



## Democratic Developments and Regional Security in the Middle East

CAIRO, 30-31 OCTOBER 2011



This workshop, organized by the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs and the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, took place at a seminal moment in history as Egyptian society stands on the verge of upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections and key constitutional decisions which will determine the legacy of the 25 January Revolution.

### MAIN POINTS

- To solidify the gains of the 25 January Revolution, Egypt is conducting a vibrant dialogue on core democratic principles such as respect for the law, parliamentary rule, sovereignty of the people, and respect for minority rights.
- There is a diversity of perspectives among the Islamic movements in Egypt. Their role is expected to increase following the coming parliamentary election. This should not in itself be seen as a rejection of modernity or an attempt to isolate the country from the West.
- The military has played a positive role in the Revolution, but it must tread carefully to avoid fostering antagonism during the coming months. Many are looking forward to the moment when the military will surrender the control of political life.
- Most agree that Sharia law will influence the new constitution. Interpretation of Sharia law and the role of the parliament and judges in the emerging system are being debated in a lively civic dialogue. There appears to be widespread consensus however, including among representatives of Islamic parties, that civic law, as voted by the Parliament, will always be the basic law of Egypt (even if influenced by Islamic values), and religious and cultural minorities will be protected under the new constitution. There is a sense of urgency that these issues continue to be debated and clarified in coming months, and that such discussions include a wide range of views.
- There is a strong sense that changes in the Arab world will lead to profound changes in the Middle East, and that Egypt will have a leadership role. Egypt's relationship with the region and especially Palestine will alter the balance of relationships in the region. Outside powers can play a positive role on Gaza, fostering economic development and supporting dialogue, but were urged to understand their role will be limited.
- There is a strong undercurrent of accountability adding urgency to Egyptian political life. As one participant warned: "Tahrir Square is still there, we can always go back." As this report goes to press, we note the poignancy of this statement and the urgent need to address the range issues laid out in this report.

## REPORT

On 30-31 October, the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs and the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies convened a meeting in Cairo on “Democratic Developments and Regional Security in the Middle East.”<sup>1</sup> The participants included: presidential candidates, senior party leaders, a Supreme Court judge, senior military leaders, current and retired diplomats, leaders of the youth movement, and other renowned figures. They were joined by a limited number of international experts, including from the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. The meeting was co-chaired by Pugwash Council Member Maj. Gen. (ret) Dr. Mohamed Kadry Said of the Al-Ahram Center and by Pugwash Secretary General Paolo Cotta-Ramusino. Special thanks are given to the Al Ahram staff (particularly Ahmed Kamel, Eman Ragab, and Marwa Salim) and Cherifa Sirry for working very hard to put together the participant list, to the staff of Pugwash (Claudia Vaughn), and to Anissa Hassouna for her invaluable help. This report was prepared by Sandra Butcher, with inputs and contributions from several participants.

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This perhaps unprecedented workshop took place at a seminal moment in history. Egyptian society stands on the verge of upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections and key constitutional decisions which will determine the legacy of the 25 January Revolution.

Participants discussed the pending transformations from a broad range of religious, national, regional and international perspectives. The simple fact that this meeting was possible given the fluidity of the moment and the high stakes involved proves there is a sense of dynamism in the Egyptian political body. The vibrancy of the dialogue, which included strong voices of the youth movement and key women leaders, was in itself evidence of the profound changes in the Egyptian political discourse. One participant likened this emerging scene to many separate lines joining together to make the distinctive fingerprint of the new Egypt.

There are clearly different visions, religions and cultures vying for space in the Egyptian political arena. The overriding sense was that most are interested in solidifying what has been so far a relatively harmonious revolution, with an emphasis on coexistence and the respect of differences. There was a unanimous agreement on the importance of dialogue and the need to develop a deeper understanding of the various perspectives.

However, key critical areas emerged during discussions that require further exploration:

- What structures will be put in place in the new society and to what extent will the constitution and the emerging legal order be integrated with sharia law? What role will the military play, both during the transition and after elections?

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<sup>1</sup>The meeting was a private meeting closed to the press to ensure open exchange of perspectives and exploration of creative possibilities for ways forward. There was no attempt to seek consensus, and in fact the sharing of diverse views was encouraged. The meeting was held according to traditional Pugwash/Chatham House rules to enable an open exchange of perspectives and exploration of creative possibilities for ways forward. Thus, the substance of the discussions can be reported out, but no item discussed can be attributed to any one individual. The views expressed do not necessarily represent the view of the author or Pugwash, and the report reflects the predominance of Egyptian participants in this meeting. The rapporteur for this report was Sandra Ionna Butcher, Senior Program Coordinator, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. Email: sibutcher@earthlink.net. Pugwash appreciates the support of the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Heathside Charitable Trust for support of our Middle East activities.

- What is the nature of the Egyptian political landscape and how will the Islamic movement move forward as it takes a more relevant (and perhaps dominant) role in Egypt?
- How will changes in Egypt and elsewhere (including especially Palestine) affect the regional and international equilibrium?

In the course of our discussions we were honored to hear from some of the leading political, judicial and military figures involved in these issues, including some in-depth discussions with presidential candidates and leaders of political parties. Without diminishing the importance of fostering more in-depth understanding of the differing political platforms, this report does not attempt to recreate in depth that portion of the discussions, since the meeting was not structured as a presidential or political debate and was held under Pugwash/Chatham House Rules.

This report focuses on cross-cutting issues affecting democratic developments in Egypt and their possible regional and international impact, and highlights some outstanding questions and concerns. There is a clear concern that the gains of the 25 January Revolution need to be integrated into societal structures, and all sides of the political arena seem aware of the need to be responsive to the popular will. This may take time. As one prominent figure said, “going through the neck of the bottle takes time.” And yet, there is a pressing sense of accountability. One leading political figure expressed the undercurrent present today in Egyptian political life: “Tahrir Square is still there, we can always go back.”

## THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY, ROLE OF THE MILITARY, CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES/SHARIA LAW

Some felt the changes occurring in Egyptian society will become clearer only over time. Egyptians need to figure out why Mubarak was able to stay in power for 30 years. There is a lack of trust in the legacy of the political system caused by the failure of institutions to create check and balances and concern over the continuing impact of a regime that didn't allow for the rule of law. As one participant said, there is a “need to learn a culture of democracy.”

One of the students reminded participants that since birth his generation has known nothing but the Mubarak regime and corruption. As a result there is an entire generation that does not trust political parties and seeks answers about the implementation, application and fulfilling of the promises that the rule of law will be respected, and certain freedoms and transparency guaranteed.

Most Egyptians seek to see the future role of the state diminished. They hope that respect for the law, parliamentary rule, and sovereignty of the people will prevail, but many fear guarantees of such values are not secured yet. This issue of democratic development, one participant argued, is not limited to the elections but includes critical questions about what the future checks on power will be and the structure of society after the elections. Although the elections are dominating attention at the moment, some call for further, non-election related dialogue on core concepts such as what is meant by the state, a civil state, citizenship. Democracy is based on a majority but also involves a dynamic minority, and questions about the rights of minorities continually emerged during the course of our discussions.

There is a strong sense of the need to protect the democratic state constitutionally. Some felt deeply that Egyptians need to guard against those who may seek to manipulate democracy to ensure they will rule forever—to avoid what would in effect represent a new revolution. The people toppled the patriarchal

authority, and will not tolerate religious or other domination. Some warned (based on the Palestinian example) against wasting the energy of the whole country on internal conflict.

## Timing

Issues of timing have been debated in Egypt, in a sort of chicken and egg conundrum. What comes first: the constitution, a parliament or a president? Through a popular referendum in March 2011, the people voted for the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF, a group of 20 senior military figures) to continue to rule under a working/provisional constitution (which went into effect 30 March 2011), followed by parliamentary elections, and then presidential elections. The future elected parliament will form a committee to draft a new constitution. Parliamentary elections will run from 28 November 2011 through January 2012; some predict the Shura Council elections will begin in January 2012 and finish by mid-March; the presidential election will take place by April/May at the latest, followed by local city council elections. By the middle of next year civilians will once again receive authority from SCAF.

Some have criticized the planned length of time for parliamentary elections, which will take approximately three months due to a controversial requirement that requires judicial supervision of elections at all polling stations. Given the fact that there are only a limited number of judges, this is seen as unnecessary and not a sufficient guarantee of non-corruption, even by some leading jurists who favor instead a public monitoring system.

One leading minority figure said that Egypt is currently “suffering a crisis morning, noon and night.” There is no president, no cabinet, no good police and no judiciary and this leaves few guarantees that the success of the revolution will be assured. Some argue that according to legal definitions, the revolution is still an “extraordinary/emergency situation,” which thus allows the possible continued use of military courts. Deep concerns were raised about the continued use of this definition. Questions were raised about whether or not the old regime should be tried under this “extraordinary situation” or if this should be done through ordinary courts on applied law. Concerns remain over the handling of the Maspéro incident of Oct. 9, 2011 (where around 24 - 27 Copts were killed, supposedly by the military and several hundreds were injured), continued monitoring of mobile phones, control of the media, and arrests of activists, etc.

History shows examples that serve as a warning if the timing of change is pushed or delayed. The February 1917 Russian revolution ousted the tsar, but too little progress on the social sphere paved the way for the Bolshevik revolution in October. The 1979 Iranian revolution initially toppled a despotic figure but eventually led to a very different outcome. The way in which the Taliban in Afghanistan rose to power was pointed out by one participant as a warning (while others expressed frustration at what they consider the misguided focus on the consequences of the Taliban power in Afghanistan rather than the US impact on that country).

## Role of the military

Egyptians take pride in the fact that in their revolution, unlike others in the region, the military played a supportive and some say decisive role (in Egypt the people were against the police and not the military), without which the revolution would not have been successful. This was an act of courage by members of

the military, as there was no guarantee at the time the revolution would be successful, and had it failed, members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) would likely have faced execution. From the military perspective this is crucial to keep in mind as criticisms emerge over whether or not SCAF is supporting the gains of the revolution.

The people will go to vote under the protection of SCAF and security forces, but the armed forces will not be allowed to vote in upcoming elections. There are no military people running for president, despite the fact some think this is unfair but there are retired military people running for presidential elections and this in turn is causing concerns in others. The cabinet after the elections will have a defense minister. SCAF asserts it does not intend to stay in power following the elections, though some doubt these statements.

Questions about military interference in the economy were raised and discussed. By some figures, military involvement in the civilian economy does not exceed 10 percent. Some other figures see the 10% limit as exaggerated. The military claims this involvement is focused in small and medium (but not heavy) industries, helping to implement mega infrastructure projects at national level, and that military banks are owned by the military or military partners. It was pointed out that in the future the military has no intention of increasing its involvement in the economy, especially heavy industry. It was noted that the Ministry of Defense sometimes has projects which benefit both the military and civilian sectors such as roads and bridges.<sup>2</sup> Others note that the Egyptian military leaders are foresighted enough to see that stability would require economy based on both state economy as well as political liberalization.

Even senior military leaders are against the use of military trials for civilians. The law stipulates that any civilian attack on armed forces or equipment can be tried in a military court, while a civilian attack on other civilians does not. There was disagreement about the way this is currently being applied and some criticized the military in this respect..

The military was urged to tread carefully in the next few months, as there is still a feeling of unease at the military's silence or complicity over the last 30 years, despite its positive role in the revolution. It is important not to create antagonism but to continue to play a positive role during the transition.

Participants benefited in this discussion from a presentation by and dialogue with General Sameh Seif El Yazal, chairman of the Al Gomhouria Center for Political and Security Studies and Researches.

## The role of sharia law in the new constitution

In Egypt there is a robust and vibrant debate under way about the future constitution. There is a sense of history, and an awareness of the responsibility of the moment and its impact on the future shape of Egyptian society. Some experts agree that the constitution is likely to be inspired by the basic principles of Sharia. However, people will differ over the right application in addressing the national interest, the structure of the state, public laws, rights and freedoms. Participants engaged in a creative and in-depth dialogue on these topics with Judge Tahany El-Gebaly, Vice President of the Supreme Constitutional Court and Egypt's first female judge.

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<sup>2</sup> Participants noted this article by David D. Kirkpatrick, "Egyptians Say Military Discourages Open Economy", The New York Times, Feb. 17, 2011 (<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/22501/Egypt/Politics-/Amendments-to-Shura-Council-Law-approved.aspx>). In it, Abdel Fattah el-Gibaly director of economic research at Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies said that Egypt will go back to not exactly to socialism but maybe halfway.

Legal minds are closely exploring the ways in which Sharia might influence the new constitution and the legal system. There is of course a range of thinking on this. Repeatedly in our discussions it was highlighted that this is not unlike many Western countries whose constitutions and legal systems derive from a Christian source, or for example the role of Confucius in Chinese traditions.

The debate will occur over interpretation. There was an appeal for Egypt to have “an open space of thought” on these matters and to avoid religious despotism, to remember “our understanding is human, no one has the truth.”

On a basic level, some legal scholars argue that one must distinguish between the practice of Islam and individuals’ religious creeds. From this perspective, in Islam there is no supremacy of the individual, only the prophet. Any person whosoever can make his or her own correct or incorrect judgment. From its origin the Islamic message promoted a civil state based on values and general principles. Variables change over time through jurisprudence. Sharia promotes equality and justice, and the legal structure applies to all and accepts the creed of others. From this perspective, all are “partners in the same nation” and if people breach this, they are against the principles of Islamic Sharia. There is a difference between the reference (“the source” does not mean “the only source”) and rulings, which are interpretations by individuals. Choosing a hard line law versus a moderate law is a personal choice. Parliament has the right to examine interpretations provided by jurors. In other words, in a state of law, there is a source. Through jurisprudence laws are applied by a judge. No individual should say they have a judicial base.

Some legal experts highlight the fact that Islam respects everyone, even those who don’t believe in religion, with all having freedom of creed, thought, and expression, and the human right to say “I am not a believer.” There is no requirement to hold him accountable as this is his personal responsibility in his relationship with his God. Any citizen can choose any religion, even if it is not revealed. No Muslim can discuss his relations with God, though one can discuss supreme values.

It was pointed out that some have called for “rulings with principle” and this causes concern. Some believe there needs to be a “scrupulous” and “accurate” dialogue with all partners in the nation about this. According to Islam, the philosophy of punishment is to act as a deterrent. Society must be very clear about jurisprudence surrounding punishment, which changes over time. There was a warning of the importance to guard against extreme stringency so that what has happened in other countries does not happen in Egypt. Muslims can be wrong in applying certain models, which differ widely in Sudan, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Gulf countries, Afghanistan, etc. Punishment cannot be applied, unless within the framework of law.

There was some concern expressed that not all people understand these distinctions, and that with such high illiteracy rates there are many people who will be influenced in certain directions by religious references who tell them what to do according to selective interpretation of the religious doctrine. Many fear that the political arena can be manipulated when politicians make appeals on religious grounds.

Liberal parties and others are mainly concerned that Islamic movements may try to govern or take power, and may ultimately not follow the principles of justice and diversity. It was noted that not all Islamic parties share one vision, with differing interpretations of Islam and different principles among different groups and that in fact not all Muslims will accept principles that may be imposed.

While certain ideas (such as wearing a veil) can be promoted, some felt it important that Islam should not be confined to a certain mold, since it can be applied in many different ways. The Turkish example may be useful, as Turkey is often viewed as having bridged the problems between Islam and the civil state.

### For further exploration

Concerns raised about the future structure of society and the constitution merit further consideration than time allowed at this meeting, and while the list below is neither complete nor prioritized, it does show the range of topics requiring further exploration and clarification):

- Continuing use of military courts to try activists;
- Continuing use of the legal definition of “extraordinary situation” and its impact on civil liberties during the transition;
- Questions over what efforts are in place to combat corruption;
- Efforts to postpone the elections;
- Judicial versus a public monitoring system for elections;
- What freedoms will be guaranteed in the new constitution;
- What impact will possible changes have on the role of women in their daily lives, in their ability to work, etc.;
- To what extent will a broad range of representatives be included in the writing of the Constitution (the Copts will be involved, but some see a need for the same involvement by other groups);
- Will there be a guarantee that different political parties will be allowed to participate in the coming state;
- The future role of centralized vs. decentralized industries;
- What amount of military budgetary detail will be provided (with the military hesitating to provide any detail beyond broad budget categories);
- Who will nominate the commander of the armed forces;
- Will the president (after the constitution) continue to be supreme commander of the armed forces;
- Will the next president have a role in determining arms and weapons deals or will this continue to be the purview of the military;
- Will there be changes in the military/civil economies;
- Further clarity on who exactly can become president. What constitutional guarantees (if any) will there be that others can come to power next;
- Concerns still exist regarding media censorship (the results of a recent torture investigation, along with the abduction of activists, were cited as examples);
- Is there any future role for a crisis management team which would hold regular meetings under the president or cabinet;
- Will the 12 million or so expats have the (new) right to vote;
- What role will the big families and tribes play in the “new” Egypt.

### Egyptian political landscape and the role of the Islamic movement(s)

There are more than 6,700 candidates from over 50 political parties now fully registered in Egypt (with a total number of parties registered and seeking registration of around 75) and competing for 768 seats in

the upcoming elections 498 elected in the lower house and 270 in the upper house.<sup>3</sup> They are divided under four basic blocs<sup>4</sup>:

1. The Egyptian bloc (liberal/left of center), including Free Egyptians Party, the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, and the Mubarak-era leftist opposition Tagammu Party;
2. Islamist Alliance, led by the Salafist Nour Party, and including the Asala (Authenticity Party), the Salafist Current, and the Construction and Development Party, the political arm of Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiya;
3. Revolution Continues (an electoral alliance between activists and various socialists), including the Socialist Popular Alliance Party, the Egyptian Socialist Party, Egypt Freedom, Equality and Development, the liberal Egyptian Current and the Revolution Youth Coalition;
4. Democratic Alliance (Muslim Brotherhood-led), bringing together 12 parties under the leadership of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). Two main partners in the coalition are the liberal Ghad Party and Al-Karama (Dignity) Party (Nasserist-leaning).

In addition, there are two parties running independently: Al Wasat (new center party), a moderate Islamic party which split from the Muslim Brotherhood in 1999, and the Wafd Party, Egypt's oldest liberal party, which recently pulled out of the Brotherhood's Democratic Alliance.

Some pointed out that the number of political parties, each with its competing ideologies and intellectual reasoning, should not cause concern. It can be considered a reshuffling of cards and a reorganization of the political map, as questions like secularism and civil vs. religious relations are sorted out. Some believe the problems Egypt faces are more cultural than religious.

Some 50% of the population lives on or below the poverty line, approximately 1/3 of the people are illiterate and approximately 1/5 is unemployed, with economic growth remaining at approximately 1%. How the coming political leaders respond to these crises in energy, environment, health, human population and housing will in many ways define their future success. In this respect, parties that are providing food and other comforts to potential voters were criticized by some as "buying votes," while others defended these practices as being responsive to the needs of the people.

## Role of the Islamic parties

One national political leader said, it is a "terrible mistake to think Islamic beliefs go against democracy." As with any movement, there are extremists and moderates, but the majority of the Islamic movement is moderate, believes in moderate solutions, rejects violence, believes in cooperation with others, respects differences, and supports democratic processes. However, others believe strongly that practicing democracy on the basis of religion is not right.

Within Egypt there is at the moment not one voice of the "Islamic movement" but rather a series of different voices promoting alternative ways forward. The Muslim Brotherhood represents perhaps the more moderate of these groupings, while others like the Salafists take a more stringent line. The Islamic parties were characterized as "astute political players" who have their constituencies at heart.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/22501/Egypt/Politics-/Amendments-to-Shura-Council-Law-approved.aspx>

<sup>4</sup>For further information see for example: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentPrint/1/0/25030/Egypt/0/Finally,-Egyptian-parties-set-to-begin-the-battle-.aspx>

It was pointed out that Islamic parties (and the Muslim Brotherhood) have a special role in Egyptian society, since they have been at the forefront of key issues such as fighting the dictatorship, and that these are in fact the communities that have borne the brunt of persecution for many decades. Some are concerned that the Muslim Brotherhood was powerful under the old regime, and that it will not give up this role.

Participants held an in-depth discussion with a senior leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Dr. Essam el Erian of the MB's political bureau. Discussion centered on the Freedom and Justice Party, the nature of the Islamic movements in Egypt, and the overriding sense that the majority in the movement are moderates seeking a democratic approach in an Egypt that is based upon Islamic values.

While the Muslim Brotherhood is not running any presidential candidates, some contenders do have historical connections to it.

Participants in the workshop held a wide-ranging and informed dialogue with Sheikh Hazem Abu Ismail, a formerly prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Ismail has practiced law for 30 years and helped defend MB members prosecuted under the Mubarak regime. He has publicly taken controversial stands, such as suggesting women should be required to wear the veil. He promotes the concept that any future changes in Egypt based on Sharia will not equate to an Egyptian rejection of engagement with the international community.

Participants also heard from Dr. Tarek El Malt, Deputy Head, Al Wasat Party, and Dr. Salah Abdel Kreem, its co-founder. The Al-Wasat party is "a democratic party based on Islamic civilization, standards, and values," which emphasizes the rights of full citizenship, including Copts being able to hold positions in government (including the presidency), and the full equal rights of women as part of society.

Dr. Abdel-Monem Abul-el-Fotouh, who was unable to participate in the workshop but who met separately with a group of workshop participants that included the Pugwash Secretary General, is another leading (independent) presidential candidate who is a former member of the MB. Abu El Fotouh represents a moderate approach, emphasizing that laws should protect minorities and freedom of expression. Abu El Fotouh's campaign also emphasizes that civil laws voted by the Parliament, which may be inspired by Islam just as in the West civil law is inspired by Christian values, should rule the life of Egyptian society, as opposed to subjective interpretations of Sharia.

Some criticized the merging of religion with politics, especially the use of religious slogans for political parties, such as the Muslim Brotherhood's traditional slogan, "Islam is the solution." Some supporters pointed out this is a general and vague slogan, not unlike the Obama campaign's use of "Yes, we can," while another pointed out that if a group were to use the slogan "Christianity is the solution" this would not be acceptable, so one group should not impose on the others what they are not willing to accept themselves. There is a concern by some that the Islamic movements in Egypt do not present issues related to democracy and citizenship in a transparent way.

There was broad agreement in the room that contrary to an external belief that Islam will clash with global culture, there is instead an "internal intention" to work in harmony with global culture, and that modernity is one of the main principles of Islam.

It was repeatedly pointed out, including from those of a strong Islamic perspective, that Egypt is not a closed culture, and that many of the leaders of these new Islamist movements are former bankers, lawyers, etc. From this perspective, the community of Egyptian society, if based upon Islamic concepts, will not be different from the global community except where Islam specifically rejects certain things (alcohol being one example of an area of contention). Any such changes should not be seen as a “reproach” to the Western world. It was likened to differences among different states in the USA or in different European countries, where some have different approaches to the legality of prostitution, drug use, gambling, and smoking. Keeping one’s culture, as do some groups in countries like the USA, is not necessarily a stance against modernity.

The Salafists, for example, say they have no problem with education, theatres, banking systems. Examples were given that Salafists would not order women to wear the hijab or ban alcohol, and Christians would be able to deny that Mohamed is prophet, all of which are part of an individual’s creed and would be allowed. There are some “basics” identified in the holy Qur’an, and these would be the only exceptions. The basis of society should be justice. There would be no problem in having relations with Asia and the USA. Some strict Islamists would be ready to tell their sons that if you die to defend the rights of a Christian, you are a martyr. From the Salafist point of view, there is a minimal level of what is mentioned in the Holy Qur’an. For example, all say Islam does not accept adultery. Other issues such as music, photos, etc. are not mentioned by anyone. Those who have concerns about certain Islamic groups were encouraged to get out among the people and talk to them about their own perspectives so that people have the freedom to decide.

It was pointed out, however, that in the election some prominent Salafists have stated that voting for liberals goes against principles, raising a concern that if they were to take power, they would change rules for their own interests, and that promoting women now was only a means to garner seats, and that once in power they would exclude women and non-Muslims from political process.

Those in the political arena who believe Egypt is a religious society view secularism as a great danger and a threat to Egypt’s future, since it means an unacceptable liberalization of the state. Some seeking political influence will never accept a schism between religion and the state. Some extreme Islamists accuse secularists of refusing Islamic doctrine. These concerns raise questions among some parts of the population about the future rights of non-Muslims and women in elections, for example. It is also known these parties may also take positions more inimitable to the West and the USA.

Salafists expressed frustration that, while they feel they have clarified their position on issues related to democracy, the rule of law, the role of women, etc., the media, etc., has distorted their image, owing mostly to the lack of political heritage in Egypt.

From some perspectives, Western concern about this increased involvement of the Islamic parties in Egypt’s political system seems hypocritical. Many Western countries have Christianity as a basis for their legal systems, and in England there is a monarch that is both head of state and head of the church. Some 15 national flags bear a cross, and Muslims in those countries respect those flags.

## The role of liberal and other parties

While much attention is focused on the likely success of the Muslim Brotherhood in upcoming parliamentary elections (and therefore the role they may play in drafting the new constitution), there are vibrant political parties who do not have a religious basis.

Participants engaged in an in-depth discussion with Amr Moussa, former head of the League of Arab States and former Egyptian foreign minister, who is at the moment leading in the presidential polls.

While some are steadfastly against involving any members of the former Mubarak regime in future politics, there are others who look to Moussa as an experienced politician who promoted some positive policies during his career (one participant said the Egyptian diplomatic file of the 1990s was a “bright file” can be defended) and who has specified some projects for regional and national economic development (such as a proposed bank of development for the Middle East or a rail project to link the region). Some of the young people questioned the perceived League of Arab States’ apathy during the Egyptian revolution.

Participants had a dialogue with Dr. Mohamed B. Argoun, chair of the program committee of Hamdeen Sabahi's campaign, which seeks to promote Egyptian economic enterprises, engagement in regional and national development, and Egypt’s potential to improve manufacturing and technology and to provide silicon and solar power, with a focus on state industry, development and education as the way forward for Egypt.

Participants also heard from Anwar Esmet el Sadat (nephew of former Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat), Vice President and a founder of the liberal Reform and Development Party.

## The role of young people

Throughout our discussions, the role of young people in the revolution, and the need to continue to engage this important part of the population in decisions regarding the future directions for the country were repeatedly emphasized. At times in our discussions it was clear that young people of various parties want a clear change from Mubarak-era policies. They share frustrations about the current role of the military, and seek strong guarantees about future freedoms and transparency in government. The way in which these concerns were voiced, with youth leaders sitting as equals around the table, emphasized their role and potential continuing impact on the transformations under way in Egyptian society.

### For further exploration

Some issues concerning political trends in Egypt were brought up in discussions are noted in the list below, which is neither complete nor prioritized, but does show the range of topics requiring further exploration and clarification:

- Influence of religious figures in the political arena;

- Concerns over what some consider a practice of “buying votes” in certain areas where political parties are providing rice and other items to the electorate;
- The need for more detailed and specific information/papers to clarify exactly what each group will give to the people on topics such as: foreign relations with the West, societal structures, civil society, the rights of women, daily freedoms, etc.;
- Further clarity on the exact links between various Islamic groups;
- How to ensure that the representation of youth groups is substantial and not cosmetic;
- Concern over the use of certain religiously laden words and slogans in the political arena;
- Role of the media in providing accurate descriptions of political options;
- The role of former officials in the new political scene;
- How to guarantee political involvement of vibrant minorities;
- How to guard against what some fear will be a possible encroachment of liberties if certain Islamic groups gain significant power.

## CHANGES IN THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EQUILIBRIUM

There was a sense that a new era has come and that the changes in the Arab world will lead to changes in the Middle East, and reverse the legacy of the recent past, where dictators spread a culture of violence in the region and the youth lost hope of a better life and turned to violence. The Tunisian example (where 90% of the population reportedly participated in elections), the fact that we are about to witness elections in Egypt, and developments in Libya, Yemen, Syria, etc., all lend hope to the end of what was described as the “distorted” image the West has had of Arabs and Muslims.

Participants noted that the reordering of the relationship Egypt will have with the outside world, especially with Palestine, will be of critical importance as this is what will alter the balance of certain long-standing regional interests. It would be inaccurate to see this change only in terms of the impact the Islamic political movement might have on the security calculus. From this perspective the issue is about charting a new future for the region, beyond the old relationships based on Western occupation and dominance, and there is a feeling that the West is losing its grip on those who were formally under its control (such as Egypt and Tunisia). In fact, many feel this is precisely what will occur, as Egypt and others begin to express their own economic views, principles, and interests.

The changes in the region pose some strategic concerns for Egypt as well. Some in the military are concerned about potential divisions and separation along the borders of Egypt, in Sudan and Libya for example. The concern is that there may be separation like that which took place between Gaza and the Palestinian Authority. In Libya, there has been a “miracle” and yet it is highly unlikely that it is possible to disarm Libya now. There is not a clear vision of the Islamic movement in Libya, and a low chance that the country might split. While not a neighbor, there also is concern about the possible division of Yemen, which some say has an 80% probability.

However, there is some frustration over the lack of a clear Arab stance toward revolutions in the region, and a request from many for clarity. It was noted that Egypt has since February provided unadvertised, ongoing support to Libya by extending electrical power and grids to Eastern Libya and Benghazi. Other

forms of support were also provided, such as intelligence, etc.

The regional balance of power is fluid at the moment, with many seeing Egypt as having the dominant role now and for the foreseeable future. They see Egypt playing a leading role, based on a modern approach and complementing the role of others. However, Turkey, Iran and Israel all have varying levels of influence, and some have requested greater clarity among the SCAF and political parties regarding Egypt's likely approach to these 3 countries. For example, Turkey's role in the region can be important, it is well known for its flexible diplomacy. Some said that various Egyptian political actors should further clarify the role they see for Israel in the "new order". There is a shared sense that regional cooperation is the best way to escape economic problems. Some see the issue of Middle Eastern security as linked with Mediterranean, African, and West Asian security and stability.

Egypt's stance is likely to be continued support for a region free of nuclear weapons. Egypt supports the position that those with nuclear weapons should disarm, and that there should be no further proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region. The more nuclear weapons in the region, the greater the danger. Any use of nuclear weapons in the region would harm Egypt's population and crops for decades. Most seem to support dialogue with Iran as a way forward on the nuclear issue.

It was pointed out by one leading politician that it is urgent for Egypt to not only orient itself as a leading player in the Arab world and the Middle East, but also as an African country, and that this connection should also be stipulated in the new constitution. There also are possibilities raised for a rapprochement with the GCC. Some wondered about the possibility of rapprochement beyond the Arab world, toward a wider regional security pact including the Maghreb.

## Palestine

Participants were honored to hear presentations from and have in-depth dialogue with three leading Palestinians during the course of the workshop: Dr. Husam Zomlot, Executive Deputy Commissioner, Fatah Commission for International Affairs; Ghazi Hammad, Deputy Foreign Minister, Hamas; and Ahmed Youssef, Advisor to PM Hanyeh.

There is a sense that the "Arab Spring" is having a positive impact on the Palestinian arena, and that the cause of the Palestinian people is a core issue for all Arabs. This Arab dimension, combined with the Fatah-Hamas agreement, hopefully may create opportunities for a forward movement.

Watching the changes unfold in the region is bittersweet for Palestinians, who have sought their "spring" since 1978. There is widespread frustration with the negotiations and with the US role via negotiators like Dennis Ross, and a sense that there is a need for a new push for "a new Palestinian spring," involving all the Palestinian people.

There is disagreement on tactics however. Some believe armed struggle versus Israel is not helpful for tactical reasons, while others do not rule out the use of force and note that the Israelis would never have released Palestinian prisoners without Shalit. Those who support the non-violent approach point out that the use of armed struggle is not a consensus position, as only 5-7 per cent of Palestinians support it, and they point to the fact that international support for the Arab Spring stems in large part from the fact it is

largely a non-violent struggle.

There is frustration that the Palestinian Authority does not represent all Palestinian perspectives, and that it should cooperate more with Hamas and others.

There is a sense that a Palestinian agreement on a national unity cabinet would greatly facilitate the engagement of Europeans on these issues.

The viability of continuing to promote the two-state solution was debated, with some thinking the lack of Israeli movement on this points to the need to go back to the one-state option. Others debated this forcefully, believing it would be a setback since all parties have agreed on two states, and they worry that if there were a switch now to one state, it would be impossible to convince Palestinians of the need to stand under an Israeli flag and serve in the Israeli armed forces. They fear this tactic could result in another 30-40 years of racial discrimination.

There is a strong sense among Palestinians that the Arab world needs to support their struggle. Some believe that sanctions against Israel and a new international effort on the scale of the pressure brought to bear on South Africa to end apartheid is now needed. (It was noted that the South Africa boycott started with Scottish trade unions, and three months ago they agreed to boycott Israel.)

The role of Egypt in Palestine is considered one of the successes of the revolution, and support of the Palestinians is and will likely remain one of the main pillars of Egypt's foreign policy. This includes a complete shift in relations with the entire Palestinian movement including Hamas. Many believe the Palestine issue was lost due to the fragmentation of the Arab world in the past, and that this was due in large part to the role of the US in the region in supporting the status quo, and that Israel in the past has felt protected both by the US and by Arab weakness. Rebuilding an Arab strategy toward Palestine is "vital" according to one participant.

Some see the main divide in Israel as not between the Israelis and Palestinians, but between the Israeli extremists and moderates. There is a sense of disillusionment over Israel's true commitment to negotiations, and some feel that Israel has used negotiations as a weapon, to cover settlement activities. That has combined with the fostering of division between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas and others, the US monopoly on the process, the regional system's support for the status quo over the past 20 years (including Egypt's role in this), and the imbalance of power between Israel and the Palestinians to create the current situation. The current Israeli reliance on far right voters in the US was seen as ironic by some, as in a sense the inheritors of neo-fascist parties are now supporting Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. Or, as one participant said, in Palestine "the West is killing Western values."

All sides have said they can "survive with the presence of Israel" and say they have never rejected the idea of a land for Jewish people. The recent attack on the Israeli Embassy was discussed, and some felt this was the first time Egyptians were able to express their views about Israeli aggression.

Continuing to keep Hamas on the terrorist list was considered by many as unhelpful. One participant wondered why Europe has imposed sanctions on Hamas and not on Israel, when Israel has killed many more people than Hamas.

Some positive movement by some EU countries was noted (including Sweden, Italy and Spain). Many felt there was a need to cooperate with the EU, under an Arab umbrella. Lifting completely the siege on Gaza could lead way for increased business opportunities between Egypt and Palestine.

While we met, news came through of UNESCO's recognition of Palestine. There was a sense of positive forward movement, and yet a sense that even if Palestine is recognized by the UN, there is a need to hold Israel accountable for its actions.

## Role of outside world

The role of external factors in the region was highlighted by some. As one participant noted, "there is a temptation to fish in muddy waters, or to make the waters muddier." Outside players bear a responsibility to avoid the temptation to create more instability, and should rather promote dialogue and understanding to the extent it is possible for them to constructively facilitate consensus and nation building. However, this role is limited. The regional level is the "main scene."

There was a general agreement that the US role in the region has too often promoted interests above principles. This legacy of prior US support for dictators leads many to believe the US and Europe must bear some responsibility for their prior actions during this transition period. Saudi Arabia was mentioned as an example where due to shared economic interests the two countries have good relations, despite the fact that Sharia law exists in Saudi Arabia (others wondered if this were a good example to use, given the economic model).

The European and international community will need to accept that their approach will need to change to one of promoting real regional development and building local economic capacity, and not one relying on aid alone.

- There is a strong sense that the prior regional order, influenced disproportionately by the West (especially the USA), is over.
- Many see this moment as an opportunity for Egypt to take a leading role in the Middle East, in the Arab world, and in Africa.
- There is a sense that forward movement on Palestine is possible given the increased involvement of Arab countries, especially Egypt, and the Fatah-Hamas agreement.
- Disagreement remains among Palestinians and others on the best tactics to use at this moment.
- The outside world is encouraged to help in building regional consensus and nation building through emphasizing development versus aid, but to expect that external players will play a reduced role in the region's affairs.

## THE LEGACY AND THE WAY FORWARD

Participants heard from a legendary figure in the Egyptian protest movement, George Ishak, who launched the Kefiyah ("Enough") movement, which is attributed with "breaking the barrier of fear" in Egypt as it was against new terms for Mubarak since that date and were the first to stand against the

“succession” plan. His participation added a sobering reminder that Egypt’s struggles for democracy have a long history, and that their hopes and dreams have not yet been fully materialized. Concerns remain as to whether or not Egypt is entering a period some call “Mubarak-plus,” where the same system will be perpetuated but in different forms. There was a reminder that there is an international covenant on the right to express one’s opinion in all forms, including the right to demonstrate. There is a shared belief that the Egyptian ballot box will prove who will win in this struggle, providing the election is fair. Once again, participants were reminded that the struggle in Egypt is a political and cultural struggle, not a religious one.

Someone commented that in Egypt to “vote” has a double meaning. It can mean the traditional “vote” in elections or it can also mean to “scream” in the case of grief, pain or cry for help. It remains to be seen if this scream will be responded to and lead to the changes the people seem to desire, or otherwise.

Planning this workshop was not easy. While preparations started nearly three months prior to the meeting, as the date approached, the organizers faced challenges from those who believed it too controversial to attempt this sort of dialogue at this critical moment in time. But the experience proved the usefulness and need for such conversations. All of the major players in the political spectrum were involved in the dialogue, and this set a precedent. The challenges and complexities were laid out, and this dialogue will continue into the future. Pugwash was encouraged to continue to convene such meetings in Egypt and elsewhere.

## Appendix One

### **“Democratic Developments and Regional Security in the Middle East”**

**Cairo, Egypt  
30-31 October 2011**

**Introduction  
Paolo Cotta-Ramusino  
30 October 2011**

First, I would like to thank the local authorities, the Al Ahram Center, the local organizer, and I would also like to thank all the participants who have made time in their very busy schedules to be here. The recent changes and revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have brought new ideas and new perspectives into the international scene. Hated undemocratic regimes have disappeared or are in the process of disappearing, leaving space for new ideas and new political actors. Some of these political actors, like the Islamic movements and parties, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, are in fact not new at all, but have been kept under pressure, repression and forced political marginalization for many years. Now it is the time when they can operate openly and take their share of political responsibility.

The world is watching with deep interest these tidal changes in MENA, and wants to learn and understand more. With this meeting (and similar meetings that may follow) Pugwash wants to give its modest contribution to this process of understanding through exploration of the following topics and questions. The countries that are affected by these changes are countries where a plurality of religions, traditions, and ethnicities is present. There are different religious sensibilities and practices and/or there different attitudes towards secularism.

How would the Islamic movements and parties respect this plurality? How do they plan to combine democracy and respect of minorities with their desire that Islamic values should significantly shape the society?

Is Islam “the solution” (for example, of the various economic and societal problems) or there are different angles and different plans compatible with Islamic values?

How will sharia law and the legal system voted by the parliament interact with each other? For example, will they be fully compatible, will they have complementary responsibilities, or will one be dominant over the other in cases of conflicting interpretations?

Is the freedom to change religion going to be allowed? And what limits will there be to the freedom of letting known publically that one has changed religion? Will the only constraint be the requirement of avoiding derogatory statements about other religions or beliefs?

Will the law strongly protect freedom of expression and the freedom to participate in and to organize political parties? And with what constraints?

About the role of women in the society: will they have basically the same rights and obligations as men (electoral rights, civil rights, schools, access to public offices, etc., etc.)?

Are the parties that are de facto linked to the Islamic movement(s), planning to cooperate among themselves (and to what extent)? Do they conceive the possibility of making coalitions with parties of a different kind (including the secular and liberal ones)?

In terms of international cooperation, are the Egyptian parties interested in helping the movements in the other countries of MENA that are still engaged in trying to get rid of the old regimes?

The Israeli government's occupation policy is de-facto treating the Palestinians worse than how the ousted regimes in MENA treated their respective populations. Still if the Arab plan (Beirut 2002) with some limited and agreed modification of the boundaries will be someday implemented, will the present political parties be ready to respect the basic principle of the Arab plan? Will they be available to strike a deal about the peaceful coexistence with Israel. And how now is it possible to help the Palestinians?

It is no mystery that in the West there are powerful groups that want to increase the antagonism with the Islamic world and with Islam in general. How do parties linked to the Islamic movements plan to engage the Western governments, the Western bodies of experts, the Western intelligentsia in order to reduce the cultural/political divide that is separating the West and Islam? How to induce the people in the west to better understand the developments of the situation in MENA?

## Appendix Two

### **“Democratic Developments and Regional Security in the Middle East”**

**Cairo, Egypt  
30-31 October 2011**

#### **PARTICIPANT LIST**

##### **Egyptian Participants**

1. Hazem Salah Abu Ismail, Presidential candidate, Salafist Party
2. Dr. Amr Moussa, Independent Presidential Candidate, former Secretary General of the Arab League; former Minister of Foreign Affairs
3. Dr. Mohamed Allam al Senbaw, Professor, Military Technical College, Cairo, Egypt
4. Mutamer Amin, writer and political activist
5. Dr. Mohamed B. Argoun, Prof. Dept. of Aerospace Engineering, Cairo University
6. Dr. Alaa Abul Azaeim, Tariqa Azmeya Sheikh of and Member of Sofi High Council
7. Dr. Salah abd El Kareem, Cofounder and Political Office member, Al Wasat Party (New Center Party)
8. Dr. Ahmad Bahey, Al-Ahram Center for Political & Strategic Studies
9. Dr. Essam El-Erian, Vice President, Freedom and Justice Party and Muslim Brotherhood
10. Judge Tahany M. El Gebaly, Vice President, Supreme Constitutional Court of Egypt
11. Ms. Inas el Gaby, Youth Coalition/Justice Movement
12. Mohamed el Hussein, Political Researcher, Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC), The Egyptian Cabinet, Cairo
13. Dr. Tarek El Malt, Deputy Head, Al Wasat Party
14. Dr. Anwar Esmat el-Sadat, Founder and Vice President of the Reform and Development Party (now merged with Masrena (Our Egypt) Party, former Member of Parliament, served on the Foreign Relations Committee and the Economic Committee of the People’s Assembly, and Chairman of the El Sadat Organization for Social Development and Welfare

15. Cherifa Sirry, Member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs & Foreign Policy advisor for the Revolution Youth Union and factions of the Coalition
16. Ehsan Yehya, Revolution Youth Union
17. Magdy Hussein el Sherif, President, Hezb Horras el Sawra Party
18. General Sameh Seif Elyazal, Strategic Expert and Director of Al Gomhouria Center for Political and Security Studies and Researches, Cairo
19. Ms. Rania Farouk, Member of the Executive Bureau/Media Officer, Revolution Youth Union (RYU), and Policy Specialist, Reform and Development Party
20. Nada Ghanem, Political Researcher, Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC), The Egyptian Cabinet, Cairo
21. Rev. Antoine Rafic Greish, Spokesman for the Catholic Church, Cairo
22. Amb. Ahmed Haggag, Secretary General, Africa Society, Cairo
23. Anissa Hassouna, Executive Director, (Sir) Magdi Yacoub Foundation; Secretary General, Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (ECFA); Treasurer, Egyptian Pugwash Society; Advisor, Egyptian Cabinet's Decision Support Center; Member, Advisory Board of the Arab Thought Organization (Beirut, Lebanon)
24. Abdallah Helmy, Revolution Youth Union/Reform and Development Party, candidate for Parliament
25. Mr. George Ishak, Independent Parliamentary Candidate, Christian Copt, Egyptian Activist and Founder of the "Kefaya (Enough)" Movement, part of the National Association for Change (NAC), and Founder and Member of the National Council for Human Rights
26. Maj. Gen. (ret.) Dr. Mohamed Kadry Said, Member, Military and Technology Advisor and Head of Security Studies Unit, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo, Egypt, Pugwash Council member
27. Ahmad Kamel, Researcher, Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies
28. Moaz Abdel Karim, Youth Coalition/Egyptian Front, candidate for Parliament
29. Mohamed Khalil, Middle East Analyst
30. Mr. Ramy Lakah, co-President, Reform and Development Party, now merged with Masrena (Our Egypt) Party which he founded
31. Salma Sherif Nagy, Political Committee, Misr El Horeya Party

32. Iman Ahmed Ragab, Researcher, Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo
33. Hesham Youssef, Head, Amr Moussa Campaign
34. Rev. Dr. Andrea Zaki Stephanous, General Director, Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services, and Vice President of the Protestant Community of Egypt
35. Ahmed Zaki, Political Researcher, Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC), The Egyptian Cabinet, Cairo
36. Sameh Al-Barqy, Al-Tayyar Al-Masry Party (Egyptian Current Party)
37. Saher Samy Fahmy, 6th April Youth Movement
38. Moustafa Madboly, Head of The National Reconciliation Party (Alwefaq Alqawmy)
39. Amr Esmail, member of Hazem Salah Abu Esmail
40. Sherif Helaly, Democratic Alliance (NGO)
41. Sherif Gamal, Democratic Alliance (NGO)
42. Nadim Abdel-Gawwad, Political Activist (Libral)
43. Farida Ezzat, Political Activist (Libral)
44. Tharwat El-kharabawy, Al-Wasat Party and Islamic Writer
45. Mohamed Al-Gabah, Egyptian Youth Revolution Coalition
46. Ibrahim Makram, The Coptic Evangelian Organization for Social Services (CEOSS)
47. Naila Refaat, Sida
48. Dalia Bahaa, Researcher, Political Science
49. Esaraa Ahmed, Information and Decision Support Center, The Egyptian Cabinet
50. Sherif Roshdy, Information and Decision Support Center, The Egyptian Cabinet
51. Amal Mokhtar, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo, Egypt
52. Aly Mohamed Aly, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo, Egypt
53. Hany Al-Aasar, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo, Egypt

54. Abo Alfadl Elesnawy, Horas Elthawra Party (Guardian of the Revolution Party)
55. Badr Rezaq Aly, Secretary General, Elthawra Party (Guardian of the Revolution Party)
56. Hind Mehyar, Information and Decision Support Center, The Egyptian Cabinet
57. Amir Ramzy, a Christian Activist and lawyer
58. Ahmed Abdelrahman Samir, Coalition of the National Association
59. Basem Sameer, Al-Baradie Campaign

## From Palestine

1. Ghazi Hammad, Deputy Foreign Minister, Hamas
2. Ahmed Youssef, Advisor to PM Hanyeh
3. Dr. Husam Zomlot, Executive Deputy Commissioner, Fateh Commission for International Affairs

## Other International Participants

1. Dr. Maha Azzam (UK), Associate Fellow of the Middle East and North African Program, Chatham House, London
2. Amb. Serguey Batsanov (Russia), Member, Pugwash Council, and Director, Geneva Office, Pugwash Conferences; Member, International Advisory Board, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)
3. Ms. Sandra Ionno Butcher (US/Pugwash), Senior Program Coordinator, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs
4. Prof. Paolo Cotta-Ramusino (Italy), Secretary-General, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs; Member, Pugwash Executive Committee; Professor of Mathematical Physics, University of Milan
5. Ms. Taghreed El-Khodary (Gaza/ Netherlands), Freelance Journalist/Analyst from Gaza
6. Mr. Sverre Lodgaard (Norway), Member, Pugwash Council; Senior Research Fellow and former Director of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) in Oslo; former Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) in Geneva
7. Mr. Arnold Luethold (Switzerland), Head, Middle East and North Africa Program, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)

8. Dr. Steve Miller (USA), Director of the International Security Program of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government; Editor-in-chief of the quarterly *International Security*; Co-chair of the US Pugwash Committee
9. Mr. Erik Paulsen (Norway), Chargé d'affaires, Norwegian Embassy, Cairo
10. Mr. Nicolas Pelham (UK), Palestine correspondent, *The Economist*
11. Amb. Svein Sevje (Norway), Ambassador, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
12. Ms. Claudia Vaughn (Italy/US/Pugwash), Program Coordinator, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, Rome, Italy

## Appendix Three



**Meetings with Representatives  
of the Islamic Movements  
(Harakat Islamiya)**

**Cairo, Egypt  
13-14 August 2011**

**By Paolo Cotta-Ramusino**

In mid-August 2011, the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs organized a few meetings with some selected representatives from various Islamic movements. These meetings build upon and tie into recent and planned Pugwash activities in the region.

This report summarizes some of the main points raised in these meetings. It highlights areas for further exploration in a forthcoming series of meetings Pugwash will organize in Cairo. The future meetings will involve experts from other countries (including the US, Europe, Russia and possibly some other Middle Eastern countries) and selected representatives of the Islamic movements.

1. *On the fracture between the Islamic world and the West.* There is considerable agreement that this fracture is a problem and that constructive dialogue and political engagement are needed. Attitudes differ. Some more than others stressed in the meetings that the primary responsibility of this fracture lies in the West. Islam, so the argument goes, is not against any culture or religion. Islamic values par excellence are "Peace and Justice." There is no room for discrimination and oppression and violence. There is a perception that the West tends to impose its values and, as in the case of Israel and of the past Egyptian regime, to practice coercion. Moreover, some raised concerns about strong discrimination against Muslims in Europe and in the West. As an example the various anti-burqa (anti-nijab) laws have been mentioned. It was pointed out that the victims of such discrimination are mainly lower-class workers who are particularly needed in Europe.

2. *On foreign policy perspectives.* It was felt that the attitude of the Islamic movements towards other countries and different cultures should be in general very constructive and forthcoming. Statements that any future Egyptian Government will cooperate with all other countries have been repeated many times. There are of course differences in the consideration given to different countries. Some made the point that Egypt should cooperate in particular with African and other Arab countries. Most expressed the view that relations with Iran should be seriously improved. On the contrary, attitudes towards Israel ranged between two poles. The first pole would be to modify the relations, to abandon the subservient attitude taken by the Mubarak regime, to take into account Egyptian interests (e.g. in the case of the economic agreements about natural gas), but still to maintain diplomatic relations and have an attitude that would stress regional coexistence, without giving up an increasingly strong support to the Palestinians. The second pole would be to cut diplomatic relations with Israel altogether. The relations towards the West are seen naturally with a much more positive attitude. Friendly European and Mediterranean countries are not a problem. As far as the US is concerned, the role of the US in the Middle Eastern region is resented and criticized. It was mentioned by one person in particular that the case of Palestine, the case of Iraq

and, outside the Middle East, the cases of Afghanistan and Pakistan are all examples where US intervention, policy and dominance have created a disastrous situation. This is not encouraging others to have 'overly friendly' relations with the US. Some acknowledged that Obama's Cairo speech was encouraging and positive, but then questioned what happened after that speech. In any case, as another person stressed, asserting the interests (including the economic interests) of Egypt will be the dominant criterion that will shape Egyptian foreign policy.

3. *On civil law, sharia and tolerance towards other religions and secularism.* Participants pointed out that Islam is tolerant and has nothing inherently against other religions (in particular it is very respectful of the Christians and the Jews – who are Ahl-al-kitab- people of the book). Christians themselves are included even at the highest level in the "Freedom and Justice party" that originated from the Muslim Brotherhood. The laws and the future constitution should not define any dominance of any religion, as one important leader pointed out during our meetings. The law will be always a civil law, decided by the Parliament and implemented by the proper civilian institutions. The source of such law "can be Islamic" (as much it has been pointed out that Christianity is the root of the laws existing in the Western world). But the constitution and the legal system should not be seen at all as a corollary of the Quran. The respect of all the rights of the minorities should be in any case guaranteed. The question was asked if people without religion, will be duly protected. Yes: it has been stated that it is of course one of the rights of the individual to have a religion or not. An interesting discussion arose at some point about the right to change religion and the hypothetical crime of "apostasy." The approach of the senior leader in the discussion was that yes one has the right not only to change religion, but also to communicate his/her decision to others. This of course borders with the right of proselytizing, i.e. to try to persuade others to have the same change of religion. Another viewpoint expressed in the room was that trying to persuade others to abandon Islam in an Islamic society may create social disturbances and this should be punishable by the law. In principle, dialogue among different religions (dialogue among civilizations) should be in all ways supported, but clearly grey areas exist about how to manage/regulate the dominance of Islam in an Islamic society.

4. *On the Islamic movements.* It appears likely that in the forthcoming Parliamentary elections the collection of Islamic movements/parties will take well over half of the popular votes. But the Islamic movements gave rise to various parties, some of them are in the process of being formed now and some of them are not necessarily on good terms with each other. Together with the Freedom and Justice Party (a direct offspring of the Muslim Brotherhood) and the Alwasat (New Center) Party, are the Salafist parties that are not in good terms with previous parties and others. Moreover in Egypt there is a large Sufi population (a few million and expanding) and a new Sufi party is being built that is antagonistic to both the Muslim Brotherhood and, even more, to the Salafists and Wahabis. There are rumors that also the Christians (Copts) want to have their own party. One should notice at this point that even if Egypt forbids the establishment of parties that are direct expressions of religions and religious sects, there are many ways to get around this prohibition (e.g. by giving neutral names to parties that are promoted by religious movements but formally not controlled by them). The (young) liberals who gave birth to the Egyptian revolutions are also having their own party (parties) and also the people who came out of the NDP (Mubarak party) are getting organized. It is however true that the only group that has proven to be organized for a long time and that has shown to be able to bear the weight of the organized opposition during the Mubarak period is the Muslim Brotherhood and this gives the MB an obvious edge. The set of alliances that could be formed in this patchwork of political parties is not easy to predict. The stated goal of the MB is to gain a relevant weight in the Parliament and possibly (together with some allies) the majority of the Parliament. The election of the Parliament, expected to be in November-December, will

come before the election of the President. The MB has decided not to present its own presidential candidate, but one of its former high-level exponents is running for that office.

### **Concluding remarks**

Contrary to the impression expressed by many people after the beginning of the so called Arab spring, the Islamic movements have not been ruled out and have not been replaced by liberal western-like 'democratic' movements or parties. It is true that, in many cases (and particularly in Egypt) some young professionals, possibly western-educated and western-sympathizers have acted as sparks for the "revolutions". The role of the modern means of communications (internet, facebook, twitter, text messages, etc) should certainly not be underestimated. It is also true that, at the beginning of the revolution, the Islamic movements (and the MB in particular) were having a prudent approach and waited a while before being involved. Nevertheless now the Islamic movements are fully and openly involved in the political debate and in the political competition and have still a great leverage on the population as a whole. The west and other countries should be aware of the exact nature of the developments that happened and are underway in a significant part of the Arab world and should be ready to understand, engage and cooperate with the Islamic movements. Many things are yet unclear. What will be the foreign and internal policies (economic, social, in terms of human and democratic rights, etc) of governments where the Islamic movements and parties will be very relevant if not dominant) is certainly yet to be understood. A temptation that should be absolutely avoided by the west is to see all the developments, particularly in Egypt, through the deforming lens of "what appears to be more useful for the security of Israel". Ending the occupation, respecting the democratic rights of the Palestinian people, implementing a real 2-state solution (if this is what people want) are the conditions that will be in the medium and long range more useful for the security of Israel than a not-so-covert support given by a dictator (such as Mubarak) who has lost since long time the credibility and the support of his own people. It is finally worth pointing out that in the Arab world all the regimes that, one way or the other, have been based on "socialist" or "secular-nationalist" ideas (such as Algeria-Tunisia-Lybia-Egypt-Syria-Iraq) have been under severe strains and many of these regimes have been dissolved. As for the alternatives to these socialist-nationalist ideas, the capitalist-western vision has been too much associated with foreign imposition and domination and particularly with the a-critical support of Israel and so had no chances to be considered with sympathy by the large masses of the Arab world. Maybe the time is ripe for a revival of the Islamic political vision where some important adjustments in terms of human rights, respect of minorities and of dissent, interaction on equal footing with other parties and, in the international scene, with other countries, may be essential for stability and development in the forthcoming period. The debate on these issues is just beginning and Pugwash wants to support dialogue and constructive exchange of ideas on these issues.

Democratic Developments and Regional Security in the Middle East



*E. El-Erian*



*H. Ismail*



*A. Moussa*



*S. Elyazal, S. Batsanov*



*P. Cotta-Ramusino, A. Moussa, M. Kadry Said*



*E. Yahia, C. Sirry, R. Farouk*



*A. Leuthold*



*T. M. El Gebaly, A. Hassouna*



*H. Zomlot, E. Paulsen*



*M. Azzam (speaking) and participants*



*A. E. El-Sadat*



*H. Ismail, A. Kamel*

