached out to help one of my female colleagues during a frightening crowd surge.

The common slogans demanding Sharia or the cries of "Islamiyya Islamiyya" should not be taken as a sign of the consolidation of a single, undifferentiated Islamist trend rising to power. The joint slogans masked considerable ongoing disagreements and competition among Islamist groups. All chanted for implementing Sharia, but when

pressed on specifics few seemed to have much more in mind than keeping Article 2 of the Constitution which defines Egypt as an Islamic country. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis do not agree on what implementing Sharia in Egypt would look like, or on many other issues, and will as likely be political rivals as a unified bloc. I watched two Salafis during the rally argue furiously over a flier opposing any constitution other than Sharia, with the other equally enthusiastic Islamist insisting that there must be a constitution informed by Sharia.

The more important point, easily lost in the political tumult, was that the Salafis and the Gama'a have now shown themselves to be all in for the game of democratic politics within the framework of the nation-state. When I met with leaders of the Salafi al-Nour Party in Alexandria a few days before the march, they spoke eagerly about democratic participation and drafting a platform offering practical solutions to economic and social problems (though of course Islamic identity, demands for Sharia, and conservative social norms still loom large in their worldview). For Salafis who have long defined themselves by the rejection of political participation and of nationalism, this is no small thing. After years of reading ideological tracts by Salafi figures explaining the illegitimacy of democracy and denouncing the Muslim Brothers for their political participation, it was rather exhilarating to hear hundreds of thousands of them demanding early elections. Many Egyptians continue, with reason, to worry about the depth of their democratic commitments and their conservative social agendas. But the changes have been remarkable.

The Muslim Brotherhood, for its part, faces a delicate situation. While it clearly relished the show of Islamist power, it also now has to worry about a backlash against that display of strength and the blurring of long-cultivated distinctions from other trends such as the Salafis. It has long sought to position itself as the moderate face of Islamism, triangulating against the more radical salafis and Gama'a to capture the pious middle ground. Sharing the stage with those forces on July 29, not only infuriated potential secular coalition partners but could also complicate its long-term efforts to reassure mainstream

voters. Brotherhood leaders such as Essam el-Erian and Mohammed el-Beltagy were almost immediately backpedaling, disavowing the more controversial slogans and claiming to have honored the agreements with the other political forces even if the Salafis violated the deal (the Salafis, for their part, claim to have never signed the deal in the first place). Muslim Brotherhood youth activists I spoke with after the rally were furious about how it had unfolded, and many even refused to participate.

But the Brotherhood's dilemma pales next to the new reality facing the political activists. The decision to occupy Tahrir looks increasingly like a grievous strategic blunder. Their appeal to revolutionary legitimacy grows more threadbare by the day, absent direct engagement with the issues about which Egyptians really care. While they clearly felt that they had no other way to maintain pressure on the SCAF, the sit-in quickly alienated almost everybody. The violence led by hostile locals that greeted their march on the Ministry of Defense in Abassiya seemed to symbolize their loss of popular sympathy. During a week in Cairo and Alexandria, I could not find a single person other than the protestors themselves with a good word to say about the Tahrir sit-in. The decision by most groups to end the sit-in ahead of Ramadan offered an opportunity for a fresh start — though the tenor of political discussion among the various activist groups suggests that there is no consensus about the lessons of the sit-in or the path forward.

The SCAF has contributed to the tense political environment. Its attack on the April 6 Movement and the activist community more broadly for its alleged foreign funding has cast a pall over their activities. In Alexandria, the sit-in organizers made me leave after an hour out of fear that I would be photographed in the tent city and used as evidence of American backing. Many participants in the ill-fated march to the Ministry of Defense believe that the hostile reception by the local neighborhood residents was the result of systematic disinformation and agitation against them. The SCAF itself has encouraged some of these problems by responding to some protestor demands, and thus validating their choice of street politics, but never going far enough on core demands like police reform,

stopping military trials for protestors, or compensation for the (increasingly controversial) martyr's families. It is not clear why they felt the need to forcibly empty Tahrir square after most groups had already decided to leave. But at least it seems to remain committed to the most important point of all — the need for elections as soon as possible to create a legitimate civilian government and allow their return to the barracks.

The display of bearded men and women in niqab clearly shocked the political groups that had made Tahrir their own. The reaction was not just about the violation of the agreement, but ran much deeper. On Twitter and Facebook and around the square, they made fun of the Islamist interlopers, ridiculing their behavior and their appearance and their intellect. But their fury could not hide some uncomfortable truths. How could these Islamists not be viewed as an integral part of the Egyptian people? The people wanted Hosni Mubarak gone, but they do not necessarily share the radical political demands of determined socialists or anarchists or cosmopolitan liberals. The Salafis bused in from the provinces are also Egyptians, and they can not simply be defined out of the newly emerging Egypt if it is to become genuinely democratic. The activists have long talked about "bringing Tahrir to the people." But when those people came to Tahrir, the activists fled.

It is easy to understand why frustrated protestors feel that taking to the streets is the only way to meaningfully pressure the SCAF, but street politics are not democratic politics. Making the size of crowds the currency of political power actively invited this week's Islamist response. Given their increasingly open skepticism of democracy and growing recognition that they are unlikely to win through elections, I would put even money at this point that they will opt to boycott the elections, on whatever reasons seem sufficient at the moment. This would be a disaster for them, and for Egypt. The Islamist demonstration and the end of the Tahrir sit-in should be a moment for all sides to catch their breaths, focus on their shared desire for a return to civilian rule and a transition to democracy, and prepare for the coming elections and a return to civilian rule.

Why Egyptian progressives should be chanting ‘economy first’

By Mohammad Fadel, Monday, July 18, 2011

It has now been a little more than five months since Hosni Mubarak was forced to resign as president of Egypt. While no one predicted that the post-Mubarak transition would be a stroll in the park, many Egyptians seem genuinely surprised at the extent of post-revolutionary divisions in Egypt. The transition has not been helped by a disturbing tendency of conflicting political forces to accuse their political opponents of working secretly for the “counter-revolution” or prematurely raising “particular” interests at a time when all citizens should be thinking only of the public good. And, as yesterday’s front page of the New York Times reported, the Egyptian military is exploiting ideological divisions among Egyptian civil society to entrench its status as an extra-constitutional actor, with the connivance of some liberal forces including one sitting justice on the Supreme Constitutional Court. Has revolutionary momentum in Egypt therefore ground to halt, confronted by the harsh reality of the complexities of governing a country of over 80 million people that suffered 30 years of institutional rot under the Mubarak administration? And if so, what can be done to renew revolutionary momentum?

While many liberals believe that regaining revolutionary momentum requires focusing their energy on establishing a bona fide liberal constitution as exemplified in the “constitution first” slogan, I believe the revolution would be better served by focusing on establishing the foundations for an accountable and effective government that would allow Egypt to make the structural changes its economy needs in order to establish a stable and prosperous democracy for all Egyptians in the long-term. Only after those conditions have been satisfied will it make sense to discuss the thornier and much more divisive questions like the relationship of religion to the state.

Despite the attention given to the ideological divisions between secularists and liberals on the one hand, and Islamists on the other, the fundamental division in Egypt is one of class. Debates about the character of the Egyptian

state and the extent of personal liberties is primarily an intra-elite debate that does not address the practical problems the vast majority of Egyptians face in their daily lives: how to find food, shelter, health, and education. We are all familiar now with the idea that 40 percent of Egyptians live on \$2 per day or less; but that should not lead us to believe that those living on \$3 or \$4 per day are living good lives. By contrast, Egypt’s well-to-do have solved the daily problems of life in Egypt in a manner customary to elites in the developing world: by withdrawing into an isolated world of gated-communities, private schools, and private health care. Many of these Egyptians, despite their relative privileges, nevertheless participated in the Jan. 25 revolution, and stand to benefit — perhaps substantially — if a more democratic and accountable government is put in place. There is already evidence that Egypt’s hi-tech sector is enjoying something of a quiet renaissance in the wake of Mubarak’s departure. Yet the opportunities in hi-tech will almost inevitably be restricted to already privileged segments of Egyptian society.

As I argued in a previous [article on this site](#), the success of the Jan. 25 revolution depends not only on strengthening formal democratic procedure, but also requires a substantial restructuring of the Egyptian economy so that it works for the benefit of the bottom three-quarters of Egyptian society. The only way to move the revolution forward, and avoid the risk of a return to de facto or perhaps de jure military rule, is progress on a new social contract that makes credible commitments to improving, in the short term, the living conditions of the mass of the Egyptian people, and in the long term, their productive capacity.

Unfortunately, the secularist-Islamist divide has obscured, and continues to obscure, the more urgent debates needed on how to restructure Egypt’s economy so that it can solve both its short and long term challenges. Indeed, the brooding omnipresence of the “secularist-Islamist” debate is particularly distressing because it ignores the substantial

common ground shared by all Egyptian political forces: Namely, the need to have a genuinely representative government that is accountable to the Egyptian people through periodic free and fair elections; the need to guarantee freedom of expression in order to monitor the performance of the government; the need to have the law applied in a neutral fashion so that it serves the public good instead of the interests of the regime in power; the need to eliminate arbitrary detention and abusive police tactics including torture; and the need to guarantee a decent standard of living for all Egyptians.

Thus far, the chief revolutionary demand with respect to the economy has been to raise minimum wages, and indeed, the government has taken steps to do just that. Unfortunately, raising minimum wages is at best a band-aid incapable of solving the structural problems endemic in the Egyptian labor sector. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces has thus far seemed more intent on obtaining aid from neighboring countries and the west, with the goal of delaying needed economic reforms, rather than pursue the vigorous restructuring of the economy that Egypt needs. Moreover, it is unlikely to change course unless domestic political forces pressure them to do so. The Jan. 25 coalition, however, has not been able to articulate sufficiently to the Egyptian public the connection between political and economic reforms, and have allowed themselves — and their continuing demonstrations — to be portrayed as hindering the recovery of the economy.

Instead, Egyptians of all political groups need to focus on the inter-linkages between individual rights, accountable

and effective government, the rule of law, and economic prosperity. No system of law, whether Islamic or liberal (or pick your other “ideal”), can function if it is effectively undermined by a bureaucracy, which is demoralized by low pay, for example. Yet no government can pay its civil servants a fair salary if it fails to collect sufficient taxes from its citizens, a fact which in turn requires a growing economy. Economic reforms, which must include substantially enhanced redistribution of national income and social investment, are the most crucial prerequisites for a modern, independent, and democratic Egypt that can live off the sweat of its own brow rather than the capricious “generosity” of an international community that inevitably comes with strings attached. The revolution can only regain its footing if political forces focus their attention on achieving the core demands of the Jan. 25 revolution as expressed by the shared demands of all Egyptian opposition groups and defer debate on the more philosophical and divisive questions such as the relationship of religion to the state. By fetishizing the constitution, moreover, Egypt’s civilian political elite are placing the cart before the horse and substantially increasing the risk of creating a constitutional military dictatorship. Such an outcome will only lead to further deferral of the day of reckoning in Egypt and would represent the most profound betrayal of the more than 800 Egyptians who died in the Jan. 25 revolution.

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What have workers gained from Egypt's revolution?

By Joel Beinin, July 20, 2011

CAIRO — Since June 12, half of the 18,000 workers who operate and service the Suez Canal have been on strike. They are employed in maritime services by seven subsidiary companies of the Suez Canal Authority in Suez, Isma'iliyya, and Port Said. In contrast, those employed directly by the canal authority have always received higher wages and better benefits. Long before January 25, 2011 subsidiary company workers raised the demand for parity, effectively a 40 percent wage increase.

Management of the subsidiary companies accepted this demand in April, an expression of the new possibilities of the post-January 25 era. But the interim government has maintained that wages and working conditions of public service workers are established by parliamentary legislation, and therefore, no changes can be made while the parliament is dissolved. The strike expresses workers' rejection of this logic.

Egyptian workers have achieved increased strength and self-confidence in the course of the revolutionary movement. This is expressed by the capacity to sustain a five-week-long strike in an industrial sector linked to the economically and strategically critical Suez Canal and by insisting that economic demands be met despite the absence of the legal framework established by the old regime. Labor unions continue to rebuff myriad accusations in the press and by some of the "revolutionary youth" that workers' economic demands are narrow "special interests" rather than "national interests." In this respect, workers share the achievement of all Egyptians who heeded the revolutionary call, "Lift your head high. You are an Egyptian" — the recovery of their human dignity.

The removal of former president Hosni Mubarak and the top layer of his regime empowered Egyptians to find their voices and demand "dignity, democracy, and economic justice" — a popular chant during the occupation of

Tahrir Square in January-February and since then.

This was not an entirely new experience for millions of industrial and white-collar workers. Many of them won substantial economic gains, like those demanded by the Suez Canal Authority subsidiary company workers, during the movement of over 4,000 strikes, sit-ins, and other labor collective actions that began escalating in 1998 and continue today.

During the three days before Mubarak's departure on February 11, workers visibly contributed to the revolutionary process by engaging in some sixty strikes, some with explicitly political demands. Strikes and sit-ins have continued regularly since then at the rate of several per week. The total of perhaps two-hundred workers' collective actions for the first six months of 2011 is at the same order of magnitude as the pace of labor protest since 2004.

This has allowed workers to consolidate several gains. The most important institutional achievement is the consolidation of the right to organize independent trade unions.

Since its establishment in 1957, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) has been an arm of the Egyptian state and a key institution in its repressive apparatus. ETUF enjoys a legal monopoly on trade union organization established by Law 35 of 1976 and subsequent amendments. ETUF elections, especially the most recent in 2006, were rigged. State Security Investigations arbitrarily disqualified oppositional political elements of any stripe — from Communists to Muslim Brothers — from running for union office. ETUF and most of its local officials stood aloof from or actively opposed the workers movement of the last decade.

Before January 25, three independent unions unaffiliated to ETUF were established. The largest and most important was the 35,000-member union of Real Estate Tax Authority

(RETA) workers. A dramatic sit-in strike of 3,000 RETA workers in front of the Ministry of Finance in December 2007 resulted in a 325 percent wage increase. Kamal Abu Eita and other strike leaders used the momentum of this victory to establish an independent union in December 2008. In April 2009 the government recognized it as the first non-ETUF affiliated union since 1957. The independent RETA workers' union was a founding member of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU), whose existence was announced at a press conference during the Tahrir Square occupation on January 30.

Among the newly-established unions affiliated with EFITU are eight unions and a city-wide labor council in Sadat City, where 50,000 workers are employed in 200 enterprises — mainly textiles, iron and steel, and ceramics and porcelain. There were only two unions in Sadat City before this year. A largely non-unionized labor force was only one of the generous incentives to private investors offered in special economic zones established in the new satellite cities of Cairo. Another is that in Qualified Industrial Zones, if 10.5 percent of a product's assessed value comes from Israeli sources, it receives duty-free and quota-free access to the United States.

EFITU and the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS), a non-governmental organization established in 1990 to promote trade union independence, successfully resisted the imposition of the original candidate of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the former ETUF treasurer, as Minister of Manpower and Migration in the transitional government. Instead, they proposed Ahmad Hasan al-Burai, a professor of labor law at Cairo University who had publicly advocated trade union pluralism for years. SCAF accepted the nominee of the independent workers' movement.

Minister al-Burai argues that the legal basis for the registration of independent unions is that Egypt has ratified International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions guaranteeing freedom of association and protection of the right to organize (No. 87) and the right

to organize and bargain collectively (No. 98). These international treaty obligations supersede national legislation. With al-Burai's approval, the Ministry of Manpower and Migration has formally registered about twenty-five independent unions not affiliated to ETUF. Dozens of other independent unions are in the process of formation.

Some independent unions — like the Cairo Joint Transport Authority union of bus drivers and garage workers and the RETA workers' union — are quite large and command the loyalty of a great majority of the potential bargaining unit. Others have only fifty to one hundred members in factories employing hundreds or thousands. The pensions and social benefit accounts of some public sector industrial workers are tied to their membership in ETUF-affiliated unions. Minister al-Burai has indicated his willingness to sever this connection, which could dramatically increase the number of independent unions. But the financial procedures involved are complex.

Meanwhile, the EFITU, the CTUWS, and the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) have filed a court case seeking dissolution of ETUF and sequestration of its assets. Their legal brief argues (correctly) that, like the dissolved National Democratic Party, ETUF was an institution of the Mubarak regime. This coalition has also drafted a new trade union law to replace Law 35. The Ministry of Manpower and Migration has held three rounds of discussion on the draft law, the latest with the participation of representatives of the ILO. Kamal Abbas, the general coordinator of the CTUWS, is optimistic that a new trade union law will be enacted before the parliamentary elections this fall.

Another workers' achievement is an increase in the minimum wage. In 2010 Nagi Rashad, a worker at the South Cairo Grain Mill and a leading figure in the workers' protest movement, successfully sued the government over its 2008 decision not to increase the national minimum wage. Khaled Ali, director of the ECESR, was the lead attorney on the case. As a result, the minimum wage was raised to £E 400 (about \$70) a month - still a woefully

inadequate amount that would leave the average Egyptian family of five with two-wage earners well below the World Bank's poverty line of \$2 a day. It is also far less than the consensus demand of £E 1,200 (about \$200) that has emerged from the workers protest movement since 2008.

The interim government promised a further increase to £E 700 (about \$120) monthly, effective July 1, 2011. However, the state budget for the fiscal year that began on that day reduced the amount to £E 685. Workers and their supporters continue to press the demand for £E 1,200.

The minimum wage, however, applies only to those employed on permanent contracts (the equivalent of tenure). The private sector operates primarily on the basis of indefinitely renewable "temporary" contracts lasting one-year or less. The "informal sector" is unsupervised by the government. Therefore, the minimum wage applies primarily to public sector workers on permanent contracts.

Struggles to obtain permanent status for public sector employees have escalated. For two weeks in June, some 200 workers on temporary contracts at Petrojet, an oil services firm, conducted a sit-in demonstration in front of the offices of their employer, the Ministry of Petroleum. Although access to the offices was not blocked, five workers were arrested. On June 29, they were convicted in a military court and received suspended sentences of one year in jail. This is the first implementation of SCAF's Decree 34 of March 24, which established penalties of up to £E 500,000 (about \$83,400) and up to one year in jail for participating in a "disruptive" strike or demonstration.

The suspended sentence suggests the delicate balance SCAF must maintain. It seeks to minimize the political and economic changes that occur under its watch and until it can hand off power to a legitimate civilian government. But the SCAF cannot repress all popular demands and remain legitimate in the eyes of the people.

The April 6 Youth Movement and other "revolutionary youth" groups that emerged from the Tahrir Square occupation from January 25 to February 11 were, at

first, reluctant to embrace specific economic demands, despite the popular chants demanding "social justice." Since the mass demonstrations of July 1 and July 8 and the reoccupation of main squares in Alexandria and Suez as well as Tahrir in Cairo, the April 6 Movement has raised the slogan, "The families of the martyrs and the poor first."

Economic demands have become more prominent since clashes between families of the martyrs and thugs of the Ministry of Interior in Cairo in late June. A large banner overlooking occupied Arabain Square in Suez supported the general demands of the current phase of the revolutionary movement. Speedier public trials for Hosni Mubarak and the high officials of his regime accused of corruption and purifying the Ministry of Interior, which commands the police and other security services, are high on the list. The banner also demands a jobs program for youth - unemployment is especially high in Suez - and a national minimum and maximum wage. The later demand has been adopted by those continuing to occupy Tahrir Square.

In addition to SCAF's reluctance, there are many obstacles to fulfilling the revolutionaries' aspirations for social justice. Personnel, practices, attitudes, and institutions of the old regime are entrenched throughout the country.

For instance, a manager at the Suez Maritime Arsenal, one of the subsidiary companies of the Suez Canal Authority, coordinated with military intelligence and then imposed his presence on an interview with a striking worker on July 11 (1,200 workers of the Maritime Arsenal are currently on strike). The same manager reported to military intelligence that he and others had intervened in the Arabain Square sit-in on July 8 to force those occupying the square to retract a "stupid" statement they had made. (One journalist shared with me his inadvertent recording of the conversation between the manager and a military intelligence officer.)

On June 7, one hundred women formerly employed at the Mansura-España textile firm tried to collect their monthly wages for April, ranging from £E 250-300 (about \$42-50), from the United Bank offices in Mansura. In 2008 Mansura-España, a private-sector firm established

in the 1980s in the Nile Delta town of Talkha, across the river from Mansura, went bankrupt. United Bank, its largest creditor, acquired most of its shares. In November 2010, the bank sold its interest in the firm without paying legally required severance compensation to the workers remaining on the payroll.

Among the workers seeking their salaries was Mariam Hawas, a 44-year-old mother of three. United Bank employees refused to pay the women, taunted them, and told them, “Go and block traffic in the streets if you want your rights.” So they did.

A traffic policeman urged one truck driver who could not move his vehicle through the ensuing traffic jam, “Run them over. The blood money for each one is £E 50 (about \$8).” The truck ran into Mariam Hawas and another woman, Samah Isa. Mariam died on the way to the hospital and Samah was badly injured.

Neither has yet received any compensation. The truck driver who ran into the two women has been charged with causing wrongful death and injury. But he was released without bail, an indication that he may be treated leniently if he can be located at all when the trial begins in late July. The traffic policeman has not been found.

Ten days after Mariam Hawas died United Bank paid severance packages to Mansura-España workers at the rate of 2 ½ months’ salary for every year of employment. The total cost to the bank was \$62,000.

The lives of Egyptian working people are still cheap in the eyes of a great many policemen, government officials, and managers of firms in both the private and public sectors. What has changed, and this is the most important gain of the revolutionary movement, is that workers no longer accept this.

Recovering in the hospital, Samah Isa asked, “How can a life be worth 50 pounds? I don’t see a future until I get my rights. That’s what I want.”

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Will Egypt's Activists Boycott the Election?

By Marc Lynch, September 6, 2011

Egyptian activist groups have called for another “million man march” on Friday, September 9 in an attempt to “correct the course” and to revive what they see as a flailing revolution. Friday is shaping up as a significant test of the continuing power of the activist groups after a summer where they have struggled. The exuberantly successful mass demonstration of July 8 gave way to an unpopular Tahrir sit-in and a disastrous attempt to march on the Ministry of Defense. Recent calls for protests have produced small turnouts. Friday is therefore being widely taken as a test of the continuing relevance and power of the activists.

But in some ways the turnout on Friday is a sideshow compared to the decisions to be made about the upcoming Parliamentary elections now scheduled for November. It's no secret that many activists are deeply disenchanted with the SCAF-led political process. They see street protests as the source of their power, and understand their identity as the “soul of the revolution.” They have done little to prepare for elections and don't look likely to win. Some view the coming elections as themselves counter-revolutionary since they will likely produce a Parliament dominated by Islamists and ex-NDP *fulul*. When I was in Egypt in July, I already began hearing whispers that activists might boycott the elections. Those are now spilling out into public.

Will activists actually boycott? What would happen if they did? I think that it is distressingly likely, and growing more so, and that it would be a disaster. An activist boycott probably would not be joined by the major political parties, and probably wouldn't affect the overall turnout or results. But it would have a disproportionate impact on the perceptions of the legitimacy of the election, especially in the West, and would seriously undermine hopes of achieving a democratic Egypt. I am putting this out here now mainly to draw attention to the risks, provoke some public discussion...and, hopefully, to be proven wrong.

Most activists are deeply and vocally disenchanted with the course of post-Mubarak Egypt. They complain bitterly about the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, most potently about the use of military trials for protestors and their own harsh treatment at the hands of security forces. There's a lot of evidence that they have lost support from the wider public in recent months. They have nevertheless scored notable successes through actual or threatened street protests, on everything from the Shafik government to the SCAF's dramatic reversal on the question of Supra-Constitutional principles, especially when they seem to command widespread popular support.

Friday's protest seeks to recreate the success of the July 8 protest, which rallied many Egyptians behind a growing sense of frustration, recaptured the spirit of the early days of the revolution, and put real pressure on the SCAF. But that high point soon faded in the controversies over the Tahrir sit-in, the violence at Abassiya, the Islamist July 29 counter-demonstration, the pre-Ramadan clearing of Tahrir, and a nasty SCAF-led campaign against their alleged foreign funding. When I was in Cairo in late July, I struggled to find anybody with positive things to say about the Tahrir sit-in, and found deep frustration across the political spectrum with the activists. The September 9 “course correction” rally hopes to recapture the magic of July 8.

We will see on Friday whether the groups that have endorsed the demonstration succeed in bringing large numbers out to Tahrir or in driving the SCAF to offer political concessions. Despite all of their struggles, they might. There's certainly plenty of frustration, serious labor unrest, dismay with the SCAF's erratic decision making, and fears of rising Islamist power. That anger may well trump the popular disenchantment after the Tahrir sit-in and the nasty official campaign against foreign funding being used to tarnish their image. The Muslim Brotherhood and most other Islamist groups have announced that they will stay away this time, unlike

in May, setting up a competitive dynamic which could galvanize participation by their opponents. Either way, the turnout and the SCAF's response will dominate Egyptian political discourse and shape the perceived balance of power for the next few weeks.

While there are a lot of different demands in circulation, the seven demands presented by the Revolutionary Youth Coalition seem representative. They largely avoid questions of religion and the constitution. Three focus on issues which only really speak to the protestors themselves: ending military trials for protestors, abolishing "repressive" laws outlawing protests and demonstrations, and cracking down on the *baltagiya* (thugs) who harass protestors. As intensely as such issues are felt by the activists, it isn't clear to me that most ordinary Egyptians care. Another calls to banish NDP leaders from political life, which is understandable from a revolutionary perspective but rather undemocratic. And then there's a demand for minimum and maximum wages which many Egyptians likely do find appealing but sits awkwardly and alone amidst the other six non-economic demands.

There's a real and troubling tension between the two demands which address elections. One demand calls for the SCAF to rapidly hand over power to an elected civil government. Another calls for a completely new elections law, which makes sense given the oddities of the current law although perhaps is premature given that the new election law hasn't yet been issued. But the two demands contradict each other. A timetable for a rapid return to civilian rule through elections *should* be a top priority; it also seems to be exactly what the SCAF is doing, to the point of rejecting repeated calls from the West and from some Egyptians to postpone elections to give secular and liberal forces more time to organize. Devising a new election law, on the other hand, would take time and would almost certainly require postponing the elections currently scheduled for November. Like the earlier activist campaign for "Constitution First," the effect of this demand would be to extend rather than end the rule of the SCAF.

That ambiguity goes to the heart of the potential for an activist boycott. The idea of an election boycott began to rise as the realization set in that they won't win elections just through claims of revolutionary legitimacy. It is not clear that they believe that successful elections would serve their interests, advance the revolution, or fit their identity. The kind of Parliament likely to be returned by the coming elections, even if completely free and fair, will likely involve heavy representation for Islamists and ex-NDP remnants (the *fulul*). Would participating in such an election only grant legitimacy on a system which does not deserve it?

Each leak about the upcoming election law generates outrage over rules which allegedly favor Islamists or established parties. That said, whatever law is ultimately adopted, few activists seem to have done much to prepare for the elections. I'm not sure why, but I haven't heard much about their equivalent of the Islamists out all over the country distributing food and holding public events and organizing for the vote. Maybe they don't have the money, maybe they don't see the point, maybe they mean to do it but haven't found the time, or maybe they just don't see elections as the right way to assert themselves in today's Egypt.

Revolutionaries are not necessarily democrats, despite the generic label of "democracy activist" preferred by the American media. Many of them simply prefer street action to institutional politics. It's not just what they do, it's who they are. Protestors protest. It's much more exciting than preparing draft laws for consideration in committee meetings. Many of the Tahrir activists view themselves as the soul of the revolution, standing above politics. Maybe they feel that joining in the elections could implicate them in a system which remains counter-revolutionary at its core and take away their ability to mobilize the streets. They have seen, over the course of a decade and especially from January 25 through this summer, that street politics *works*. Would a small Parliamentary bloc really compensate for the loss of the Tahrir gambit?

So there are all kinds of reasons that they might choose to boycott. But it would be a disaster if they did, for themselves as well as for Egypt. If they seek to deprive the

election of legitimacy, their prominence in the media will ensure that the international narrative will become one of failed revolution. That will hurt Egypt both at home and abroad. It will keep Egypt locked in political crisis, and make it much more difficult to forge a broad consensus on a new constitution and to establish enduring democratic principles. It will weaken international support for the new Egypt, and sour potential investors and tourists on its prospects. It will also hurt them by putting them outside of the newly emerging institutions and less able to influence the shape of the new constitution or vital new legislation.

In short, an election boycott would be a disaster. But they might not see it that way for the reasons outlined

above — especially if they see the elections consolidating a new system which doesn't live up to their hopes for the revolution, or have an appropriate place for them. Precisely because others see it as more disastrous than they do, threatening a boycott will look like an attractive option for pressuring the SCAF. Once those threats are made they could become a self-fulfilling prophecy as groups are trapped by their rhetoric.

That's why I'm bringing it up now — to try to pre-empt that process by opening debate on it now. In other words, I'm putting the potential for activist groups to threaten or to actually boycott the elections on the radar...in hopes that it won't happen. So let's go prove me wrong!



The mind of Egypt's military

By Michael Wahid Hanna, August 23, 2011

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has been ruling Egypt since the fall of Hosni Mubarak. But the SCAF's erratic decision-making process and its complete lack of transparency have left nearly everyone confused about its ultimate intentions. Many think that it aims to re-impose de facto military rule, and rumors swirl about its counter-revolutionary schemes and alleged secret deals. Activists routinely accuse the SCAF of blocking systemic change and continuing the repressive rule of the former regime.

My recent discussions with individuals close to the military leadership left me with a more complex picture of a military establishment uncomfortable with its public role, unsettled by continued protest, and hampered by an authoritarian mindset that continues to guide its thinking. The key to understanding the SCAF is that it has used its expanded power with a single-minded determination to restore the country to what it perceives to be stability and return it to normalcy. Without a clear roadmap for transition, the council has been reactive and inconsistent, ensuring continuation of the very activity it has sought to bring to an end — namely, public agitation and demonstration.

Critics of the SCAF attribute to it an endless capacity for devious political machinations. In fact, the SCAF's ad hoc management of the transition demonstrates that its actions are most often a response to popular political pressure and not reflective of a broader vision. The SCAF's resistance to activist demands is not reflective of an ideological counter-revolution to preserve the former regime but represents a fundamental aversion to thoroughgoing, and potentially destabilizing, reform.

The SCAF's relationship with the Ministry of Interior and the issue of security sector reform is the clearest embodiment of this approach. The military leadership had sought to avoid major decisions on the Interior Ministry due to its desire to cede policing responsibilities and pre-occupation with the potential for disruptive and subversive retaliatory actions by those purged from the ranks.

The instances when public protests have effected change, despite falling short of protester expectations, have also been a function of SCAF fear of public disorder. This is particularly so when protesters have demonstrated a united front and a consensus with respect to demands, increasing pressure on the SCAF and decreasing the likelihood of negative blowback. These cases have been understood by the SCAF to be broadly reflective of informed opinion. The protest movement's success in this regard is dependent upon strength in numbers and resilience, as isolated and small protests have not been accorded any level of respect and have been repressed actively and, at times, with force.

This fear also explains the SCAF's unpopular resort to military trials. Beleaguered by the continued tumult and wary of unempowered and weak civilian leaders, the SCAF has prioritized law and order and has been most draconian in discharging its newfound policing duties, resorting promiscuously to the use of military justice for civilian detainees. The SCAF has also come to display the very same sense of its own indispensability typified by the Mubarak regime, and has internalized criticism of its role as an attack on the nation's unity and security.

The SCAF was ill-prepared to assume its role when the Mubarak government was toppled. While the SCAF has consistently sought to portray itself as a participant in and supporter of the country's revolution, it has operated with many of the same limitations that handicapped the former regime and left it out of touch with Egyptian society. While the Egyptian military had once dominated the government in the wake of Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser's Free Officers' Movement, its role in civilian governance and Egyptian politics has receded in recent decades. What had once been an outright military state evolved in ways that privileged other competing actors, including, most significantly, the Ministry of Interior and the new business elite.

This diminution of political power and the lack of military participation in active repression was a critical factor in

allowing the military to untether its future from that of the Mubarak regime. But the military's retreat from political life also meant that the country's senior military leaders were wholly unfamiliar with the mechanics of governance. This inexperience and uncertainty further entrenched crisis management as the military's mindset and has come to define its stewardship of the transition.

While its institutional identity allowed it to separate its fate from that of the sitting government it supported, the armed forces were a part of the standing order and had never intimated its discontent with the state of the country. With stability its primary touchstone and a keen sense of its popular reputation, the military was not inclined to intervene on either side to tilt the balance of power during the 18-day uprising that toppled the government. When horsemen and thugs on camels descended on the protesters of Tahrir Square on February 2, the military was a neutral bystander, waiting for events on the ground to clarify which side would emerge from the battles raging in Egypt's streets. At every juncture, the SCAF has done the bare minimum necessary to restore public order, but almost every successive step or concession has been accomplished through direct political pressure and popular protest. In the few instances when the SCAF has sought to establish a framework for transition, such as its management of the March constitutional referendum, its approach has been haphazard and riddled with indecision.

In this pursuit of stability, the SCAF has also constantly been guided by the understandings and biases that shaped government policy during the Mubarak era. This has manifested itself primarily in the council's understanding of mass mobilization and protests, which centered tightly on the Muslim Brotherhood's perceived role — despite what had transpired during the popular uprising and the broad-based nature of participation in the uprising. As the most coherent opposition force during the Mubarak era, the SCAF assumed that massive public protests could only be a function of Brotherhood organizational capacity.

This perception was the main driver behind the SCAF's early moves to co-opt the Brotherhood and to ensure

its support for a speedy transition process. This is a priority for the SCAF, which is adamant on stepping back from a front-line position of governance, albeit with its institutional role and prerogatives firmly intact. These early moves were welcomed by the Brotherhood, which had confidence in its organization and networks, believing that a speedy transition would benefit its electoral performance. The Brotherhood also realized that frontal confrontation with a military establishment that enjoyed unparalleled popular sympathy would alienate uncommitted voters and distract from electoral preparations. The decision to eschew criticism of the military was also informed by the Brotherhood's deep-seated fear of military retrenchment and a sense that friction at this stage would discourage the military leadership from relinquishing power. Instead, they have displayed a keen, and at times obsequious, desire to cultivate the confidence of the SCAF in its ability to calm the current environment and play a positive role in restoring stability.

This short-term convergence of interests was seen by many observers as an outright agreement between the Islamists and the military. Instead, the Brotherhood's unified and clear lines of leadership allowed the group to establish reliable channels of communication with the military. In turn, the military respected the discipline and organizational capacity of the Brotherhood and was more confident in its ability to enforce discipline upon membership, aiding the process of orderly transition.

The Brotherhood presented a disciplined front standing in stark contrast to the more chaotic and fragmented nature of the emerging politics of the country's non-Islamist opposition. For these groups, the leaderless aspects of the uprising, which had created resilience within the protest movement, undermined their position with respect to the SCAF during transition and amplified the SCAF's predisposition regarding the role of the Islamists in controlling the dynamics of protest. The military's analytical failing was further reinforced by the highly hierarchical nature of Egyptian society. Despite incessant praise for the youth of the revolution (*shabab al-thawra*), the reference was often overlaid with a hint of

patronization that underestimated their actual and critical role during the Egyptian uprising.

This understanding was eventually overtaken by events as Egypt's non-Islamist opposition was able to sustain its protest movement and organize significant displays of public strength without Islamist participation. The protests led to a reappraisal by the SCAF and a series of concessions that had not been previously contemplated, including the overhaul of the transitional government, the start of security sector reform, and acquiescence to the trial of the deposed president.

The persistence of the protest movement and the ingrained suspicion of many of the youth activists toward military authority have also fueled a deep-seated belief among some of the members of the SCAF that outside forces must be encouraging the emerging divide between these groups and the SCAF. The harsh rhetoric targeting the council and its longtime leader, Minister of Defense Field Marshall Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, has shocked the SCAF and has been interpreted as an effort to sow dissension and undermine national unity. The fundamental inability to conceive of organic, non-Islamist political mobilization remains, clouding current understandings of the dynamic political scene. While to a degree cynicism can be ascribed to some of the SCAF's recent statements regarding foreign interference, it would be a mistake to view these pronouncements as simply political play-acting and rhetorical excess.

The haphazard and at times authoritarian manner by which the SCAF has ruled has also led to speculation that the military is positioning itself for a reassertion of military rule. Recent discussions of far-reaching constitutional arrangements enumerating specific powers for the military have further reinforced this suspicion. However, several individuals close to the SCAF maintain that this position, often referred to as the Turkish model, is not representative of a consensus among the military leaders. These individuals also indicated that the two key members of the council, Tantawi and Chief of Staff of the Egyptian armed forces, Lt. Gen. Sami 'Anan, have not thrown their weight behind this proposition.

While suggestions for a Turkish model likely suggest divisions among the country's military elite, they are as reflective of nascent divisions among Egypt's non-Islamist political forces, some of whom have now come to view Islamism as a greater threat than military encroachment on civilian authority.

It is certainly true that the military is keen to protect its institutional interests, and its power and influence have been expanded by the trajectory of recent events. However, it is the military establishment's unrivalled credibility with Egyptian society that remains the ultimate buffer between it and unfettered civilian oversight. In the near-term there is no political force in Egyptian society that could credibly challenge the military or its prerogatives. This should not be seen as a failure of the Egyptian uprising — the process for bringing the military under untrammelled civilian control will take years and will parallel the maturation of the political system.

Paradoxically, the Egyptian military leadership's newfound position of strength has exposed its vulnerabilities by forcing it into an unfamiliar role of active governance and, hence, controversy. Limited by its governing mindset, the SCAF has been slow to adjust to new realities and loathe to undertake structural reforms that could create societal tensions and inhibit its return to the barracks. Ultimately, the Egyptian military will do as little as possible in the way of actual reform, in the hopes of avoiding what it deems to be unnecessary conflict. Coupled with its refusal to cede power to Egypt's transitional civilian leadership at this critical juncture, the military's ultimate goal remains a stable environment to allow for an eventual, prompt transition. While this suggests a superficial understanding of democratic culture and the norms of constitutionalism, based on its track record to date, inaction by the SCAF might in the short-term be far preferable to a more active military role in determining the country's future.

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What's behind the Egyptian military's attacks on civil society?

By Shara Aziz, August 18, 2011

In recent weeks Egypt's interim military rulers, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), have stepped up attacks on civil society leaders and pro-democracy activists, accusing them of peddling "foreign agendas" and various other seditious activities. These attacks, while disturbing, paradoxically are a sign of progress in Egypt's political transition. Members of civil society have become sufficiently effective and sophisticated as to warrant a concerted international smear campaign by Egypt's highest authority.

At first blush, the attacks appear to be a rerun of the tripe authoritarianism for which former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and his fellow Arab dictators are famous. When one cannot address the people's legitimate grievances, it's rather expected to revert to unfounded accusations of foreign sabotage, espionage, and any other external factors that distract the population from domestic problems. Viewed through this lens, the Egyptian military exposes its true colors as simply Mubarak-lite bent on preserving the status quo with only superficial changes in leadership. And this was the motivation behind the reformers' three-week sit-in in Tahrir Square until they were forcibly removed by the military.

It is no secret that Egypt is the second largest foreign aid recipient after Israel. Under then President George W. Bush, the United States government stopped channeling non-military foreign aid through the Egyptian government and instead distributed grants directly to civil society. President Barack Obama discontinued this practice until Mubarak's fall from power on February 11, after which hundreds of nongovernmental organizations lined up to request funding.

Much of the money has gone to democracy promotion projects aimed at enhancing Egyptians' ability to engage in the political process, hold their government accountable,

call for transparency in governance, and other projects that serve as the building blocks of a democracy. Some projects were successful while significantly more were an embarrassing failure for reasons ranging from self-dealing to ineptitude.

Notwithstanding the mixed results, the issue of how American foreign aid — sixty-five millions of dollars worth — is distributed has become a game-changer from the military's perspective. So much so that members of SCAF used a panel at the United States Institute for Peace in Washington, D.C. last month to publicly condemn the U.S. for violating previous understandings on foreign aid. When challenged on the double standard of accepting military aid yet rebuking economic and social aid to civil society, the military leaders blithely characterized the former as "legal" and the latter as "illegal."

In other words, if the money goes through the military to ensure political dissenters are starved of American funds then the foreign aid is clean and most welcome. Otherwise, it is part of a grand conspiracy to destroy Egypt and prevent it from attaining its rightful place as a regional leader.

Two deductions can be made from this seemingly irrational behavior. First and foremost, the military is not interested in operating any differently than the Mubarak regime. In which case, there is no need for protesters to camp out in Tahrir Square to expose the military's authoritarian tendencies and bad faith. The ongoing attacks against the April 6th movement and other reputable civil society groups, along with the military's unprecedented use of military courts to try civilian protesters and imprisoning bloggers for critiquing the military, have effectively proven that point.

Second, the military's willingness to figuratively bite the hand that feeds it, at least \$1.3 billion dollars in American

aid, reveals just how threatened they are by the pro-democracy movement led by human rights groups, political reformers, and grassroots activists. Under Mubarak, the trumped-up conspiracy theories of foreign sabotage were a diversionary tactic to distract a starving public away from the regime's domestic failures. For Egypt's current military rulers, these tactics are about preserving their political survival to the extent that they merit a risky and unprecedented public censure of Egypt's biggest ally.

Despite decades of oppressive practices by Mubarak, Egyptian civil society has finally become sufficiently effective to become serious political competition in the contest for power. No longer are human rights advocates and youth organizers dismissed as merely children complaining on the fringes, but rather they are feared as sophisticated and sufficiently empowered organizations diligently working to ensure the system — and not just the leaders — is reformed for the benefit of all Egyptians. That includes holding the military accountable.

The military's propaganda campaign therefore reflects a palpable fear on its part, along with those political forces whom it has been able to co-opt, of political competition that could deny them power they seek to wield for decades

to come. Not only do they want to deny political dissenters a potential source of funding and discredit them, they also likely seek to direct the foreign aid towards groups that either implicitly support them or are otherwise ineffective.

For these reasons, the Obama administration cannot and should not buckle to the military's coercive tactics to eliminate any viable political competition. Notwithstanding the serious flaws in American foreign aid policy as described in a 2009 audit by the USAID Office of Inspector General, which certainly need to be rectified, the United States must stay true to its values of supporting democracy tailored to the needs of a particular nation.

It is up to the Egyptian people to choose who should lead them and they deserve to have diverse and meaningful choices. Cowing to the military's threats makes that possibility less likely.

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How Mubarak's trial brings justice to Egypt

By Michaëlle Browers, August 17, 2011

The trial of deposed President Hosni Mubarak alongside his two sons, his ministers, and their business associates, resumed Monday after launching on August 2. Many Egyptians expressed satisfaction at seeing the dictator on trial by the country's own judicial system, and hope that his conviction would stand as an emblem for a new Egypt. But others had reservations about his treatment. Those mixed feelings reveal how even the prosecution of Egypt's head

of state can only represent a first step in a longer-term and more comprehensive process toward transitional justice. The drive for retribution and punishment must not eclipse the need for truth telling, accounting, and transparency.

Egypt is not the first country to struggle with the question of how to bring leaders of a deposed regime to justice. Transitional justice is generally associated with holding

accountable perpetrators of massive violations of human rights. But in recent years, activists and scholars have shifted attention to the ways in which transitional justice can facilitate the transition from autocratic to democratic government. For Mubarak's trial to play this role, Egyptians need to rethink what they want from transitional justice. While punishing the old regime for its crimes is necessary and important, the prosecution of deposed officials will ultimately prove an empty victory if the process does not help consolidate a new and meaningful democratic order that ends impunity, reconstructs state-citizen relations, and institutionalizes accountability and rule of law.

The trials of Mubarak, his ex-Interior Minister Habib al-Adly, and six more senior ministry officials began with great fanfare on August 2. They are being charged with a variety of offenses, including ordering the police to shoot at unarmed demonstrators on January 28 and 29. Mubarak, his two sons, and his tycoon business associate Hussein Salem (who is being tried in absentia) face charges of striking an illegal business deal involving the sale of natural gas to Israel and the receipt of villas in exchange for the sale of state land. The next session, scheduled for September 5, will feature the testimony of four police officers for the prosecution.

The trial is being held by the regular judiciary in accordance with normal laws rather than in military courts or according to exceptional proceedings and thus is, in effect, a test of Egypt's legal system. Advocates of transitional justice argue that such criminal proceedings can play an important role in promoting the rule of law and contribute toward democratic transitions. The primary goal of such a trial is to publicly herald the end of past abuses and distinguish a new, post-dictatorial order. The aim from the perspective of transitional justice is not only to punish the individuals who committed the crimes, but to demonstrate the end of impunity, to establish the truth about the past, to restore dignity to both individual victims and society as a whole, to deter future abuses, and to strengthen the rule of law. This means holding governments accountable for conducting themselves according to rules that are publicly promulgated, equally

administered, and consistent with international human rights standards.

The broader goals of transitional justice can prove elusive if some element of a formal legal process, such as competent or independent judges and investigators, is lacking. Show trials are not enough. If investigators fail to amass the evidence necessary to convict those on trial, the judges will be left with a choice between acquitting a dictator (denying the nation justice) and issuing convictions despite lack of evidence (undermining due process). Only if the public views the trial as fair and just; only if the charges are investigated and the evidence documented; only if the process is public and comprehensive; can the trial contribute toward greater transparency, accountability, and rule of law. Only then will the new order and future generations truly be able to look back on this time as a testament that no one is above the law and affirm that justice was achieved.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) that replaced Mubarak on February 11 may have a greater interest than the Egyptian public in a speedy conclusion to the trial. Mubarak's defense lawyer, Farid al-Dib, has already indicated that he plans to subpoena field marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, who was defense minister under Mubarak's rule and, as head of the SCAF, is currently the de-facto ruler of the country. Many observers are already speculating that the defense is seeking to call into question the proceedings by arguing that Tantawi was complicit in the decisions made during the crackdown on Tahrir Square protesters. The SCAF will seek to resist any calls or procedures aimed at examining their role in the corruption and repression of Mubarak's regime in general and in the repression of the protesters in particular.

The desire for a quick conclusion to the trial also risks limiting the scope of charges in ways which can undermine the demands of real transitional justice. The human rights violations for which Mubarak is being tried cover just two days whereas the violence of Mubarak's rule spans three decades (and the violence of the old regime predates Mubarak's rule). In general,

truth commissions are better than trials at raising the quality of a society's understanding of past abuses, as well as providing recognition and restoration of individual healing for victims than trials, which are more geared toward ending impunity and deterring future abuses. For the moment, there are no plans to set up a truth commission in Egypt and the judge's decision to no longer televise the proceedings will certainly undermine the trial's cathartic effect for the Egyptian citizenry. The complicity of members of the SCAF with the old regime renders it highly unlikely that the full facts and responsibilities surrounding the violations of the deposed regime will be adequately uncovered in the criminal proceedings of the current trial. In fact, the achievement of a genuine process of truth telling will likely depend on the successful transition to civilian rule, which if the SCAF holds to its commitments, should take place after a presidential election in November.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the charges lies in its combining economic and political crimes. Although the specific charges of corruption Mubarak and his sons face are undoubtedly only the tip of a larger iceberg of privateering, the corruption charges both expand the scope beyond those two days and raise the possibility of a more systemic investigation into the workings of the Mubarak era — and a more far-reaching indictment of the Egyptian state.

Transitional justice processes often tend to compartmentalize human rights violations and economic crimes and pay more attention to the former than the latter. In transitional justice literature, there is growing attention to the way in figures such as Pinochet, Marcos, and Suharto have used their ill-gotten assets to stifle investigation into human rights violations. One need also consider a number of such cases in which lack of attention

to economic crimes left in place structural conditions that contributed to the continuation of political corruption, violence, and human rights violations, such as in post-Abacha Nigeria and the post-Mobutu Democratic Republic of Congo, or post-Suharto Indonesia. Impunity in the Egyptian political system can only be effectively confronted when the corruption that has allowed perpetrators to amass the money, power, and influence to buy, bribe, or otherwise delay or escape accountability for human rights violations, has been effectively understood and confronted. The lack of transparency and accountability in the Egyptian government has both political and economic facets and both facets — its repression and corruption — were mutually reinforcing.

But here too the requirements of transitional justice threaten to run up against the SCAF. Egypt's military has come to control a network of diverse companies and vast tracts of land, constituting a significant portion of the Egyptian economy. In short, Tantawi and other members of the SCAF continue to enjoy the fruits of economic crimes, yet remain unaccountable. Additionally, the SCAF has tried thousands of those who protested for democratic change before military tribunals, in proceedings many human rights groups have deemed unfair.

Transitional justice serves to delineate both past and future. A narration of Egypt's authoritarian past must remain attuned to the mutual interdependence of economic and political repression as it attempts to achieve the goals of truth and justice and go beyond retribution for the past toward a more comprehensive future of economic and political reform and social reconciliation.

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The Muslim Brotherhood as helicopter parent

By Nathan Brown, May 27, 2011

Soon after I began teaching, a student came to my office hours because she had been ill and missed a portion of the class. That was not unusual — but what did seem a bit out of the ordinary was that she brought her mother. I explained to the student that she could take an incomplete but that I advised this only as a last resort, since it would not be easy to make up the work after she had begun a new set of courses the next semester. Her mother piped in, “He’s right honey. You know how I feel about incompletes.” I had encountered my first “helicopter parent”— those who hover closely over their grown sons and daughters, monitoring their choices, offering unsolicited advice, and intervening in their daily interactions.

There is no image that better captures the behavior of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood toward the political party it claims only to be launching, and that may be a problem for Egyptian democracy. The new Freedom and Justice Party will be free, says the parent Muslim Brotherhood, to make its own choices. But the Brotherhood as helicopter parent cannot resist suggesting to its offspring who the new party’s leaders will be, what it stands for, how it will be organized, who should join it, and who its candidates will be. The party is completely independent in decision making — so long as it does precisely what it is told. And actually, it is not only the party that is being told what to do — individual members of the Brotherhood movement have been told to join no other party and to obey movement discipline in the political realm. This kind of relationship between movement and party is already making the Brotherhood a difficult partner for other political actors; over the long term, it may make the Islamists awkward electoral actors.

A close relationship between party and movement was to be expected, but this relationship is more than close; it is micromanaged. In a recent meeting of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Consultative Council (a policy making body with approximately 100 members that had not been able to

gather in the Mubarak years for fear of arrest), as well as in a series of other decisions widely reported in the Egyptian press, the protective parent movement has taken the following steps:

- After repeatedly insisting that the party would be able to select its own leader, the Brotherhood has been unable to resist giving its offspring an unusually generous gift: three members of its top body, the Guidance Bureau, will move over to the party to run it. All three (Muhammad Mursi, Saad al-Katatni, and Issam al-Iryan) are skilled and experienced in all sorts of ways — in speaking to the press, organizing and running movement affairs, and serving as parliamentarians. While their personalities are very different, all come across as very capable figures. But all three also stand out as very loyal to the Brotherhood movement.
- The movement (and not the party) is also said to have put the finishing touches on the party platform. And that platform is not likely to be a terse or vague document; earlier leaked drafts suggested a very detailed set of policy proposals.
- The movement has not only written the party’s platform, it has also approved its bylaws. In the process, it has left its very strong imprint. Those bylaws, for instance, make clear that the party is dedicated to peaceful and gradual reform along Islamic lines. Reform of what? The party aims to “reform the individual, the family, the society, the government, and then institutions of the state.” Reforming political institutions is standard stuff. But it takes a very special kind of political party to tell voters that it wants to reform them and their families as well. Actually, that is the traditional mission of the parent Brotherhood movement — it makes much more sense for a movement like the Brotherhood to focus on helping its members improve themselves than it does for a party to run on reforming the individual and the family as a program.

- The movement (and not the party) has decided that it will contest up to one-half of the seats in parliament. (Earlier, movement leaders had consistently suggested they would seek at most one-third of the seats, though they were often careful to add that no final decision had been made.) The raised electoral horizons for the party were not well explained — the most plausible argument was that competing for the extra seats would be the best way to ensure that the party would wind up with the target it seems to want: something like one-quarter to one-third of parliamentary seats; the crossed signals surrounding the decision may have also been an outcome of transferring authority from the small and more cohesive Guidance Bureau to the larger, more diverse, and less wieldy Consultative Council.
- The movement is not only determining the number of candidates for upcoming parliamentary elections; it also seems to be picking the names. According to at least one account, the movement is actually preparing separate candidate lists, some for a party list system (full of skilled parliamentarians), and some for a district-based system (full of those likely to serve their local constituencies well). The final list of candidates will therefore not be determined until the new electoral law makes clear the blend of list and district voting.
- The movement has also made clear how much it expects its members to be bound by its guidance in the political realm. Brotherhood members are not required to join the party, but they are told not to join any other. The movement decided that its members will not contest the presidency; if former Guidance Bureau members Abd al-Minaam Abu al-Futuh actually files for candidacy, that will likely be grounds to evict the estranged leader from the organization. There are numerous accounts that the Brotherhood is going beyond telling its members what not to do; local branches are also reportedly suggesting which of their members should go into the political work of the party.

When pressed about their close management of the party, movement officials react defensively: this is only to get the

party off the ground, they claim. Once it is founded, it is free to evolve as its members see fit. But with its structure, leaders, members, and program so closely shaped by the movement, it is not likely it will evolve very much at all.

The movement is currently exploring its options in realms far from the political sphere. It has suggested intentions of forming youth clubs, broadcast media, and even soccer teams (leading to some Egyptians joking that Brotherhood players will follow the path of the political party by seeking only to tie every game). If the Brotherhood does develop in so many different directions while keeping close control over the various aspects of the movement, it will post difficulties for Egyptian democratic institutions. Historically, it is precisely the Brotherhood's broad focus and diverse interests that has made it a difficult coalition partner. When a secular political leader sits down with someone from the Brotherhood, he or she finds that the potential partner is cautious, anxious to protect a broad range of activities, and wary about committing to specific agendas or compromise over programmatic issues.

Recently the Brotherhood's general guide explained that while the movement stands for democracy and freedom, it did so within an Islamic reference and that "democracy cannot make permitted what is forbidden, or forbid what is permitted" in religious terms, "even if the entire nation agrees to it." Such a general formula actually has an ironically populist resonance in what remains a fairly conservative and religious society. The problem will come when the movement's leaders watch closely to ensure that the party interpret that general formula in accordance with its own strict instructions. Other political actors will likely find that a Brotherhood party tied closely to such a movement to be a difficult partner in the rough-and-tumble game of democratic politics. And indeed, the revolutionary coalition that brought down Husni Mubarak is already showing serious signs of fraying over precisely such issues. The Brotherhood absented itself from some recent meetings and demonstrations held by other political forces with an oppositional flavor. But it did not hesitate to send its representatives to an official sanctioned gathering.

The close relationship with the movement will probably serve the party well in the electoral realm — in the short term. It will have a nationwide army of dedicated workers to organize its campaign. But in the long term, the movement and party have very different organizational impulses. A party interested in winning elections wants to attract large numbers of voters. A movement interested in an ideological mission is more concerned with the level of commitment of its core supporters. In recent days, a former Brotherhood parliamentarian was videotaped telling Brotherhood members that they should only marry within the movement. It is that sort of insular attitude — one that served the movement well under harsh authoritarian conditions — that makes the transition to mass democratic politics such a challenge. But with the close watch the movement is keeping over the party, the tension between

seeking large numbers of votes and fulfilling the movement's mission is not likely to be felt over the short term.

To compare the Freedom and Justice Party to my student contemplating an incomplete is not an exact analogy. When it comes to democratic transformation, the party's helicopter parent is giving its offspring the precise opposite advice to that provided by my student's mother: it is very much recommending an incomplete.

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Inside Egypt's Salafis

By Lauren Bohn, August 2, 2011

"All Americans think I'm a terrorist," 34-year-old Salafi political organizer Mohammed Tolba exhales with his trademark belly laugh. He grips his gearshift and accelerates to 115 miles per hour down a winding overpass in Cairo. "But I only terrorize the highways." Since the fall of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, Tolba has constantly been on the go. "The media says we all wear galabeyas (long Islamic dress), put our women in niqabs (a face veil), and will cut off people's hands," Tolba says, dramatically feigning a yawn. "We're the new boogey-man, but people need to know we're normal — that we drink lattes and laugh."

To this end, the silver-tongued IT consultant shuttles regularly from the modish offices of popular television personality Bassem Youssef (he's starring in a segment on

the "Egyptian Jon Stewart's" highly anticipated new show) to the considerably less shiny quarters of Cairo's foremost Salafist centers. He's been conducting leadership and media-training workshops for Salafis. "These guys don't know how to talk to the public," says Tolba, rubbing his eyes in exhaustion. "Once they open their mouths and face a camera, man, they ruin everything."

The same might be said for their debut on Egypt's main stage last Friday, as hundreds of thousands of Salafis joined other Islamist groups in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Drove of people from governorates across Egypt got off buses near Tahrir Square, chanting "Islamic, Islamic, we don't want secular." One Salafi, Hisham al-Ashry, beamed with pride as he walked back from the square to his tailor shop downtown. "Today is a turning point, we finally showed

our strength.” Meanwhile, “the liberals and the leftists are freaking out. God protect the nation and revolution,” noted popular blogger Zeinobia.

Who are the faces and voices of an oft-deemed bearded and veiled monolith that packed the square? And what exactly do they want?

“Salafi” has become something of a catchall name for any Muslim with a long beard, but Salafism is not a singular ideology or movement with one leader. As Stéphane Lacroix, a French scholar of Islamist movements, explains, it’s more a “label for a way of thinking” guided by a strict interpretation of religious text. Salafis aspire to emulate the ways of the first three generations of Islam. Many Salafis have cultivated a distinctive appearance and code of personal behavior, including untrimmed beards for men and the niqab for women.

The Salafi culture has been growing in Egypt for decades, but until the revolution had little formal political presence. “Satellite salafism” hit Egypt in 2003, with around 10 Salafi-themed TV channels broadcasting from Egypt on NileSat. The intensely popular Al-Nas, Arabic for the People, began broadcasting in 2006. Its programming focuses on issues of social justice and sermons by prominent Salafi preachers, like Mohammed Yaqoub and Mohammed Hassan, whose tapes and books are common fixtures among street vendors throughout Cairo. Nobody knows exactly how many Salafis there now are in Egypt, but Abdel Moneim Abouel Fotouh, a presidential candidate formerly of the Muslim Brotherhood, recently estimated their number at around 20 times the number of Muslim Brotherhood members (unofficial reports estimate Muslim Brotherhood membership between 400,000 to 700,000 members).

Salafis in Egypt abstained from politics for decades. Under Mubarak, many were arrested and tortured. Salafi gathering points like Aziz Ballah, where the charismatic Tolba has been doing most of his media training and outreach to Salafis, were known as the most intensely monitored institutions in Cairo. They rationalized their apolitical conditions with an elaborate ideological argument which rejected political

participation as contrary to the Islamic Sharia. Most Salafis stayed away from the January 25 revolution. For decades, they lambasted the Muslim Brothers for their willingness to participate in a secular political system based on the laws of man rather than the laws of God. But now they are rushing to join that same system. What do they hope to achieve through the ballot box?

Almost all Salafis currently agree on the need to protect and strengthen Egypt’s Islamic identity, which in practice means defending the Second Amendment of Egypt’s Constitution which preserves Sharia as the main source of Egyptian law. The argument that Sharia is not only compatible with democracy, but actually required by democracy, is a new approach for Salafis who have traditionally rejected the very concept of democracy. Sixty-two percent of Egyptians believe “laws should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran,” according to an April 2011 Pew Research Center poll. “Majorities usually run countries. So why should the minority [secularists] rule everything,” poses Abdel Moneim Al-Shahat, a prominent Salafi scholar and the spokesperson for the Salafi movement in Alexandria.

What would this mean, exactly? Many non-Salafis fear that implementing Sharia on Salafi terms would force women into niqab, turn Christians into second-class citizens, and impose Quranic punishments for serious offenses such as flogging or cutting of hands for theft. Some Salafis give ample causes for such fears, but others see this as a red herring. “Egyptians aren’t against Sharia, they just fear the people who they think will impose and enforce it ignorantly,” reasons Doaa Yehia, Tolba’s equally quick-witted wife.

The Salafi party Al-Nour, Arabic for light, has tried to present what it considers to be practical solutions to economic and social problems, in part to avoid the perception that they are only interested in imposing Sharia. Nour spokesman Mohammad al-Yousri argues that “everyone thinks Sharia is our only aim, but that’s like someone who has cancer and you tell them to get a nose job. Right now, Egypt’s a poor, weak underdeveloped country.” Or, as Sheikh Ahmed Bin Farouk told me after

Friday prayer in Ain Shams, a poor section of Northeastern Cairo, “everybody wants to talk about the cutting of hands. *Khalas*, stop. Before this could ever happen, we’d have to assure almost full economic and social equality. And obviously that could take anywhere from five to 500 years.”

Where the politically savvy Muslim Brotherhood figures have mastered a public discourse of moderation and compromise, Yousry says Salafis know “when to take a stand. We’re not all smiles like Amr Khaled [a popular moderate Muslim televangelist who’s consistently likened to the “Billy Graham of Islam.”] We know what we believe and there are limits to flexibility.” When asked how he lost two fingers, he recounted his fighting in Iraq in 2004 with the resistance against U.S.-led forces.

During another conversation with scholar and cleric Sheikh Hassan Abu Alashbal, known for one of his televised appeals to President Obama to “revert” to Islam, I asked what Salafis might do if a moderately liberal figure, like famous opposition leader Mohammed ElBaradei, should come to power through the ballot box. “Don’t worry, we’re not going to kill him,” Hisham al-Ashry, a Cairene tailor, comically interjects with a Brooklyn drawl he acquired from living in New York City for 15 years. “We’ll just cut off his hands or maybe his throat.” Sheikh Alashbal glares at him, unfazed by the joke. “We are not worried about liberals,” he says. “If you only watch television, you’d think they’re everywhere, but if you go to villages and among the true Egyptian people...you will find they’ll only take Sharia.”

Such talk may be meant to reassure non-Salafis but often only frightens them even more. They point to the Salafi rejection of their attempt to establish “supra-constitutional principles” guaranteeing personal and political freedoms as evidence of their intention to impose their own vision on all Egyptians. Liberals warn that democracy is not only the rule of the majority, but also an agreement on the fundamental rules of the game. But Salafi slogans at the July 29 rally pointedly declared that, “there is nothing above the constitution but God’s Sharia.”

Years of repression left the Salafi movements disjointed, with each wagging the finger at the other for being the less authentic or authoritative representative of Islam. Richard Gauvain, a scholar on Cairo’s Islamist and Salafi organizations, argues that their power structures are severely weakened by internal feuding. There’s little to suggest individuals within the organizations will be able to agree among themselves on questions of political importance. Lacking a clear internal organizational structure, the hallmark of the Muslim Brotherhood, different Salafi schools and other Islamist groups hold sway in varied areas of the country. For them to succeed at the ballot box, they will need to overcome these deeply ingrained divides. It is not clear that they can.

There are also generational divides. Many high-profile Salafi sheikhs voiced opposition to the Arab uprisings on grounds they were not modeled on the behavior of the prophet and that the suicide of the iconic young Tunisian Mohammad Bouazizi who set himself on fire was haram. It remains to be seen whether these sheikhs can regain popularity among a younger generation of Salafis who defiantly took to the streets despite contradictory calls from a fractured leadership. “We actually have more trouble connecting people inside the movement than we do connecting with liberals,” says Al-Nour spokesman Mohammed Yousry. “The challenge is telling these people this is the real Salafi way. It’s wide open and progressive.”

Such divides make it difficult for Salafis to present a clear, unified message. For instance, while Salafi political spokesmen emphasize the modesty of their political aims, scholars like Sheikh Alashbal say there’s no doubt the caliphate, referring to the first system of government established in Islam that politically unified the Muslim community, will be established. “This is the purpose of the revolution,” he explains in his ornate living room lined with leather-bound scholarly tomes — many his own. “It’s Allah’s plan for us to build one country in the Muslim world and rule the world. There is no doubt we won’t.”

For a movement that abstained from politics for decades, the Salafi “ground game” has been impressive. Their ability

to organize transportation of their cadres from all over Egypt to Tahrir Square last week opened some eyes. The Nour party registered even before most of its mainstream counterparts. Armed with a logo of a bright blue horizon, they've already set up three spacious offices in Cairo, branches in the Delta, and even up the Nile throughout the oft-neglected Upper Egypt. Its spokesman Yousry predicts Islamists will yield 40 percent of seats in parliament. In a single breath, he rattles off the names of cities and governorates in Egypt where he "knows" the party has the most presence and power on the ground.

Their strategy rests in part on the tried and true Islamist method of outreach and social services. Mohammed Nour, director of the Nourayn Media group and member of the new party, sits in his fashionably orange-speckled office near Cairo's corniche, constantly switching between his iPhone and iPad. For him, the math is simple. "Other parties are talking to themselves on Twitter, but we are actually on the streets. We have other things to do than protest in Tahrir."

One Friday in early July while protestors occupied Tahrir Square, Nour party member Ehab Zalia, 43, distributed medical supplies in the slum city of El Ghanna. Another Friday, 24-year-old Ehab Mohammed sold gas tubes at a reduced price to residents of the impoverished Haram City. "This isn't campaigning, this is our religion," he explained. One resident in the neighborhood, Aliaa Neguib, 42, says she has no plans to officially join the group, but in a country where 40 percent of people live below the poverty line, efforts like these are effective. "We need services. If they are loyal and give us that, we will support them." And they will, promises spokesperson Yousry.

The efforts of a new generation of Salafis to find their place in a post-Mubarak Egypt take many paths. In a virtual parallel reality outside of Cairo, nestled in Egypt's own Paramount studio lot, Mohammed Tolba strokes his beard and gets ready for his close-up. Shortly after Mubarak stepped down, Tolba and like-minded friends created Salafayo Costa, a spin on the international-coffee chain, as an internet-savvy PR campaign meant to debunk stereotypes. With a Facebook group of almost 9,000 members, the coexistence group hopes to broaden political

dialogue. He and his brother Ezzat, a liberal filmmaker, released a video on YouTube called "Where's my Ear" in an attempt to bridge what they deem a dangerously growing chasm between secularists and Salafis in post-Mubarak Egypt. The film is in reference to a notorious sectarian crime in late March when Salafis allegedly assaulted a Coptic Christian and cut off his ear.

Now, he's bringing these "normal Salafis" to a broader Egyptian audience through the comedian Bassem Youssef's hit show. Under hot lights, Youssef pretends to throw a punch at him in "a battle for the future of Egypt." After taping a segment in which Tolba and his liberal brother make light of the holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast throughout the day and festively break in the evening, one of the show's directors grows nervous, worried the segment will offend Egyptian viewers.

Youssef promptly cuts him off. "We need to diffuse anger and tension the Egyptian way — with comedy. It's time liberals and Salafis talk to each other, get out of their comfort zone." Tolba poses for a picture with one of the show's young production assistants who excitedly announces it's the first time he's talked to a Salafi. Tolba pantomimes as though he's cutting off his ear.

Still, his toughest critics might be Salafists themselves. Tolba's efforts have registered unfavorably among an old guard of strident Salafis who've labeled his approach "inappropriate" or "unnecessary." He's received a steady flow of hate mail on his perpetually drained white blackberry. And some scholars and even friends have refused to speak with him.

"Look, I'm calling for Salafis to get off their chairs and talk to those people who are scared of them, and for liberals to do the same. Stop isolating yourselves," Tolba says, before taking a call from a "not so funny" sheikh — a gratuitous reminder the task won't be so easy. "This is democracy. This is the new Egypt."

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Egypt's democratic Jihadists?

By Omar Ashour, July 13, 2011

“We were not in love with combat...if there was a way to hold a government accountable, Sadat would probably be alive today...we didn't know another way to change things.” That is how the Jihadist icon Abbud al-Zumur, a former leader of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri's al-Jihad Organization, recently explained the most famous assassination in modern Egyptian history. Zumur is currently an elected member of the Consultative Council of the Egyptian Islamic Group (IG). Until last March, he was also the most famous political prisoner in Egypt.

Zumur was one of the eight IG leaders who signed a unilateral ceasefire declaration in July 1997. The Initiative for Ceasing Violence ultimately transformed into a comprehensive process of abandoning and delegitimizing armed activism against political enemies. Zumur was the only one of the eight signatories who was not released from prison. While he agreed to abandon political violence, he did not agree to stop vocally opposing Mubarak. His commitment to political opposition, combined with a principled rejection of violence, represents the current face of Egypt's Islamic Group as it faces a rapidly transforming Egypt.

Egypt's Islamic Group was the largest armed Islamist organization in the country and second largest in the region, after the now defunct Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The estimated number of the IG members is somewhere between 15,000 to 25,000 men. During its Jihadist phase, the IG operated in more than a dozen countries. In armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya; in training camps in Pakistan and Sudan; in assassination attempts in Ethiopia; in bombings in Croatia and the United States, and in a five-year insurgency in Egypt, the name of the IG usually came to the fore.

In its post-Jihadist phase, the IG abandoned violence, strongly criticized al Qaeda's behavior and strategies, and accepted participating in elections. Now, it lies on the

right of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) when it comes to social conservatism and constitutional liberalism. For example, the IG still categorically denies the right of Copts and women to run for presidency (the MB does not deny that right, but says it will not support any female or Coptic candidates). When it comes to the Salafis, there are more similarities. The IG is Salafist in religious doctrine, though its relationship with mainstream political and apolitical Salafis was quite tense in the past.

The IG entered the post-Mubarak period with some serious credibility problems. The head of the IG's Consultative Council, Karam Zuhdi, and his deputy, Nagih Ibrahim, did not only call on Islamists to abandon politics, but also declared that any opposition to Mubarak and his son was futile. “Those guys became a mouthpiece for the interior ministry,” says a leading figure in the Muslim Brotherhood. He was not too far off. The position of some of the IG leaders between 2003 and 2011 was quite close to that of the regime, especially when it came to criticizing other Islamists, like the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Hezbollah. Traumatized by the experiences in Mubarak's jails and estimating that he will survive, both Zuhdi and Ibrahim supported the dictator until his last days in power.

This was not the case with the IG mid-ranks and grassroots. Most of the ones I spoke to described the position of the leadership during the revolution as a disgrace. “They told us it is illegitimate to join the revolution...we disobeyed them...now they want to jump [capitalize] on the blood of the martyrs” said a former member of the dismantled armed wing. “The relationship between the leadership and the members was always characterized by strong emotional ties and solid loyalty. But their stance with Mubarak killed it,” said another.

Post-Mubarak, the IG held elections for its highest executive body, the Consultative Council, on May 23, and both Ibrahim and Zuhdi were voted out by

members. Others, including Zumur, came to the fore. The Consultative Council of today is quite different from the one that decided to assassinate President Sadat. Four of the nine members hold PhDs, including Dr. Safwat Abd al-Ghani, the former head of the armed wing. He was also the author of “Another God with Allah? Declaring War on the Parliament,” the IG’s anti-democratic manifesto, which was also quite popular among other Jihadists. Abd al Ghani’s dissertation, however, was on political plurality and democratic transition.

The IG, in its new form, decided to participate in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. The question is why? The likelihood of losing is quite high, especially to Islamist rivals like the Brotherhood and the Salafis. The reactions to the IG leaders speaking on TV were largely negative, with thousands of tweets mocking them. Moreover, the mid-ranks are complaining that the grassroots are not so eager to fill in the party membership and registration forms. “I am responsible for Aswan City, but I know others who are asked by the leadership to fill a number of forms that are 10 times the number of members...we should be led by the realities on the ground, not by the wishful thinking of the leaders,” says Ismail Ahmad.

Indeed, a coalition or a merger with a larger, more experienced group like the Brotherhood makes more sense. But the quest for legitimacy and legal protection is one of the main determinants of the current behavior of the IG. In Egypt, there is a saying: “A white dime will serve you in a black day.” Aside from the political incorrectness, the reality of the IG is similarly saying “a good party today will serve you in the bad moment tomorrow.” In addition, like other Islamists, the IG’s history is that of “punching above its weight.” It can pull an upset, sometimes.

Egypt’s Jihadists today are relatively insignificant and too individualized. (Some also argue that they are good in hiding.) This is not their time. Unarmed civil resistance delivered a heavy blow to Jihadism and significantly undermined its rationale (that armed activism is the most effective and most legitimate tool for change). “The Islamic Group sacrificed a lot in the 1990s,” says Ibrahim.

“Two thousand its sons were killed, 100 were executed by military trials, and some of our 20,000 prisoners were detained for 20 years without a court order, despite having more than 45 court judgements ordering their release. This is a high price, without achievements. [The] January 25th revolution accomplished great things in 18 days and it was all done peacefully.”

Thus far, the IG has adhered to its commitment to abstain from violence, even as a good opportunity to engage in violent activism has presented itself. The proliferation of small and mid-size arms is currently a security problem in Egypt, due to the Libyan conflict and other factors. Any group that strategizes for a future armed campaign should be using this rare opportunity. But rather than stockpiling weapons, rebuilding its armed wing, recruiting and training angry teenagers and manipulating the weak security arrangements, the IG is holding internal elections, asking its members to fill party registration forms, holding anti-sectarian violence rallies, and issuing joint statements for peaceful coexistence with the Coptic Church of Assyut. “We were finally capable of taking revenge from the state security officers who tortured us. Instead we chanted *silmiya* (peaceful),” said Muhammad Abbas, a former member of the IG’s armed wing, a graduate of the famous Khaldan training camp in Afghanistan, and a veteran of multiple battles against the Soviets.

But if most of the problems between the IG and the Egyptian government were resolved, this is not necessarily the case with America. The United States still holds Dr. Omar Abd al-Rhman, the first leader of the IG and its inspirational ‘godfather,’ who was convicted of ‘seditious conspiracy’ in October 1995. The IG held several rallies in front of the U.S. embassy in Cairo demanding his release. It also organized several widely attended conferences to support him. The IG is also on the State Department’s list of foreign terrorist organizations (which generally needs an update). “They are still on the black list, despite abandoning violence 14 years ago. What message does that send?” says Dr. Osama Rushdi, a democracy activist who was the IG’s spokesperson in the mid-1990s who left the organization in 1998. He told me this while showing me

a handwritten letter by Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, the famous Jihadist strategist, in which al Suri was complaining that Rushdi was undermining Jihadi activities in Europe.

In any case, U.S. policymakers may want to keep in mind that the group will play a role in the future politics of Egypt, either by forming a coalition with other Islamists or by rebuilding its support base in Upper Egypt. From what I saw, the latter process is on-going with determination. What is certain, though, is that the IG's subscription to Jihadism is currently expired. Whether others will follow

its model or not in the post-Mubarak era is yet to be determined. Egypt was the birthplace of modern Jihadism. But after Mubarak, it may also be its graveyard.

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Egypt's Wild West **Post-revolution score-settling between the native Bedouin and Egypt's security services has brought chaos to the Sinai Peninsula.**

By Mohamed Fadel Fahmy

The landscape of Egypt's lawless North Sinai governorate is punctuated by the bullet-riddled, torched police station of Sheikh Zuweid, a densely populated town roughly nine miles from the Gaza border. It is just one of the security buildings that has fallen victim to the long-running clashes between the military and the Bedouin tribes of the region, clashes that have only escalated since Egypt's revolution.

Hosni Mubarak's regime branded the Bedouin, a largely nomadic and clan-based people, as outlaws who threatened Egyptian sovereignty. As his rule collapsed in February, and afterward, the Bedouins sought retribution against the security services that long oppressed them, attempting to carve out a degree of autonomy in the region.

The unrest has turned into an economic headache for Egypt's new military rulers: The pipeline that supplies 40 percent of Israel's natural gas has been bombed five

times since the revolution, halting the country's natural gas exports. But more importantly, Sinai has become a breeding ground for Islamist extremism and violence that — barring a dramatic improvement in relations between the Bedouins and the central government in Cairo — threatens Egypt and the region at large.

Sinai's lawlessness recently sparked an international incident: On Aug. 18, gunmen carried out a string of attacks in southern Israel that left eight Israelis dead. The Israeli government, which claimed that the attackers were militants from the Gaza Strip who had crossed into Israel through the porous Sinai border, retaliated by launching attacks in both Gaza and Egypt.

That same night, five Egyptian soldiers were killed and several injured during an attack on the Egyptian side of the border. Lt. Col. Amr Imam, a media spokesman for the Egyptian military, said that the officers were killed by

an Israeli Apache helicopter that fired two rockets. “It may have been a mistake,” he said.

Also on Aug. 18, a man wearing an explosives belt blew himself up at an Egyptian checkpoint 11 miles from the Sinai town of Taba, killing an officer and injuring two others. “The body of the dead officer and the unidentified head of the bomber were brought over to the hospital,” said Abel Wahab, a doctor in the emergency department of the hospital in el-Arish, North Sinai’s capital.

The Israeli operation outraged the Egyptian public and prompted thousands to protest outside the Israeli Embassy in Cairo. Amid rumors that Egypt might recall its ambassador from Tel Aviv, the Egyptian government also brushed off a rare Israeli statement of regret as “not in keeping with the magnitude of the incident and the state of Egyptian anger.”

In Sinai, that anger is more palpable — but it’s more often directed at the Egyptian state.

Ibrahim al-Mенаei, a leader of the Swarkeh tribe, considered the most powerful tribe in the north, told me that Mubarak’s formally dissolved state security apparatus was to blame for the lack of law and order in the region. He accused the security forces of framing his people for crimes that they did not commit and labeling them as drug and weapons dealers.

“I will not let a single police officer into this region until they give in to our demands,” Menaei explained as he sat in the sanctuary of his safe house a few kilometers south of the Israeli border, surrounded by his five sons and armed disciples. He called on the new Egyptian government to repeal laws that prevent the Bedouins from owning land, abolish all absentia sentences against Bedouins that were issued during Mubarak’s rule, and prosecute police officers responsible for killing Bedouins.

There are in fact two Sinais: the impoverished north and the more-developed south, home of beach resorts catering to international tourists. The security vacuum may have

turned Sinai into a regional hot spot, but it is also an economic boon to Bedouin leaders, who have thrived off what is literally an underground economy. Menaei said that he spent \$100,000 to construct a subterranean tunnel large enough to smuggle cars into nearby Gaza. “As many as 200 cars a week were smuggled through,” he said.

“ Hamas gets \$1,000 per car as tax,” he explained. “The buyer pays me the car’s price and rent money for using the tunnel — \$5,000 for a car and around \$8,000 for a truck.”

Such a lucrative source of revenue requires significant weaponry to protect it. “This is our operation room,” Menaei boasted, showing off two 14.5 mm anti-aircraft machine guns stored in the corner of the room, covered with bedsheets.

The smugglers showed me one of their blockade-busting tunnels positioned to relieve the Gazans’ suffering from the Israeli blockade and sanctions. It was equipped with ventilation and lighting systems, as well as network boosters meant to amplify the mobile-phone signal. Its entrance was well hidden between man-made huts and fences located amid an olive tree field in the desert.

“I get \$50 for every Palestinian I smuggle into Sinai,” Menaei said, explaining that Hamas supervises the smuggling operation from the Gaza side of the border. Standing nearby, one of his sons demonstrated how the smugglers plunge safely into the tunnel using a rope tethered above ground.

Salem Aenizan, a fugitive leader from the Tarabin tribe, insisted that the Bedouins’ links to Gaza are based on financial interest rather than an ideological affinity with Hamas. He told me that the tunnels are used to smuggle food, cars, medicine, and construction materials — but that the weapons trade ceased after Hamas’s 2007 takeover of Gaza and that the smugglers refuse to transport suicide bombers or people intent on kidnapping tourists.

But the Bedouins’ entrepreneurial spirit has nevertheless led to some interesting opportunities. “We built the

Gaza Zoo,” Aenizan boasted. “I received \$20,000 once for smuggling a tiger. We had to drug it.”

For the Bedouins, the profits that they reap from smuggling are only compensation for generations of neglect and outright hostility from Egypt’s central government. “Only 10 percent of my people benefit from the tourism industry,” Aenizan said. “The rest is pocketed by Egyptian tycoons.”

It is not unusual for Bedouins to refer to non-Bedouins as “Egyptians” — a sign of their detachment from Egyptian society. Running water is still scarce in many areas of Sinai, another sign of the government’s negligence. Although most Bedouins hold Egyptian citizenship, they are not allowed into the high ranks of the military, according to Aenizan and Menaei.

Aenizan, who is wanted on an 80-year sentence for allegedly smuggling goods, described how interactions with the corrupt judicial system often sour Bedouins on the state. “They jailed our women to force us to turn ourselves in,” he said, attempting to justify his contempt toward the government. “I didn’t even enter a court or have a lawyer. They ask you to be an informer. If you refuse, they frame you.”

The Bedouins’ long-simmering frustration with the Egyptian state boiled over during the mass protests that led to Mubarak’s fall from power. Three police officers were kidnapped by armed men in el-Arish during the height of the revolution, and their whereabouts still remain unknown. Tourists fled the city as lawlessness grew more pronounced.

But while Sinai’s disorder has mainly been exploited by people looking to make a quick buck, a disturbing ideological element has also tried to fill the political space. On July 29, during a protest calling for an Islamic state after Friday prayers in el-Arish, close to 100 armed militants mounted on motorcycles and pickup trucks stormed through the city waving black flags, terrorizing residents, and attacking the police station. Gun battles with security forces lasted for hours, leaving seven people dead, including two police officers and a 13-year-old boy caught

in the crossfire, according to Gen. Saleh el-Masry, head of North Sinai security.

Masry said that the attackers belonged to the radical Islamist group Takfir wal-Hijra, as well as Palestinian factions that snuck through the tunnels. “The Takfiris” — extremist militants with a dogmatic, exclusionary ideology — “have become more active during the revolution,” he said, claiming that Egyptian security forces had arrested 12 of the assailants in the el-Arish attack, including three Palestinians.

The spike in violence has been fueled by outlaws who escaped Egypt’s prisons during the anarchy that accompanied Mubarak’s fall. Deputy Interior Minister Gen. Ahmed Gamal El Din told me in an interview that 23,000 criminals escaped from Egypt’s prisons during the revolution and that only 7,300 had been rearrested or turned themselves in as of May.

The prison breaks also freed some men allegedly linked to al Qaeda, who appear to be attempting to establish a foothold in Sinai’s ungoverned spaces. Maj. Yaser Atia of Egypt’s General Security confirmed that Ramzi Mahmoud al-Mowafi, also known as “the chemist” for his expertise in preparing explosives, escaped a Cairo prison on Jan. 30. The fugitive’s prison files presented to me indicate that the 59-year-old Egyptian had fled to Afghanistan and joined al Qaeda. Upon his return to Egypt he was given a life sentence by a military tribunal, though more details on the charges against him remain unclear. Egyptian intelligence sources told me that Mowafi is currently in Sinai, though they played down the threat he posed.

And then there is the matter of the fliers. On July 29, the residents of el-Arish found a flier labeled “A statement from al Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula” distributed throughout their neighborhoods. It describes Islam as the only true religion and criticizes the Camp David agreement that led to the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. Gen. Abdel-Wahab Mabrouk, the governor of North Sinai, said that the fliers had been distributed outside mosques after Friday prayers by men who covered their faces with scarves.

Several days later, another purported al Qaeda flier appeared around el-Arish — this time announcing that the organization was planning to attack police stations on Aug. 12. For the Egyptian security services, that was one provocation too far. On that day, stunned residents of el-Arish woke to find thousands of troops from the Egyptian 2nd Army, accompanied by police officers and border guards, deployed in an “anti-terror” crackdown in Sinai.

The operation’s first phase entailed securing government buildings, police stations, and the el-Arish prison. The offensive started on Aug. 15, as one Egyptian militant was killed and 12 were arrested, according to Hazem al-Maadawi, a police officer involved in the operation. State news agency EgyNews said authorities are targeting 15 more people who participated in attacks at the el-Arish police station, including members of the al Qaeda-affiliated Palestinian group Jaish al-Islam.

These extremist rumblings have frayed nerves in the Israeli government, which had already been skeptical of the Egyptian revolution. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a Knesset committee on May. 30, “Global terrorist organizations are meddling [in Sinai] and their presence is increasing because of the connection between Sinai and Gaza.”

If there is any hope of restoring order to Sinai, it lies in a historic rapprochement between the Bedouins and the Egyptian security forces to drive out these unwanted interlopers. Bedouins have signaled their willingness to help restore security, but are also calling on the Egyptian government to do its part by finally integrating them into Egypt’s social fabric.

“We will not let a single Palestinian suspected of ill intentions into Sinai after the attacks,” said Muhammed al-Ahmar, a Bedouin and human rights activist. “But, we are fed up with empty promises, and if the police mentality does not change, then nothing will work. It’s time for Sinai to flourish and regain its full rights.”

Egypt’s new government has made tentative steps in that direction: Members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, accompanied by the deputy interior minister and members of the military intelligence, held a meeting on Aug. 20 in the el-Arish military club, in a conference hall with Bedouin sheikhs representing each tribe in Sinai.

At the meeting speakers from both sides expressed their willingness to cooperate in bringing the security situation back to normal and to bury the hatchet “for love of Sinai.” The government officials announced their concessions, including promises to soon issue a new law regarding land ownership in the region and to revisit the files of those Bedouins sentenced in absentia; the Bedouins dutifully clapped at the news. Several Bedouin sheikhs subsequently took to the podium and announced their intentions to assist in securing the region.

The government’s planned reforms are a good start, but after years of neglect, it’s going to take more than promises to win over the Bedouins. If Egypt is truly concerned about securing Sinai, it must quickly turn its words into actions.

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