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 “Reflections on the Revolution in Egypt”  
 House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia

### Testimony

Mr. Chairman:

One year after mass protests toppled longtime dictator Hosni Mubarak, Egypt is heading in an illiberal, anti-western direction. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which assumed power following Mubarak’s resignation, has deployed deadly force against protesters; subjected over 12,000 Egyptian civilians to military trials; raided pro-democratic NGOs; encouraged anti-western xenophobia through its state-run media; and placed travel bans on six American democracy workers. Islamists’ sweeping victory in the recent parliamentary elections will likely exacerbate this disturbing trend, given the Islamists’ theocratic domestic agenda and hostile foreign policy outlook.

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB), whose electoral alliance won a 46-percent plurality, aims to establish an Islamic state in Egypt by making the *sharia* the primary source of Egyptian law. While the *sharia* is a broad set of legal principles that can be interpreted variously, the MB’s public statements suggest their commitment to an extreme agenda. MB leaders have called for banning beach tourism; outlawing interest-based banking; and criminalizing criticism of the *sharia*, which would undermine the citizenship rights of Christians and other non-Islamists.<sup>1</sup> MB leaders note that, under Article II of Egypt’s 1971 Constitution, the *sharia* is “the principal source of legislation,”<sup>2</sup> and they emphasize the importance of retaining this clause in Egypt’s next constitution.

MB leaders have struck similarly uncompromising tones in their foreign policy stances. They have repeatedly called for putting the Camp David Accords to a popular referendum<sup>3</sup>, which they apparently view as a strategy for sinking Egypt’s peace treaty with Israel without being blamed for it directly. The MB has further accused Israel of working to destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and demanded that “urgent measures” be taken to stop this – despite the fact that Israel is doing no such thing.<sup>4</sup> They

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Trager, “Where Did Nick Kristof Get the Idea That the Muslim Brotherhood Is Moderate?” The New Republic (14 Dec. 2011): <<http://www.tnr.com/article/world/98471/kristof-egypt-muslim-brotherhood>>.

<sup>2</sup> “Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 1971,” Egypt State Information Service <[http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/LastPage.aspx?Category\\_ID=208](http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/LastPage.aspx?Category_ID=208)>.

<sup>3</sup> Manar Ammar, “Muslim Brotherhood to Never Recognize ‘Raping, Colonizing Criminal Entity’ Israel,” Bikya Masr (1 Jan. 2012): <<http://bikyamasr.com/52324/muslim-brotherhood-to-never-recognize-raping-colonizing-criminal-entity-israel/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Hany al-Waziri and Ghada Mohamed al-Sharif, “‘Freedom and Justice’ Reject the Formation of ‘National Women’ ... and Accuse the ‘SCAF’ of Ignoring Parties,” (Arabic) al-Masry al-Youm (12 Feb. 2012): <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/653556>>.

have also accused the United States of funding NGOs to interfere in Egyptian politics<sup>5</sup>, and the MB has hinted that it will seek new legislation to limit foreign funding of NGOs<sup>6</sup>, which would undercut Washington's ability to aid pro-democratic organizations.

While some analysts have suggested that the MB might moderate once in power, there are three reasons why this seems unlikely. First, the process through which the MB selected its parliamentary candidates practically ensures that its parliamentary delegation will adhere to the organization's strict ideological outlook. Prospective parliamentary candidates were vetted by at least four levels of MB leadership before being cleared to run for office. As a result, the MB's parliamentary delegation overwhelmingly consists of longtime members, including many who served as officials at various levels within the organization's nationwide structure. They are therefore highly unlikely to veer from the MB's theocratic principles.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the MB's previous parliamentary record demonstrates their commitment to radicalism over realism. For example, in 2008, the MB's parliamentary bloc voted against a law banning female genital mutilation (FGM), with MB parliamentarian Saad El-Katatny saying at the time that FGM was a tradition that should remain legal for medical and "beautification" purposes.<sup>8</sup> El-Katatny is now Egypt's parliamentary speaker.

Third, the Salafist Nour Party, whose electoral coalition finished second in the recent elections by winning 24 percent of the parliamentary seats, will likely constrain the MB's ability to pursue a moderate agenda. In contrast to the MB, which interprets the *sharia* in terms of its "intentions," the Nour Party aims to implement Islamic law as it was practiced during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. The Nour Party's ideological strictness will enable it to cast the MB's slightly less rigorous approach to Islamic jurisprudence as un-Islamic, thereby forcing the MB to toe a more conservative line.

The results of the recent parliamentary elections also suggest that non-Islamist parties will likely play a minor role in post-Mubarak Egyptian politics. The most promising of these parties is the Egyptian Bloc, an electoral coalition dominated by two newly formed secularist parties, which won just under 7 percent of the parliamentary seats. But since much of this support came from Egypt's Coptic Christian minority, the Bloc is viewed as a sectarian party and its support is not expected to grow significantly.

Moreover, although the Wafd Party – which won approximately 7.5 percent of the parliamentary seats – bills itself as Egypt's historic "liberal" party, its recent alliance with

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<sup>5</sup> MENA, "Muslim Brotherhood Denounces US in Foreign Funding Crisis," Egypt Independent (9 Feb. 2012): <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/648211>>.

<sup>6</sup> "Freedom and Justice Welcome the American Assistant Secretary of State" (Arabic), al-Shaab (26 Jan. 2012): <<http://www.elshaab.org/thread.php?ID=14413>>.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Trager, "Egypt One Year After Tahrir: Trager," Lecture (24 Jan. 2012): <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a43y0yJzYSg&feature=results\\_video&playnext=1&list=PL2C53A1D782EC50D8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a43y0yJzYSg&feature=results_video&playnext=1&list=PL2C53A1D782EC50D8)>.

<sup>8</sup> Liam Stack, "Egypt's Child Protection Law Sparks Controversy," The Christian Science Monitor (24 Jul. 2008): <<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2008/0724/p05s01-wome.html>>.

the MB significantly undermined its non-Islamist credentials. The Wafd has also echoed the Islamists' foreign policy positions, and Wafdist chairman al-Sayyid al-Badawi recently accused the United States of interfering in Egypt's affairs and dealing with Cairo like a "child."<sup>9</sup> Many of the remaining non-Islamist parliamentary parties, such as those from the far-leftist Revolution Continues Alliance (RCA), are similarly inclined towards anti-western populism, and have meager public support.

While the non-Islamist parties have emerged as strong critics of the SCAF and endorsed demonstrations against military rule, the Islamists have pursued a *modus vivendi* with the junta. In this vein, the Islamists have routinely denounced the demonstrations and ordered their followers not to participate – a move that has bolstered their support among the broader public, which desires a return to normalcy. The MB has further cooperated with the SCAF by appointing a retired general – rather than one of its own members – as chairman of the parliament's National Security and Defense Committee. The key question moving forward is whether the SCAF-Islamist comity yields a protected position for the military under a new constitution, such as limited autonomy over its budgets and authority over Egyptian foreign policy.

While Washington's historic relationship with Egypt's military might lead some to conclude that such an arrangement would be beneficial to American interests, the SCAF's performance over the past year suggests otherwise. The military's use of deadly force against protesters has often exacerbated domestic instability and undermined prospects for economic recovery. Moreover, the SCAF's gratuitous raid on pro-democratic NGOs demonstrates the junta's unreliability as a partner for promoting political moderation in Egypt. The travel bans that it has placed on American democracy workers, including the son of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, also raise important questions about the SCAF's political intelligence. Finally, Washington cannot bet on Egypt's military retaining its long-term authority over Egypt's foreign policy: the Islamists intend to hold the SCAF to its June 30, 2012 deadline for withdrawing from power, and they will likely push to further curtail the military's powers thereafter. For the Islamists, Turkey is a model in this regard.

Indeed, one year after Mubarak's resignation, the United States finds itself without any reliable partners in Cairo. For this reason, U.S. policy towards Egypt should emphasize two strategies.

- First, policymakers should use their conversations with the MB to emphasize "red lines" on key U.S. interests in Egypt, which include adherence to the Camp David Accords, cooperation in combating violent extremism, protection of religious minorities, and ensuring Americans' safe travel in Egypt. Washington should not be afraid to use its leverage in protecting these vital interests. That leverage starts with the \$1.3 billion in annual foreign military funding, but should also include Washington's influence in the various international organizations to which Egypt will turn for help as its economic crisis deepens.

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<sup>9</sup> "Al-Sayyid al-Badawi: The Military Council Is Like Someone Clutching Coals and Will Leave Power" (Arabic), al-Youm al-Saba' (12 Feb. 2012): <<http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=600991>>.

- Second, Washington should frame its relationship with post-Mubarak Egypt in terms of narrow common interests. Recent conversations with newly elected MB parliamentarians suggest that the MB and U.S. share a common interest in stabilizing the Sinai Peninsula, which is presently overrun by increasingly violent Bedouin tribes that have attacked Egyptian security personnel, kidnapped tourists, and detonated a gas pipeline that services Israel and Jordan. Washington should be especially concerned about terrorists striking Israel from the Sinai, since this could severe catalyze a crisis in Egyptian-Israeli relations that will be harder to contain once the MB is fully empowered.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric Trager

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Foreign Affairs

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