

Egypt

- International boundary
- National capital
- Railroad
- Expressway
- Road



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Eye on Egypt Digest

First Issue – Summer 2010





Egypt's International Economic Forum is a non-governmental , non-partisan, business organization founded in 1998 by a group of prominent Egyptians committed to the comprehensiveness, sustainability and consistency of Egypt's reform efforts. The Forum aims to promote a favorable economic and business environment that allows Egyptian businesses to prosper while also contributing to the progress and well-being of Egyptian society at large.

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Eye on Egypt Digest is a monthly publication of Egypt's International Economic Forum, offering a review of international analyses and opinions covering Egypt's economy, society and polity. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Forum.

“A Peace Plan within our Grasp”

Source: The New York Times

Date: August 31

Author: Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, *President of the Arab Republic of Egypt.*

On August 31, President Hosni Mubarak published an Op-Ed in ***The New York Times*** outlining his perspective on the latest attempt at peacefully resolving the Palestinian – Israeli conflict and on Egypt's involvement.

President Mubarak dismissed widespread pessimism surrounding the talks, citing US President Obama's involvement as a serious source of hope and positivity. Mubarak, however, acknowledged the serious psychological obstacles to a lasting peace, chief among them: the recent memory of violence and a lack of mutual trust.

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“Egypt at the Tipping Point”

Source: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Middle East Program Occasional Paper Series

Date: Summer 2010

Author: David Ottaway is *Senior Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars and former Bureau Chief of The Washington Post in Cairo during the 1970s and early 1980s*

What happened to Egypt during the last 25 years? This story is told through the eyes of David Ottaway who, over the course of this article, tracks the changes which have occurred in Egyptian society, polity and economy since he left Egypt in early 1985.

The paper presents a snapshot of Egypt in early 2010 as a country full of contradictions with currents flowing in opposite directions. It implicates Egypt to have embraced liberal economic reform wholeheartedly, leading to the first real economic boom in recent times. This reform had produced a vastly expanded upper class but also a deep rift in society between rich and poor. Simultaneously, society became much more conservative un-

der the Brotherhood's both direct and indirect influence. Thus, Ottaway claims if the economy is moving in one direction, society is moving in the exact opposite.

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“To Catch Cairo Overflow, 2 Megacities Rise in the Sand”

Source: The New York Times

Date: August 24

Author: Thanassis Cambanis, *Adjunct Professor, Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs and Adjunct Professor, New School Graduate Program in International Affairs.*

Author Thanassis Cambanis chronicles the rise of “new Cairo”—consisting of two megacities (6 October City and New Cairo) outside of the Egyptian capital's city boundaries. Put forth by the government, these cities aim to mitigate problems of pollution and overpopulation in downtown Cairo. The two cities have already seen patterns of migration, each already housing about a million people.

Though the plan was for these cities to contain the working class, thus far their residents overwhelmingly reflect the upper class. Though the govern-

ment has played the primary role in these cities' developments, it has depended on private development for their most expensive elements, all which allure the upper class' migration outside downtown Cairo. Because these elite communities are matched by the government's forced migration from illegal slums to "tracts of row houses" in the new communities, Cambanis says the new cities highlight Egypt's increased polarization between the rich and the poor.

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"Dead on Arrival? The Limited Impact of the Muslim Brotherhood's Political Participation"

Source: Al Majalla

Date: August 5

Author: Amr Hamzawy, distinguished Egyptian political scientist who previously taught at Cairo University and the Free University of Berlin.

Disagreement among Muslim Brotherhood leadership has complicated the social movement's predilection for active political processes. Hamzawy notes that the movement remains inconclusive as to what forms its political participation should consist of and how far-reaching said participation

should be. In part, this political consciousness and questioning demonstrates the Brotherhood's fear of repression. Consequentially, it has remained notably non-confrontational, particularly in its fielding of candidates during the 2005 parliamentary elections. The movement's positions not only have the potential to alienate the government, but also other opposition groups, who question its ambiguous positions on the enforcement of Shari'a law, the rights of Egyptian Copts and women's rights.

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"Towards a Better Life: How to Improve the State of Democracy in the Middle East and North Africa"

Source: Global Political Trends Center

Date: July

Last July the Global Political Trends Center published a 182-page report titled, "Towards a Better Life: How to Improve the State of Democracy in the Middle East and North Africa." The report describes the state of democracy in countries throughout the MENA region and offers suggestions about how to make improvements. The goal of the report is to "reinvigorate democrats in the region to en-

courage action that is more concrete." Aspects of Egyptian politics are described and analyzed throughout the report, most notably: constitutional amendments, political parties, and the media.

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"Can Egypt Change?"

Source: Council on Foreign Relations

Date: July 22

Author: Lisa Anderson, Provost of the American University of Cairo;

Steven Cook, Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations;

Michele Dunne, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and editor of the Arab Reform Bulletin.

On July 22, the Council on Foreign Relations published a report titled, "Can Egypt Change?" with articles by Lisa Anderson, Steven Cook and Michele Dunn.

Can Egypt Change? Prospects for Economic Reform

Lisa Anderson, Provost of the American University of Cairo, discusses portrayal of Egypt in the American press as a country on the verge of collapse. She argues this portrayal is inaccurate.

Although many challenges face Egypt's youth--including overcrowded schools with poorly paid and trained teachers, a dwindling water supply, and a job market which they are ill-equipped to enter--there has also been much positive change in the past decade. This has been primarily driven by the government's commitment to new technologies, most notably cell phones which now number over 60 million.

The introduction of cell phones and rapid exchange of information have made Egyptians impatient for development of a more structured system to both government and day to day life. Anderson argues this desire keeps even the strongest critics of the current regime from wanting upheaval. Egypt is not unstable in the way that they United States press portrays it. However, the question remains how quickly and in what way will change progress in the coming years.

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Can Egypt change? Political institutions need reform

Steven A. Cook, Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, highlights many of the positive socio-economic

changes which have occurred in Egypt during the past three decades, including increased life expectancy, literacy, economic growth and technology usage.

Yet, despite these changes, Cook maintains much more has remained stagnant, stating, Egypt is still "poor, dependent on a global power, and authoritarian." He attributes this stagnation to Egypt's political institutions. The rules, regulations and laws Nasser created to consolidate power after the 1952 coup are anti-democratic, but work in favor of those who are within or closely tied to the regime. These individuals have formed a powerful faction combating institutional changes necessary for democracy. Rebellious against this faction is exceptionally difficult, even for those who desire reform, because of the risks affiliated with taking on Egypt's internal security service.

Cook also states there is very little the US can do to influence the situation. Washington has made clear it supports "transparency, free and fair elections, and non-violence." Yet, when Mubarak dies, his successor will inevitably seek to consolidate power and thus further perpetuate the Egyptian political institutions.

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Can Egypt change? reviewing a decade of changes

Michelle Dunne, senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and editor of the Arab Reform Bulletin, observes there is no way to predict the future of Egypt; either profound change or a maintained status quo is equally possible. Rather than speculate, she reviews the changes which have occurred in the past decades.

Dunne sees the emergence of free media and the acceptance of civil society advocacy as the biggest changes in recent years. Today, journalists, bloggers and television personalities delve into Egypt's political and social life. While there are still some limitations--such as criticizing the military--overall the media is significantly freer than ever before. Additionally, NGOs have grown both in size and legitimacy and are no longer viewed as enemies of the state. Independent media features their opinions and the Egyptian government is forced to respond to their suggestions. And while a journalist or a civil society activist will occasionally be harassed or arrested, such incidences are significantly less

common than in the past. Egyptians are increasingly behaving as though they have rights which should not be compromised by the regime.

Despite these positive changes, Dunne emphasizes that “political contestation” remains lacking in Egyptian society. Egyptians are not acting as though they have the right to select their leaders and hold them accountable through elections. Yet, in light of widespread support of Mohamed El-Baradei’s platform for reform, it seems possible citizens could begin to demand an open political system on a large scale. If this were to happen, the United States would have to choose between its alliance with the current regime and the Egyptian people.

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“The Economist’s Special Report on Egypt”

Source: The Economist

Date: July 17

Author: Max Rodenbeck, Chief Middle East correspondent for The Economist

The Economist (July 17-23 issue)

published a special 14-page report on Egypt, with President Mubarak on the cover page. The report by Max Ro-

denbeck featured the following nine articles:

The Long Wait

While the article speculates on the future of Egyptian politics, it ultimately makes no prediction about what will happen, leaving all possibilities open. Egypt could transform either as Russia did with the rise to power of someone from the current regime, as Iran did in the 1970s with the angry removal of the current regime, or as Turkey did with a quieter revolution.

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America's Lieutenant

This article discusses the history and current challenges of Egypt’s relationship with the United States. Egypt has become what this article calls, “America’s Arab poodle.” In line with the US’s desires, Egypt has moderated peace in the Middle East throughout past decades. For doing so, Egypt has reaped many benefits, including: Western aid, favorable trading terms, goodwill that promotes tourism, and diplomatic prestige. Yet, despite these benefits, this relationship is becoming more difficult to maintain as the US’s

foreign policy is increasingly opposed by the Arab world. This conflict is evident in Egypt’s Gaza policy, which has been in line with the wishes of the US, but is breeding unpopularity at home and in the Muslim world.

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The Best Man Always Wins

This article discusses how the Egyptian government maintains its power, primarily focusing on the state of Egypt’s elections. It provides an overview of the most evident problems, namely the lack of independent elections coverage, the strict requirements and risk of arrest for opposition candidates, and the low voter turnout. The article also discusses growing political opposition from the Muslim Brotherhood and Mohamed El-Baradei’s supporters and suggests a boycott of November’s People’s Assembly elections by these groups could be possible, though unlikely.

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A Favored Spot

While many articles have touched upon the troubled political and economic situation in Egypt, this article

highlights the many natural advantages Egypt possesses. It notes the economic growth of the past decades, primarily due to increased foreign investment and trade, which continued last year despite the economic downturn, primarily as a result of strong domestic demand.

Much of Egypt's growth has been possible because of its wealth of natural resources, its location, and tourism. The tourism industry continues to grow, not only because of the country's antiquities and beaches, but also because of what is described as "the country's greatest resource": the warmth of the Egyptian people.

This article gives a positive forecast for the country's future because of the Egypt's vast natural advantages.

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Long-sighted

This article mentions the great success of many Egyptian entrepreneurs who have expanded overseas, including Onsi Sawiris and his three sons, Hamed El Chiaty, and Ahmed and Hassan Heikal. The article speculates these people, and many other Egyptians, have had such great success en-

tering into uncertain, but promising markets because of the skills they gained from dealing with Egypt's bureaucracy. The article believes that there will be many more successful Egyptian entrepreneurs to follow.

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A Slow Learning Curve

One of the most essential attributes of any economy is its education system. This article highlights the history and current challenges to improving Egypt's education system. A recent study by the Egyptian government found one reason why poverty has persisted, despite increased economic growth, is that few Egyptians have the skills to seize available opportunities.

One of the biggest problems the article highlights is the university admissions system. Admission is based on exam results and forces students into areas of study which they are not interested in. This produces an imbalance between the degrees of graduates and the available jobs. Additionally, this system favors those who can afford private tutors or, better yet, private schools, which are flourishing.

With the increase in private education and the overhaul of basic education in 2007, the education system is slowly improving. The article expresses optimism about the future of Egyptian education.

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No Paradise

This article discusses the difficulties the average Egyptian deals with daily and why few complain or protest their current condition. The most widespread difficulty is simply poverty. The article proposes the Egyptian poor complain "surprisingly little" because strong families, neighborly camaraderie and the Muslim tradition of charity make their condition bearable.

Additionally, fear of the state motivates many people's passivity. Violence and torture by the state remains common and emergency law, allowing arbitrary arrest and indefinite detention, remains in effect since 1981. These realities motivate many to carry on quietly, under the radar of the government.

Finally, Egyptians know from experience no one is likely to listen to their

complaints unless they know a relative or friend in a position of power.

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Saving Faith

Religion has held a significant position in Egypt throughout history. This remains true today, with Egypt currently enduring what this article calls a “full-scale religious revival.” The article highlights multiple points of view about what has caused this revival. Some see it as a political trend, noting Western invasions into other Muslim countries strengthening attachment to a threatened religion, as well as the influence of Arab Gulf countries in Egypt.

Others see the trend as a reflection of modernity, rather than a return to ways of the past. More Egyptians read the Koran because more are literate. More women don the veil because more are using public transportation.

This article predicts that, while religion will certainly continue to be strongly woven into the fabric of Egyptian society, its overt public expression in society is beginning to decline. The revolutionary influence of

Islam is being replaced with more subtle, personal religious pursuits.

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After Mubarak

Speculations about Egypt’s next leader are garnering extensive international coverage, as is evident from yet another article focused on this topic. This article discusses possible successors to President Mubarak: Gumal Mubarak, son of President Mubarak; Omar Suleiman, head of General Intelligence; and officials with experience in the military and intelligence services.

It also discusses the current Egyptian public opinion about politics. Most Egyptian citizens feel there is a severe divide between the regime feigning support for the poor, but actually taking care of the rich. This sentiment is particularly growing amongst Egypt’s youth. The article says Egypt’s youth having not endured war, not wanting to rely on the state, and increasingly connected to each other and the rest of the world through the internet, have become “impatient for a voice and a role” and have the potential to be a part of great political change.

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“Ready for Change”

Source: TIME Magazine

Date: July 12

Author: Abigail Hauslohner, freelance reporter and producer living in Cairo.

Mohamed El-Baradei’s return to Egypt has attracted extensive international coverage including an article published on July 12 in ***TIME Magazine***. The article is based on the publication’s interview with El-Baradei. It sheds light on El-Baradei’s opinions of the current government, his potential presidential aspirations, and his hopes for reform in Egypt.

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“Thank You and Goodbye”

Source: The Economist

Date: July 10

***The Economist* (July 10-16 issue)** published an article titled, **“Thank you and Goodbye- For good or ill, change is coming to Egypt and Saudi Arabia soon.”** The article addresses the future of Egypt.

The article discusses the many positive improvements in Egypt instated under President Mubarak's rule. However, it also warns that closed political systems such as Egypt's often lead to conspiring at the top and dissatisfaction which can easily spread throughout society. According to the article, suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood has been both unjust and unwise. Leaders of the Brotherhood have repeatedly said they support multi-party elections and, if ever elected, would be willing to step down at the loss of a subsequent election. The article advises President Mubarak to attempt to bring the Brothers openly into political involvement, first through local councils to test their earnestness. It also advises eradicating the obstacles preventing outsiders, like Mohamed El-Baradei, from running for President. It concludes by stating that while elections are important, what is most urgently important for the Arab world is the establishment of independent courts, freer media, a professional civil service and a more successful education system.

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“Egypt Concedes to Resistance on Privatization Push”

Source: The New York Times
Date: June 27
Author: Michael Slackman, The New York Times *correspondent on the Middle East.*

Michael Slackman comments on the government's downplayed announcement of its terminating sales of state assets to private investment. This policy shift occurred in large part, according to Slackman, because the public had become skeptical of these sales, which they perceived to reflect insider negotiations and corruption. Secondly, industries up for sale were not economically viable, as marketable sectors are already privatized or have dissolved. Most notably for Slackman, however, are the waves of protests by workers outside of parliament against the “loss of jobs, wages and social protections, often in connection with businesses that have been sold.” These protests, combined with the aforementioned issues, rendered sale of public assets a political detriment.

Although this announcement reflects an official change in government policy, Slackman says its actual importance is severely limited since the announcement merely solidifies a policy which has been in practice for years. Plus, Slackman says government pri-

vatization does not reflect the embedded Egyptian system, wherein the government has a heavy hand in daily life. This is evidenced by the still six million civil service government employees. Further, the government's efforts at reforming the system had been mismanaged. Slackman uses the example of economic attention promulgating a mismanaged educational system.

Other efforts by the government to change economic processes include greater openings to foreign investment and new legal parameters, including one allowing state-owned industries to manage themselves the same as private-sector companies.

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“Egypt's Emergency Law strikes again”

Source: Foreign Policy
Date: June 25
Author: Soba Abdelaty, Deputy Director of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.

The death of young businessman Khaled Said has drawn extensive international coverage to Egypt's judicial system. On June 25, **Foreign Policy** published an article titled, “**Egypt's**

Emergency Law strikes again” by Soha Abdelaty. The article discusses the case of Khaled Said, which gained publicity because it was videotaped and widely circulated on Facebook, inspiring massive demonstrations in the streets of Cairo and Alexandria.

This article says Khaled Said’s murder implicates the meaninglessness of the Egyptian government’s promise to restrict use of emergency law to terrorism and drug-related crimes. The article states emergency law was “meant to be an exceptional state of affairs,” but “has now become the norm.” It also highlights the irony that while Said was being beaten to death, Egyptian representatives were endorsing Egypt's human rights record before the U.N. Human Rights Council.

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Change Egypt's Expats Can Believe In”

Source: Foreign Policy

Date: June 22

Author: Liam Stack, *Cairo-based freelance journalist and frequent contributor to The Christian Science Monitor, The Guardian Weekly, The San Francisco Chronicle and others.*

Mohamed El-Baradei's campaign for reform has attracted broad international coverage in recent weeks. On June 22, *Foreign Policy* published an article by Liam Stack titled, “Change Egypt's Expats Can Believe In” which discusses the support of Egyptian-Americans for El-Baradei. The article particularly highlights the efforts of the most recent Egyptian-American advocacy group, the Egyptian Association for Change. The group has held many original events, most notably a mock Egyptian election in front of the Egyptian embassy in Washington, D.C. in which El-Baradei won in a landslide. These efforts reflect the new feeling of hope experienced by many in the Egyptian Diaspora.

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“Conflict of Interest Fears Afflict Egypt”

Source: Financial Times

Date: June 22

Author: Heba Saleh, *Cairo correspondent for the Financial Times.*

Corruption has long been a part of the fabric of Egyptian politics. This June, President Mubarak annulled the sale of state property to a private company. On June 22, *Financial Times* pub-

lished “Conflict of interest fears afflict Egypt” by Heba Saleh, who speculates the annulment was based upon conflict of interest of Ahmed al-Maghraby, the housing minister who is a leading shareholder in Palm Hills Developments (PHD). The company denied any wrongdoing and said Mr. Maghraby has had no role in the running of the business since becoming a minister. The article noted this incidence is indicative of a lack of transparency in the government that is weakening the trust of citizens.

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“The Flawed Shura Council Elections: Omen for Egypt's Future?”

Source: Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Date: June 16

Author: J. Scott Carpenter, *Keston Family fellow at the Washington Institute and director of Project Fikra, which focuses on empowering Arab democrats in their struggle against extremism;*

Dina Guirguis, Executive Director of the US-based Voices for a Democratic Egypt

The Shura Council (Upper House) elections (June 2010) garnered broad international interest. On June 16, the ***Washington Institute for Near East***

Policy published an article analyzing the implications of this election on future elections and Egyptian foreign policy.

The article highlighted the contrast between the Independent Electoral Commissions' account of the election and the reports of the independent media and the human rights organizations. The commission reported the elections ran smoothly and with a high voter turnout. In contrast, the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) and the media reported rampant irregularities, including group voting, bribery and violence against independent candidates. They estimated a mere 5 percent voter turnout.

The Washington Institute recommends the US take steps to insure a smoother execution of November's parliamentary elections through bilateral meetings with the Egyptian government. According to the Institute, the US should make clear it is concerned about the parliamentary elections, and that the result will affect US-Egyptian relations. Additionally, the Institute recommends the US should stress the importance of having international observers to ensure a just and transparent electoral process.

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“Egypt’s Waning Influence”

Source: The New York Times

Date: June 9

Author: Alastair Crooke, British Diplomat, founder and director of the Conflicts Forum and Op-ed contributor to The New York Times.

Crooke claims Mubarak's opening of Egypt to Gaza as a shift in the Middle East's balance of power. This shift, he asserts, renders Egypt increasingly less of an influential player to the Palestinian cause and, tangentially, more isolated from the Middle East. This isolation, and the increased mediatory--or arguably conciliatory--role of Egypt with regard to Israel, reflect what Crooke believes is Mubarak's desire for Israel to serve as an important key to Gamal's succession. Ironically, this preference for Abbas over Hamas and a predilection for the United States has limited the role of Egypt rather than augmented Mubarak's leverage. Though Egypt has the advantage of bordering Gaza, Crooke insists Egypt's influence to be on the decline. Crooke does not conclude whether Mubarak's policy will be successful with the appointment of Gamal, or whether it will hinder his ability

to rule, but says the fact remains: Egypt is holding fewer cards with regard to the Palestinian issue.

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“Obama Needs to Support Egyptians as Well as Mubarak”

Source: The Washington Post and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Author: Michelle Dunne, senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and editor of the Arab Reform Bulletin.

Date: June 4

On June 4, 2010, *The Washington Post* and the *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* published, “Obama Needs to Support Egyptians as Well as Mubarak” by Michele Dunne and Robert Kagan.

The article discusses the high hopes of many Egyptians after Obama's Cairo speech. Many are now disappointed by a lack of involvement by Washington and Obama's continued support of Mubarak. The Obama administration has employed “quiet diplomacy” to support of democracy and human rights and to admonish emergency law, all unsuccessfully. This

article suggests there is still time for a “new beginning” in US-Egyptian relations. It recommends Vice President Biden to have a forthright discussion with Mubarak in his June visit to Egypt about the importance of creating a more transparent political process before the upcoming transition in leadership.

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“Can't We All Just Get Along?”

Source: The Brookings Institute

Date: June 2

Author: Shadi Hamid, Marshall Scholar and Former CDDRL Hewlett Fellow and Director of Research at the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED) 2008-09.

On June 2, *The Brookings Institution* published an article titled, “**Can't We All Just Get Along?**” by Shadi Hamid. This article discusses the uncertainty of Egypt's future government. With the succession of Gamal uncertain, support for El-Baradei dwindling and no current successful attempts at cooperation between opposition parties, no one is certain of what will happen. The only thing maintaining the calm is Hosni Mubarak. This article recommends instating a 24-month transitional period to allow currently subdued political parties

to emerge and make a case for their platform. Ayman Nour also supports this model and proposes the creation of a civil state and new constitution during this period. After the two years of transition, free elections would be held.

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“A Letter to the Secretary of State”

Source: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Author: Working Group on Egypt

Date: May 2010

The Group's letter to American Secretary of State Hilary Rodham Clinton remonstrates Egypt's extension of emergency law for two more years, even in spite of Mubarak's repeated statements on replacing it with a more limited law. Though the new code of emergency laws is altered in letter—such as the government's claiming it will apply only to terrorism or narcotics—these changes are likely to be shallow in effect, as they reflect ones made previously which had little to no consequence. The Group says that, in practice, Egypt's emergency law has demonstrated itself disadvantageous to citizens, though the letter of the law suggests it is in place to protect them.

The letter calls for the US to engage Egypt, particularly to persuade the Mubarak government to lift the state of emergency prior to the important parliamentary and presidential elections occurring this year and in 2011.

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For more information, please contact us at:

Egypt's International Economic Forum

509 Road 10, off Road 9

Mokattam, Cairo

Tel: + (202) 2508-6873/4

Fax: + (202) 2508-6859

E-mail: cief@cieforum.org