

Egypt: Will Democracy Succeed the Pharaoh?

INTRODUCTION

Egypt, a proud nation with an ancient history, lies at the heart of the Arab world and is often viewed as a bellwether for broader trends in the region. With a population of around 80 million – more than twice that of any other Arab state – and its location bridging both Africa to the Middle East and the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, Egypt has long played a pivotal role in the region. And in a region that has seen more than its share of internal political crises – military coups, civil wars, and revolutions – Egypt stands out as having experienced remarkable continuity in its domestic political scene. Since the early 1920s, Egypt’s political system has undergone fundamental change just once, from a constitutional monarchy under tacit British control to an independent, authoritarian state in the 1950s.

Historical Background

Since the early 19th Century, Egypt’s history has been marked by Western colonial intervention, beginning with the arrival of French troops in 1798. Throughout the first half of the 1800s, Egypt was governed by Muhammed Ali Pasha, a governor in the declining Ottoman Empire who instituted far-reaching military, economic, and cultural reforms, turning Egypt into one of the most modern, developed states outside of Europe at that time. But such efforts at modernization by Muhammed Ali and his successors, culminating in the Suez Canal project, drove Egypt into severe debt, facilitating the colonial penetration of Britain, who maintained control of Egypt through World War I. After the war, the British nominally declared Egypt’s independence in 1922 and instituted a constitutional, parliamentary monarchy, which would remain in place until 1952. The nationalist *Wafd* (“delegation”) party, which had led the domestic movement for Egyptian independence, dominated parliamentary elections throughout this period. In July 1952, British-backed King Farouk was overthrown by a group of Egyptian army officers, the Free Officers’ Movement, led by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, who became President of Egypt and would rule the country until his death in 1970.

Upon seizing power, Nasser began to gradually establish authoritarian control over the Egyptian state, banning all political parties in 1952. Two years later, he also banned the Muslim Brotherhood organization, and then following an October 1954 assassination attempt by a Muslim Brotherhood member, the Nasser regime jailed thousands of Brotherhood activists. Furthermore, Nasser eventually nationalized banks, private commercial enterprises, and the Suez Canal, consolidating the authority of the Egyptian state over both the political and economic spheres. In 1962, Nasser established the Arab Socialist Union as the dominant ruling political party, representing Egypt’s ruling elite.

With the death of Nasser in 1970, Vice President Anwar Sadat, another of the “Free Officers” of the 1952 coup, became President of Egypt. Early in his rule, President Sadat oversaw the establishment of a new constitution for Egypt. This 1971 constitution legally consolidated power in the hands of the president and rendered ostensibly democratic institutions such as the parliament as weak and inconsequential. Sadat soon undertook dramatic steps toward shifting Egypt’s external orientation, as he expelled Soviet advisors in 1972, and changed the dynamics with Israel by initiating the October War in 1973. Following the 1973 war, the US became deeply engaged in promoting dialogue between Egypt and Israel and eventual negotiations toward a peace settlement. This culminated in Sadat’s historic visit to Jerusalem in 1977, followed by the Camp David Accords of 1978 and the Israel-Egypt peace treaty in 1979. This solidified Egypt’s standing as a uniquely powerful Arab ally to the West and particularly to the United States, while marginalizing Egypt in the Arab and Muslim world, symbolized by the Arab League

expelling Egypt and moving its headquarters to Tunis. During this period, Sadat also reinstated nominal political pluralism, creating “loyal opposition” parties representing various political orientations, allowing the Wafd Party to re-emerge, and allowing limited political and organizational activity by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Following the assassination of Sadat in 1981 by Islamists opposed to Camp David, his Vice President (and Air Force commander) Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, succeeded him. Egypt experienced a short-lived period of tempered liberalization under Mubarak during the 1980s. The parliamentary elections of 1987, for example, created an assembly with 22% opposition representation. However, this trend was abruptly curtailed in the 1990s, as the resurgence of domestic terrorism spurred the regime to crack down on political opposition and close the narrow openings that had emerged in the political landscape.

After 2000, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) began to show signs of internal reform. The NDP was embarrassed by its initial showing in the 2000 parliamentary elections, in which independent candidates (most of whom later allied themselves to the NDP) won a majority of seats. This spurred the emergence of a new wave of younger-generation, Western-educated reformers within the NDP. This group was led by President Hosni Mubarak’s son Gamal, who was appointed Chairman of the newly instituted Policy Secretariat – the third-ranking position in the NDP - in 2002. Gamal Mubarak and his allies from the Policy Secretariat led the effort to transform the NDP into a modern institution modeled after Western political parties.

Era of Hope (2004-2005)

By 2004, there were a number of signs of momentum for real political reform. In July 2004, a new cabinet was appointed featuring Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif and 14 new ministers, most of whom were Gamal Mubarak’s allies from the Policy Secretariat and were widely perceived to be economic reformers. And the Egyptian political opposition also showed signs of emerging pluralism and dynamism at this time. In late 2004 and early 2005, a new, loosely knit coalition of reformers known as *Kifaya* (“Enough”) emerged, organizing an unprecedented series of regular protests calling for political reform and openly criticizing the Mubarak regime. 2004 also saw the licensing of the new secular, liberal *al-Ghad* party, founded by Ayman Nour, a younger generation Member of Parliament who had broken ranks with the *Wafd* party in 2001. In addition, the leading Islamist movement in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, showed signs of modernizing and embracing reform at this time, issuing a pro-democracy reform initiative in March 2004. In February 2005 President Mubarak proposed a constitutional amendment to allow for Egypt’s first multi-candidate presidential election. Moreover the Muslim Brotherhood, though it remained banned and could only run candidates for parliamentary elections as independents, was nonetheless allowed to campaign openly and given much greater access to the media. In addition, the 2005 elections saw the first widespread election monitoring by independent NGOs. Although the elections were marred by irregularities, the presence of thousands of monitors in polling stations trained by Egyptian NGOs was widely viewed as an important step forward, establishing the legitimacy of independent election monitors.

Disillusionment and Regression on Reform

Despite the many signs of progress on democratic development by mid-2005, the late 2005 elections did not meet expectations, and by 2006, the trends toward reform had sharply reversed themselves. Following the presidential election, Ayman Nour – the only candidate who ran a serious campaign in opposition to President Mubarak – was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison for dubious charges of forging signatures during the formation of his *al-Ghad* party, and served more than three. Following the better-than-expected performance of the Muslim Brotherhood in the first round of

parliamentary elections in November 2005, the second and third rounds were marred by increasingly blatant interference, with neighborhoods sympathetic to the Brotherhood seeing polling centers closed down and widespread violence used to prevent voting. Since those elections, Brotherhood members have been targeted in a series of campaigns with arrests and seizure of financial assets.

In April 2006, the Mubarak government extended the emergency law, despite 2005 campaign promises to eliminate it and replace it with a narrower set of anti-terrorism laws. Efforts to stifle public discourse through targeted jailing, intimidation, and prosecution of dissenting voices, including bloggers and editors of independent newspapers, increased considerably beginning in 2006. In early 2007, the Egyptian government passed in a single vote in parliament a set of constitutional amendments described by Amnesty International as the “greatest erosion of human rights (in Egypt) in 26 years.” These included measures that expanded the authority of military courts over civilians, weakened the authority of the Egyptian judiciary to supervise elections, and legally prohibited the formation of political parties or any political activity with “any religious frame of reference” (clearly intended to block the main opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood). Nearly all opposition candidates aiming to run for seats in the *Shura* Council (the upper house of parliament) in 2007 and municipal councils in 2008 were denied registration by the authorities.

International Policy Responses

Contrary to popular belief, Egypt’s relations with its Western allies, and particularly with the United States, have long included a partnership on behalf of Egyptian development. Throughout the 1980s, Egypt partnered with the US on a series of economic reforms and modest steps toward political liberalization. In the 1990s, Vice President Gore established a unique framework of direct partnership with President Mubarak, including regular meetings between the two to address opportunities for reform. The EU’s collective approach in the 1990s was largely subsumed under the 1995 Barcelona process, with a relationship being drawn between the southern Mediterranean’s economic prosperity and political stability, and security questions such as counter-terrorism and migration control.

While such partnerships focused more on economic reform and development than political opening, this began to change by the late 1990s. Increasingly, analysts and government officials in the US and in Europe came to believe that Egypt’s lack of progress on economic development was due, at least in part, to its clear lack of political development. This growing Western interest in supporting political reform in Egypt was accelerated by the attacks of September 11, 2001, as support for reforming the repressive political climates across the Arab world became seen as a key component of counter-radicalization efforts and the quest for sustainable security in the region.

On the American side, this manifested itself in the “freedom agenda” of President George W. Bush, which included the use of various diplomatic techniques to spur political reform in Egypt. These appeared to contribute to some tangible steps toward reform in 2004 and 2005, such as the institution of direct popular election of the president, the organization of a large-scale electoral monitoring effort by civil society organizations, a loosening of restrictions on the media and freer campaigning by the opposition groups. EU support for these aggressive democracy promotion policies was muted, and in private European diplomats expressed skepticism that the policies would be effective. This was particularly the case for Mediterranean countries such as France or Italy, where political elites had good relations with the Mubarak regime and the countries have considerable business interests.

After 9/11, the European approach was packaged alongside the promotion of trade ties and economic reform in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Although the EU approach has tended to favor an incremental approach to democracy promotion compared to the more robust American approach, there is

wide divergence between EU member states on this issue throughout the Middle East and with regards to Egypt in particular. Generally speaking European countries on the southern Mediterranean, which have both stronger trade and security ties with Egypt, have been increasingly reluctant to focus on democracy and human rights issues in their bilateral relations. Scandinavian and other northern European countries, on the other hand, have fewer economic interests in Egypt and manifest the strongest interest on issues of democracy and human rights, as is evident from their greater focus on these issues at the embassy level and when coordinating EU policy in Brussels, as well as a greater proportion of their aid funding being earmarked for civil society support. Nonetheless, EU interest in supporting democratic development and respect for human rights has generally been less pronounced in the Middle East than, for instance, in parts of sub-Saharan Africa. A number of factors play into this stance, including a fear of success by Islamist political movements in a more democratic environment, senior officials' desire to have easy access to their Egyptian counterparts involved in the Middle East peace process, and to remove obstacles to negotiations on trade agreements and bilateral issues.

By early 2006, however, the US administration's support for democracy in Egypt tapered off. Following the better-than-anticipated success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt's parliamentary elections in late 2005, the United States became more apprehensive about the prospect of Egyptian democracy. This was then exacerbated by the Hamas victory in the January 2006 Palestinian elections (aggressively pressed by the US), viewed by some as a warning of what could happen if Egypt were pushed to democratize. In addition, the effort to isolate the Hamas-controlled Palestinian Authority became a focus of U.S. policy in the region, drawing energy and resources away from other priorities, including support for Egyptian reform. In the summer of 2006, the administration's focus was further diverted by escalating Fatah vs. Hamas conflict in Gaza and the eruption of war in Lebanon. By January 2008, the Bush administration began to look toward the renewal of the Arab-Israeli peace process through the Annapolis conference, and around the same time, the administration also began to focus more on aligning its Arab allies against the threat of Iran's growing regional influence and nuclear program. Both of these issues contributed to a shift toward viewing Arab allies such as Egypt primarily as regimes needed for strategic purposes, further decreasing the emphasis on issues of internal reform.

President Obama decided to reboot US relations with the Muslim world by giving an address at Cairo University on June 6, 2009. The speech was received in much of the region, notably for its respectful approach to Islam and recognition of Palestinian suffering. It also included sections related to human rights and political reform. President Obama raised the issue of democracy almost apologetically, recognizing that it had been tarred by association with the invasion of Iraq, and adding "no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by any other." But he also reiterated US commitment to freedom of speech, rule of law, good governance and transparency. He also added a thinly veiled reference to Islamists, echoing Bush administration concerns after Hamas' electoral victory in 2006:

"There are some who advocate for democracy only when they are out of power; once in power, they are ruthless in suppressing the rights of others. No matter where it takes hold, government of the people and by the people sets a single standard for all who hold power: you must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities, and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and the legitimate workings of the political process above your party. Without these ingredients, elections alone do not make true democracy."

This signaled a move away from focus on elections in US democracy promotion that has since been confirmed in statements by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the focus on some US democracy-promotion efforts. Although the point that elections alone do not a democracy make is certainly a valid

one, within the Egyptian context it is tantamount to a pro-government position. For the three years prior to the speech, the Egyptian regime engaged in a campaign of arrests against the Muslim Brotherhood not seen since the late 1960s, blocking them for participating in elections and amending the constitution to block their ambitions to launch a political party. Overall, the speech not only contained little of substance on human rights, but was also criticized by some for having taken place in Cairo at all, since it boosted a close US ally that, between 2006 and 2009, saw major reverses for democratization and continues to be a serial abuser of human rights. Indeed, focus in the speech (and, as a result, in US funding) was given to women's and minority rights, and away from political reform issues.

Under the Obama administration, the previous administration's policy continued throughout 2009 in part because the relevant senior officials in the State Department were not appointed until December, but also because concern had shifted from pressuring Egypt to reform to supporting what is seen as an increasingly weak state ahead of an uncertain presidential succession process. It was perceived in 2009 that Ambassador to Egypt Margaret Scobey's chief mission was to repair the bilateral relationship that had been strained (outside of security issues) by the Bush administration, and she had considerable room to maneuver to achieve this in the absence of clear leadership in the State Department and US focus on other issues, most notably the global economic crisis.

With President Mubarak's three-week hospitalization in Munich for gall bladder surgery in March 2010, the question of succession is now the primary interest of American civilian and military policymakers, with a first priority being ensuring minimum political turmoil during a transition period. While democracy promotion appeared to be making a comeback in 2010 — notably with the appointment of Michael Posner as Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor — it remains a muted issue. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in particular is said to be in favor of a downgrade in the importance of reform issues in the bilateral relationship, focusing instead on strengthening Egypt's role in the Middle East peace process and assuring a smooth presidential transition.

Many European countries were relieved by this change in the American approach, and from 2007 onwards the European Commission for all intents and purposes downgraded the question of support for democratization and human rights to the minimum level in terms of public support. Advocates for greater focus on political reform issues were told over this period not to expect any EU engagement, with a conciliatory attitude towards the government of Egypt the general rule.

While progress on political development in Egypt has until now been limited, uneven, and not sustained, there are nonetheless lessons that can be drawn from the international community's engagement with Egypt on these issues, and the resulting ups and downs of democratic reform.

RESOURCES AND ASSETS OF DIPLOMATS IN EGYPT

Egypt has consistently received *funds* from the West on a large scale. In conjunction with the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978 and the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty in 1979, The US agreed to give billions in foreign assistance to each of the two countries, with overall assistance to Israel and Egypt remaining in a fixed 3 to 2 ratio until 2008. From 1979 until 2008, Egypt remained the second-largest recipient of US foreign assistance each year, after Israel (in Fiscal Year 2009, Egypt was surpassed by Afghanistan in this regard, and it appears that Afghanistan and Pakistan will each receive more foreign aid than Egypt in 2010). Egypt has received \$1.3 billion in military assistance each year since 1987. It also has received large, but varying, levels of economic assistance, which has decreased from more than \$800 million annually in the late 1990s to around \$400 million in 2008 and roughly \$250 million in 2009 and 2010. Since 2000, this economic aid has included substantial funding for democracy and governance programming, which peaked at approximately \$55 million in fiscal year 2008. The Obama administration

has sharply reduced bilateral funding for democracy and governance programs in Egypt for fiscal years 2009 and 2010 to around \$20 million annually.

Perhaps more importantly, it returned to a practice that had been stopped in 2002: only granting USAID funding to civil society groups that were registered as such under the Egyptian NGO law, a notoriously restrictive and much-criticized legislation. Although additional democracy and governance funding was available without strings through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), activists said that the funding cuts were not as important as the political message the change in practice sent, i.e., that the US government considered the NGO law adequate. In April 2010, Egyptian newspapers leaked a new, even more restrictive draft NGO law — which some activists saw as an attempt at tightening regulations on civil society funding after what the Egyptian government would have interpreted as a tacit green light from the US. The new law would have closed loopholes that have allowed many of the most active and well-regarded NGOs to register a law firms, private clinics, or non-profit corporations to evade financing restrictions.

The European Union has also provided large-scale funding for Egypt, including €594 million during the period from 2000 to 2006. Only a very small portion of this funding was allocated to support democracy and human rights in that period – approximately €5 million (less than 1%), within the framework of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights. Similarly, in March 2007, the Egyptian government was allocated €558 million through the European Neighborhood Policy Instrument (ENPI) for the period from 2007 till 2013, of which only €13 million were allocated to democracy and good governance programs and an additional €16 million for human rights, with the Egyptian government having wide authority in supervising the implementation of such funds. Yet, neither the European Commission nor individual member states consider NGOs' registration status under Egyptian law when awarding grants.

Yet because of restrictions within Egypt, and political considerations on the donor and consumer side, funds spent often do not have significant effect. The US, in particular, has occasionally had difficulties finding competent recipients; many NGOs coming from a leftist perspective refused any dealings with the Bush administration, for example. This may have contributed to much of the funding available to USAID and MEPI being misspent, with NGOs created for the sole purpose of channeling such funding. There is a great degree of clientelism in the local NGO market, with projects being designed to meet donor criteria rather than based on local needs.

On issues of democratic development, diplomats in Egypt have seen fluctuating *support of home authorities* over time. On the American side, such support peaked from 2002 to 2005, when reform in Egypt was a high priority of the Bush administration's freedom agenda. After 2006, while support through funding for democracy programming continued to increase, support for addressing reform issues through diplomatic engagement was largely withdrawn, although President Bush continued to raise the issue in remarks given in Egypt and elsewhere. As noted, the Obama administration has sharply reduced support for democracy and governance programming, and there is as of yet little evidence that supporting democratic reform in Egypt through diplomacy is a priority for the new administration. Obama administration officials have claimed that concern and pressure on democracy and human rights issues is continuing in private, with public admonitions considered ineffective. There is no way to verify the impact of these pressures on Egyptian positions. In 2009, the Obama administration made no pronouncement on developments in Egypt, and has only expressed concern on two occasions in 2010 — sectarian murders of Coptic Christians in Naga Hammadi in January 2010 (which coincided with a visit to Cairo of Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Michael Posner) and the renewal of the Emergency Law in May 2010.

During the Bush administration, several members of the US Congress supported reform efforts in Egypt and aimed to apply pressure on the Egyptian regime, particularly through attempts to condition US military aid to Egypt on progress on reform. The post-2008 Congress has similar reduced its previous emphasis on reform, in part due to satisfaction with greater Egyptian efforts to stem smuggling to the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip, but also because a distancing from democracy promotion by the Democratic Party in particular, because it is seen as a signature Bush-era policy. In December 2009, Republican Senator Judd Gregg of New Hampshire added an amendment to an appropriations bill authorizing an Egypt endowment to start at \$50 million, with the State Department continuing negotiations with the government of Egypt to set a final amount. Gregg, a rare Egypt supporter in Congress, had been lobbying for a \$500 million endowment since 2007. The Egyptian government favors an endowment as it would bypass Congress altogether, avoiding any further earmarking of civilian aid and eliminating debate on Capitol Hill of policy towards Egypt altogether. It is not clear which direction the endowment will take, but the State Department is currently considering using part of it to finance an educational reform fund. The Egyptians would like the endowment to be free of any benchmarking and supplemented by Egyptian debt repayments to the US. Should it go through, the endowment will negatively impact Congress' ability to monitor bilateral ties (and hence public scrutiny), but it does offer an opportunity for clear benchmarking and positive conditionalities being attached to civilian aid spending.

Similarly, support from the EU and individual European governments for democratic reform in Egypt has also waxed and waned over the past several years. Generally speaking, the EU's approach has been to support reform through dialogue and to largely depend on the political will of the host government, with Brussels being generally reluctant to apply political pressure for the sake of democratic reform. As noted earlier, there are wide (and possibly widening) differences in the manner in which different members of the EU have approached this issue in Egypt. The post-2007 period appears to have been a nadir in bureaucratic and political support within the European Commission and among member states for vocally supporting reform. By way of example, a May 2010 statement by EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Catherine Ashton on Egypt's renewal of the Emergency Law shocked Egyptian activists by not condemning the move, and merely "encouraging" the government of Egypt "to speed up the steps needed for the adoption of an antiterrorism law compliant with international human rights standards as soon as possible, noting the government's commitment to this goal in the EU/Egypt Action plan and in other forums." Since the EU is on record supporting the abrogation of the Emergency Law and this aim has been a component of bilateral talks, the timid language was surprising, and probably a reflection of the more indulgent attitudes of Mediterranean members of the EU. The US, in contrast, had condemned the renewal.

As the 10th anniversary of the 1995 Barcelona Declaration neared, the EU undertook steps toward evaluating the progress in the decade since that declaration. This included a document issued in December 2003 on foreign relations with Arab countries and a March 2004 progress report on the EU partnership with southern Mediterranean and Middle East countries. Both reports emphasized issues of political, social and economic reform, and the importance of developing diplomatic dialogue with Arab countries to support democracy. Support for Egyptian reform from European governments has declined since that time, however, and European diplomats in Egypt have often felt that they have lacked needed support on reform issues.

Support from Europe has most often come from the European Parliament, which notably passed a resolution in January 2008 criticizing the human rights conditions in Egypt. This sparked an angry uproar from the Egyptian government, which demanded an apology, canceled the scheduled meeting of the Egyptian-European Sub-Commission on Human Rights, and temporarily withdrew the Egyptian Parliament from the Euro-Mediterranean parliamentary programs. The President of the European Parliament visited Egypt in May 2008 and delivered a speech to the Egyptian parliament in an effort to

repair relations, but he did not offer an apology or withdraw the resolution. Following this visit, relations essentially returned to normal, and the Egyptian-European Sub-Commission on Human Rights met for the first time in May 2008. In April 2009, the European Parliament again angered the Egyptian government, as the liberal bloc of parliament invited Ayman Nour to Europe for meetings following his release from prison. This time, Egyptian government pressure led many European politicians to cancel their meetings with Nour to avoid a repetition of the political crisis of early 2008.

Aside from these two actions of the European Parliament, the period since early 2007 has been widely viewed as characterized by the pragmatic, realist approach of President Nicolas Sarkozy of France. This has been evident in the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean in July 2008. Despite European assurances that this new initiative would be an extension of the Barcelona Process and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership rather than a replacement for them, it is clear that security and trade relations are taking precedence, while the focus on political reform has been abandoned. The first two-year co-Presidency of the new Union for the Mediterranean was awarded to France and Egypt, with both governments embracing the shift away from political reform.

The Egyptian government certainly values its relationships with Western governments, most of all with the United States, which has given the Western, and American in particular, *influence* with the Egyptian government. However, the historical legacy of colonialism and Western intervention in Egypt has had a limited effect on this influence, and the government of Egypt has at times cleverly manipulated this legacy to diminish the effects of Western diplomatic pressures when they were implied. The Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs — particularly under the leadership of Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit — has made rejection of “interference in Egypt’s internal affairs” systematically part of the Egyptian discourse on human rights and political reform, arguing that Egypt would reform at its own pace. While this has had some resonance among the Egyptian public and political elites, between 2005 and 2010 opposition groups moved noticeably away from supporting the government’s rejection of international engagement on political reform. Mohamed ElBaradei, the former IAEA director who returned to Egypt in February 2010 to lead a campaign for political reform, for instance urged Western pressure on political reform and called for the presence of international election observers in polls in 2010 and 2011. Previously these had been rejected by most of the opposition, in part because of a widespread rejection of US efforts at democracy promotion in the context of the invasion of Iraq. ElBaradei’s potential intent to run for the presidency has been the subject of much speculation, but he has stated he would only consider doing so if the elections could be assured free and fair.

As discussed below, US and European governments, especially the US Congress and the European Parliament, have shown *solidarity* with some prominent Egyptian activists, most notably Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Ayman Nour. More recently such governments have extended support to a number of younger generation bloggers targeted by the Egyptian regime. Many Egyptians view such solidarity, however, as selective, as it rarely extends to many other political activists, notably the hundreds of members of the Muslim Brotherhood who have been jailed in repeated crackdowns on the organization.

A variety of regional issues – the Iraq war, the post-September 11 war on terrorism, the perceived willingness of Western governments to overlook Israeli violations of international human rights law in the Palestinian territories, and the discounting of one of the Arab Middle East’s two democratic elections in the Palestinian Territories in 2006 – have seriously undermined the *legitimacy* of Western countries with the Egyptian public. The Egyptian government has exploited this lack of legitimacy to call into question Western objections to human rights violations in Egypt, and it has exploited the need for antiterrorism measures to crack down on political opposition and excuse human rights violations under the pretense of antiterrorism. Western countries have generally had stronger relationships with Egypt’s government than with its people, due to large-scale foreign assistance and valued military and trade relationships. Post 9/11

developments have also given new ammunition to the Egyptian government in deflecting pressure. Officials for instance frequently compared the Emergency Law to the US Patriot Act or Britain's Terrorism Act when criticized over the former's renewal — with Western diplomats rarely engaging in rebuttals to point out the vast differences between these legislations. Criticism of some of the worst aspects of Egypt's human rights practices, such as torture and prolonged administrative detention, has also been undermined by the rendition of terrorism suspect to Egypt by the US, often with the cooperation of European states.

WAYS DIPLOMATIC ASSETS HAVE BEEN APPLIED IN EGYPT

The Golden Rules

Western diplomats described *listening* as a fundamental part of their diplomacy with Egypt. This includes listening to a wide variety of actors within the Egyptian government — within the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Commerce and Energy, and the Ministry of International Cooperation, among others. During the Bush administration, there was an effort to identify the genuine reformers within the government, and listen to their needs. Such listening takes place through regular, formal meetings in Cairo, as well as in some private, closed-door meetings abroad.

Diplomats do also meet regularly with civil society activists, but a few diplomats noted that they had not interacted with a broad enough coalition of Egyptian nongovernmental actors, limiting their *understanding* of internal reform issues. On the US side, such meetings did increase during the Bush administration, and were continued as a way of demonstrating support for Egyptian reform after diplomatic pressure waned in 2006. European diplomats have been committed to engaging civil society and nongovernmental actors, and Egyptian civil society organizations played an active role in developing the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) Action Plan.

Demonstrating *respect* for Egypt's government is a regular component of diplomats' engagement with Egypt. However, there were a number of occasions when the US government aimed to pressure Egypt on reform issues, and the Egyptian government responded by accusing the US of showing insufficient respect for Egypt's independence and sovereignty. This was the case when the US raised the issue of reexamining the foreign assistance relationship, as well as when the US offered proposals for a draft Memorandum of Understanding, which aimed to offer additional assistance to Egypt in exchange for the Egyptian regime fulfilling promises made during the 2005 presidential campaign. On the other hand, Egyptian activists often see the Western countries as excessively deferential in their dealings with the Egyptian government, and insufficiently respectful of the rights of Egypt's citizens.

There has been some degree of *sharing* of information and tasks among Western governments on democracy and reform issues in Egypt, but seemingly less than in other countries, and this is an area which could use improvement. Such coordination has varied considerably over time as the approach and priorities of Western governments have shifted and the personalities involved have changed. Such efforts have included planning to jointly attend trials of political activists or visit such activists in jail. Diplomats commented that coordinating such moves increased the impact of such gestures. Most coordination and information sharing has taken place among political officers on the ground in Cairo, although at some moments higher-level meetings of Western foreign ministers have been useful in coordinating efforts on Egypt. Western diplomats have also coordinated democracy and governance assistance programs to some degree, mostly through a monthly meeting of diplomats tasked with monitoring domestic politics and human rights. However, diplomats voiced concern that such efforts should be institutionalized. There is also a wide discrepancy in the resources different embassies allocate to this task: in some smaller embassies, such as Austria or New Zealand, a political officer will monitor not only several issues in-

country (with the focus being on economic relations) but also issues in neighboring countries. Embassies with dedicated staff that are well-informed about the political and human rights situation and are able to attend trials, protests and other events can have much influence in informing other countries' perspective. These include diplomats from large embassies such as those of the US, Canada, the UK, and France, but also those from smaller embassies that have prioritized human rights in their relationship with Egypt, such as Sweden, the Netherlands and Ireland. Egyptian activists noted that greater awareness of the situation in Egypt can bolster their case in international platforms. For instance, in 2010 the UN Human Rights Committee conducted the Universal Periodic Review of Egypt, an occasion for the progress on human rights and political reform to be assessed in an international forum, for the government of Egypt to explain its position and other countries to offer recommendations. Activists noted that the intervention of Ireland in the UPR was particularly detailed and well-informed, in part because the diplomat representing Dublin at the UPR meeting had recently been in Egypt. Clearly, better communications from embassies to their colleagues at the UN and elsewhere can help harmonize positions and bolster the positions of domestic activists in such fora.

As noted previously, the level of engagement of individual countries differs widely. The US has officially committed to promoting democracy, and has long-running programs to fund NGOs and government reform efforts. In theory, so does the European Union through its MEDA program, which can be supplemented by embassy-level funding of individual member states. But the practice shows a natural division of labor often occurs according to each country's approach to Egypt. The European Union Delegation handles a large amount of funds, but these are mostly targeted towards economic and institutional reform efforts, with human rights and political reform playing a comparatively insignificant role in the big picture of its approach. Furthermore, reflecting disinterest in democracy promotion in Brussels and the bureaucracy of aid spending, EU Delegation officials have a strong incentive to minimize any source of friction with the Egyptian government and ensure that funds are disbursed quickly rather than efficiently (because a failure to disburse funds, even if there is no adequate recipient, can negatively impact diplomats' careers as disbursement is seen as a criteria for success in Brussels.) Likewise, within the EU Delegation there have been reports of pressure on funding officers to stay away from potentially controversial programs such as funding civil society election monitoring efforts for fear of slowing down negotiations on trade relations should the Egyptian government take umbrage.

Egyptian civil society holds widely varying views as to the postures and approaches of individual EU members. Generally speaking, France, Italy and Spain are seen as most likely to support the Egyptian government's position and scale down pressure. They rarely make condemnations of the government's practice or stress issues of human rights or political reform in public statements. While France conducts extensive monitoring of the domestic situation, neither Italy nor Spain appears to attach much importance to these issues. While all these countries fund reform measures, they tend to favor institutional reform, and programs involving administrative training rather than direct civil society funding. While this has had limited impact over the past decade, the Egyptian government itself is keen to encourage such programs and they are appreciated by the Egyptian staff that benefits from them — particularly in the case of training missions that involve travel abroad, such as France's underwriting of courses at the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration*. In some cases, a poor understanding of the nature of the beneficiary institutions has resulted in wasted funds, as Spain learned when a multi-year budget support program for the government-run National Council of Human Rights led to a full audit and the dispatching of consultants from Madrid (twice) to understand how funds had been spent. Funding might have been better spent on civil society organizations with a proven track record. The best of these often prefer securing funding from foundations such as the Ford Foundation or the Open Society Institute rather than from governments. NGOs taking funding from the US, UK or other countries involved in regional affairs can be open to media attacks seeking to represent them as spies, a fifth column, or sell-outs to foreign powers.

The regime has occasionally deployed this tactic against NGOs to discredit them in the public eye, although this is becoming less common as Egyptian media has greatly diversified since 2004.

The experiences of European countries with fewer vested strategic interests in Egypt may be a better model. Sweden and the Netherlands are generally considered to be the best examples of Western engagement on human rights and democracy promotion, both in the quality of their approach and knowledge of terrain as well as the proportionally large part of their aid earmarked for those issues. The Netherlands and Denmark have for instance focused on the issue of torture — an increasingly urgent issue in Egypt, where it is considered to be endemic and having become a normalized in police work — and collaborated with the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims and well-regarded local NGOs such as the Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture to develop an Egypt-specific program. Some medium and small embassies, such as Canada and Ireland, have also chosen to use their discretionary funding to focus on issues that others ignored, such as gay rights. In general however, funding allocation has taken place more organically than as a result of consultations between embassies, leaving room for enhanced cooperation and greater visibility in overall foreign efforts in this area.

On a broader scale, there have been a number of joint, cooperative initiatives among the US and European governments addressing political reform in the Middle East. These included the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA) announced at the G8 Sea Island Summit in 2004. BMENA was designed to include annual Forum for the Future meetings of foreign ministers from the G8 and the Arab world. Such meetings have taken place each year except in 2007, but the future of the initiative is unclear, and outcomes, if any, are intangible. Other smaller-scale joint initiatives were launched at the EU-U.S. Summit held in Dublin in June 2004.

Truth in Communications

Diplomats in Egypt have regularly *reported* back to their home governments on issues of concern regarding democracy and human rights. In addition, diplomats have been involved in *informing* not only their own governments, but also the public and the media at home and in Egypt alike. This has occurred not only through official annual reports on the state of human rights, but also through testimony in U.S. Congressional committee hearings, and through sporadic public statements or responses to press inquiries. This has been fueled by important openings to the media climate in Egypt - with the emergence of independent newspapers, satellite television, and the internet and new media, issues of political reform and human rights are now addressed publicly in Egypt in ways not possible ten years ago.

In addition, important foreign news outlets such as *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* developed a keen interest in the state of democratic development in Egypt not held for other countries in the region. This appears to have been heightened by the post-September 11 interest in democracy as an antidote to extremism, along with the arrests of high-profile dissidents such as Saad Eddin Ibrahim, whose case the Western media followed closely.

Working with the Government

The Egyptian government has worked irregularly with Western governments on economic reform issues since the 1970s, and at times there has been significant tension over such reforms. In a general sense, however, the regime has been more receptive to economic reforms and willing to cooperate on economic development issues than on political issues. The Egyptian government has been receptive to external *advising* on certain economic reform issues, including financial sector reform and efforts to increase the independence of the Egyptian Central Bank. And even in some politically sensitive areas that the

Egyptian regime was reluctant to reform, progress was eventually made, particularly since 2004. For example, in 2004, the United States identified some assistance given in cash via the Ministry of International Cooperation as a source of petty corruption, and although the ministry initially resisted giving up this funding, it agreed to discontinue the cash assistance by 2006.

Cooperation on political reform has generally been much more difficult. There has been some success in the area of political *institution-building*. This has included productive cooperation by the Egyptian regime on programs to improve the quality of educational, judicial, and legislative institutions. However, critics note that while such programs may improve the internal capacity and performance of institutions such as the Egyptian courts and parliament, they do not address the fundamental need for such institutions to have increased power to act independently of the regime. Nor do such programs have a benchmarked track record of having improved the situation on the ground. There has also been a general lack of engagement, particularly among Europeans, with the Ministry of Interior and other security institutions when it comes to discussing human rights issues. Most diplomats generally raise these issues with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and sometimes with the Ministry of Justice. However, the Ministry of Interior is typically the chief source of such problems, and human rights activists have recommended engaging it directly on such issues rather than going through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is believed to be a poor relay for such messages. As the Ministry of Interior is an interlocutor on other issues, such as counter-terrorism, channels often already exist, and directly addressing human rights could at least help make it more responsive and create channels to act quickly on specific cases, when possible. The US has the best relationship with the Egyptian security services, and has on occasion intervened to get Ministry of Interior officials to meet with US rights groups such as Human Rights Watch. Europeans — especially the French, British, Dutch, Belgians, Italians, and Germans — have counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization ties with the security services, but not on the same level.

On the European side, one institutional framework for cooperation was established by the Egyptian-European Partnership Agreement, which entered into force in 2004. According to this Agreement, the association council holds an annual meeting at the level of foreign ministers to discuss and evaluate Egyptian-European relations. Following each meeting, the EU issues press releases on the state of relations, including comments on democracy and human rights in Egypt. Since the signing of the agreement in 2004, five such meetings have been held. In the fourth meeting in 2008 the Egyptian delegation presented an ambitious vision for the development of trade and economic relations with the EU, similar to the EU's existing relations with Israel and with Morocco. NGOs monitoring these developments urged the EU to take this opportunity to condition the development of relations on actual progress in the field of human rights, but the EU has apparently decided not to do so. More generally speaking, while the EU negotiation process with Egypt includes discussion of human rights and political reform by treaty, this appears to have become perfunctory in practice. Aware of the Egyptian government's resistance to foreign pressure, diplomats have often preferred to minimize clashes and only tangentially address these issues in the negotiations agenda. The same issues exist in the US-Egypt Strategic Dialogue launched in 2006: although there are provisions for such issues to be discussed, little or no oversight exists. The suggestion that civil society representatives of both countries take part in the relevant Strategic Dialogue meetings, as suggested by a group of Egyptian and American civic society representatives, was raised by the US government and may still be under consideration as one remedy to this issue. The EU could pursue a similar approach.

Reaching Out

During the Bush administration, US diplomats regularly sought to foster dialogue on reform issues by *convening* a group of key Egyptian elites whom they believed shared a commitment to genuine reform. In 2002 and 2003, as support for Egyptian reform first emerged on the Bush administration's agenda, US

officials convened a series of closed-door meetings outside the country with Egyptian government officials, including cabinet-level ministers, who were perceived to be reformers. The United States intended such meetings to provide a safe forum for discussion and to identify steps that the US government could take to support reform efforts, including demands that they could make of the Egyptian government as a whole (i.e. beyond the small group of reform-minded Egyptian government officials). While such meetings produced serious dialogue, US diplomats came away with the lesson that the agenda for reform should be based on interactions with a broader coalition if possible, as progress through such meetings was limited and the influence of the participating reformers within the Egyptian government waned over time.

Diplomats have also provided support to democratic development in Egypt through *financing* for democracy and governance projects, which increased significantly after 2002. From 2004 to 2009, \$250 million was distributed by USAID in bilateral funding for democracy and governance programs in Egypt. But the impact of such programs has been extremely limited, as described in an October 2009 audit by the USAID Office of the Inspector General. USAID democracy and governance programming has included: assisting the Egyptian Press Syndicate in large-scale training programs for journalists; developing plans for dozens of villages and building four local citizen service centers in pilot governorates to more efficiently address citizens' concerns with corruption and local governance; funding NGOs to provide legal aid, psychological counseling, and other support to families of those imprisoned for political reasons.

From 2000 to 2008, foreign financing for democracy and governance included steadily increasing levels of funding being distributed directly by agencies such as USAID to Egyptian NGOs working on behalf of democracy and reform. The Egyptian government opposed such funding, which caused persistent tensions with Western governments, particularly the United States. In June 2002, the Egyptian parliament passed a new NGO law, giving the Egyptian government the power to dissolve NGOs without a court order. The law also renewed existing provisions prohibiting NGOs from working in politics and requiring any NGO to receive the approval of the Egyptian government before accessing any funding from foreign agency or government. Egypt was at this time the only country in the world to exercise such authority over groups wishing to receive US foreign assistance funding designated for democracy and governance.

An amendment to the US appropriations bill for foreign operations, offered by Senator Sam Brownback (Republican-KS) and passed in December 2004, reversed this by asserting that, "with respect to the provision of assistance for Egypt for democracy and governance activities, the organizations implementing such assistance and the specific nature of that assistance shall not be subject to the prior approval by the Government of Egypt." After passage in late 2004, such language remained in each annual US appropriations act for foreign assistance through 2008. In Fiscal Year 2009, this language was amended to explicitly assert the authority of USAID to determine the distribution of funds in *all* countries that receive US assistance for democracy and governance, rather than specifically focusing on Egypt. Nonetheless, in 2009, in contradiction to this amendment, the Obama administration appeared to have reached a working arrangement whereby no USAID funds would be given to organizations not registered and approved by the Egyptian government.

The controversy and tension surrounding US funding for democracy and governance in Egypt has not been limited to funding for domestic Egyptian organizations. In 2005, a number of democracy-oriented international NGOs, including the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), opened offices and operations in Egypt. These organizations aimed to *connect* Egyptian political activists, judges, and reformers with foreign democracy experts and trainers, and also to connect members of the various opposition parties and groups within Egypt. However, in June 2006, NDI and IRI were

asked by the Egyptian Foreign Ministry to halt their operations in Egypt until they were properly licensed by the ministry. As of yet, the Egyptian government has failed to properly license such democracy-oriented international organizations, which therefore find their activities severely restricted.

These organizations – as well as others such as Freedom House, which does not maintain regular offices in Egypt – are sought after by Egyptian civil society and democracy advocates for their support in professional development, international expertise, small grants, and international solidarity. International diplomatic support of their work and presence in Egypt – in the face of Egyptian obstructions – can be a valuable way of supporting democratic development in the country. Such organizations also allow donor funds to go further and be directed by those with intimate situational awareness.

This appears to be borne-out in the US government's own reporting. In October 2009, the USAID Office of the Inspector General released a report, "Audit of USAID/Egypt's Democracy and Governance Programs," with a number of interesting observations and conclusions. First, it described USAID's democracy and governance programming in Egypt as having achieved only extremely limited impact, and concluded that "A major contributing factor to the limited achievements for some of these programs resulted from a lack of support from the Government of Egypt." While the report was generally critical of the effectiveness of USAID's democracy and governance assistance programs in Egypt, it did note that "USAID/Egypt's Office of Democracy and Governance achieved its greatest success in its civil society direct grants program, which provided grants and cooperative agreements valued from \$192,000 to \$1.4 million during FY 2008." Ironically, this assessment comes seven months after the Obama administration, in conjunction with Congress, cut funding for Egyptian civil society by more than 77 percent.

The support for indigenous civil society is perhaps the single-most effective tool of the international community in Egypt. Such a reduction in aid by one donor can be met with invigorated involvement by other missions and a frank assessment of the impact of reduction of US support.

Defending Democrats

American and European diplomats have clearly *demonstrated* their support for selected prominent democrats who were arrested and persecuted in Egypt. Two such cases that drew much international attention were Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Ayman Nour.

Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Egyptian-American sociology professor, author, and democracy activist, was arrested in June 2000 on charges of defaming Egypt's image abroad and embezzling funds received from the EU. The arrest followed a public statement and newspaper column by Ibrahim that raised concerns that President Hosni Mubarak was grooming his son Gamal to succeed him as president. Initially, the US Embassy made a conscious decision to respond to the case through private discussions, contacting the Egyptian foreign ministry, advisors to President Mubarak, and even raising the issue directly in a meeting with Mubarak. Gradually, the US Embassy increased pressures on the Egyptian government in private, while at the same time steadily increasing the level of public criticism. This gradual, sequential, multifaceted approach seems to have worked, as Ibrahim was released after 45 days in prison.

Upon release, however, Ibrahim returned to activism and questioning the Egyptian government, and was soon arrested again. This time, the US Ambassador was not as directly involved in negotiations, but other officials at the US Embassy continued to engage extensively with Egyptian officials, including President Mubarak, on the case and were repeatedly reassured that if the United States would let the Egyptian justice system work, Ibrahim would ultimately be released. Ibrahim was tried and convicted of all charges in May 2001, however, and then lost an appeal in July 2002, confirming his sentence of seven

years in prison with hard labor. His health deteriorated sharply due to a series of strokes in prison, leaving him partially paralyzed (he now walks with a cane). In August 2002, President Bush informed President Mubarak in a letter that the United States would withhold \$133 million in planned supplemental economic assistance because of the case. This was the first time that the US had publicly linked foreign aid to an Arab country with that government's record on human rights issues.

This clearly angered the Egyptian government, and many in the US government were alarmed by the anger and tension and potential consequences for the US-Egypt bilateral relationship. US diplomats attest that during this period, however, Egypt's cooperation with the US on key strategic issues – counterterrorism, Israel, military overflight privileges, Suez Canal rights – remained undiminished. On the contrary, it appears that the Egyptian government may have made more of an effort to cooperate on strategic issues in the hope of lessening pressure on the reform front. Moreover, this application of clear conditionality was apparently successful, as Ibrahim was eventually referred to a higher court, which cleared him of all charges in March 2003.

Ibrahim continued his strong criticism of the Egyptian regime, however, and in 2007 private attorneys affiliated with Egypt's ruling parties brought several suits against him while he was abroad, effectively preventing Ibrahim from returning to Egypt for fear of immediate arrest.

Foreign diplomats have also defended opposition politician Ayman Nour, another high-profile figure. In January 2005, authorities arrested Nour, charging him with forging signatures filed in forming the *Ghad* Party. Having learned the lesson from the Saad Eddin Ibrahim case, the US government responded immediately to Nour's arrest in a more assertive manner than they had done with Ibrahim. In February 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice abruptly cancelled a visit to Cairo in a sign of protest against Nour's arrest. At around the same time, a group of members of the European Parliament, led by the British Conservative Vice President of the Parliament Edward McMillan-Scott, threatened to raise the profile of the Nour case by paying a visit to him in prison as a group. Nour was released in March 2005 and was allowed to run in Egypt's presidential election in September 2005. He finished a distant second to President Mubarak with just under 8% of the vote. While this was the first time Mubarak campaigned in a competitive election, the deck was stacked against opposition candidates.

Soon after the election, Nour was arrested again, convicted, and sentenced to five years in prison in December 2005. On the day of Nour's conviction, the White House released a public statement calling on "the Egyptian government to act under the laws of Egypt in the spirit of its professed desire for increased political openness and dialogue within Egyptian society, and out of "humanitarian concern", to release Mr. Nour from detention." As in the case of Ibrahim, the White House also expressed its displeasure through a tangible act, in this case canceling negotiations on a free trade agreement that were scheduled to begin in January 2006. Although the international community continued to raise concerns about Ayman Nour's imprisonment, he remained in jail for more than three years until his release in February 2009, when Mubarak wanted to re-set his relationship with the US under the Obama administration.

Diplomats involved with both the Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Ayman Nour cases noted that the US government in particular seemed to have considerably more leverage in the Ibrahim case than in the case of Nour. Ibrahim's dual US and Egyptian citizenships and his extensive ties to the United States (he has taught at numerous US universities and his wife is American) made it much more difficult for the Egyptian government to dismiss US government efforts on his behalf as illegitimate interference in Egyptian affairs. On the other hand, such claims were frequently made regarding the Nour case by many actors in the Egyptian government, including several officials generally perceived to be reformers.

In addition to these two high-profile cases, Western diplomats have provided support for a number of other imprisoned political reformers and activists in Egypt. Of the dozens of bloggers in Egyptian prisons, Abdel Karim Nabil Soliman (known on his blog as Kareem Amer) – the first person imprisoned in Egypt purely for the content of his online blog - has attracted particular attention, including in separate letters to President Mubarak and to President Bush written by numerous members of the US Congress. Incidents such as sectarian clashes or human rights abuses involving religious discrimination by the state also draw a higher profile in North America and Europe, in part due to the political weight that churches and Christian interest groups can play as lobby groups, in influencing media coverage or through elected representatives. Both focus on discrimination against Christians and politically motivated attacks on liberal reformers show the narrow base of support that exists in the West for a more thorough and approach on human rights and political freedoms. Such cases remain in the spotlight because they have a supportive and vocal constituency in Western countries. These may be émigré Coptic groups and Christian solidarity networks, or in the case of Ibrahim and Nour, these individuals' contacts among political and media elites in Europe and the US. The *Washington Post* for instance campaigned continuously for both men, as well as greater US pressure on Egypt in general, in good part because its editorial page editor, Jackson Diehl, is personally committed to reform in Egypt and has good contacts with Egyptian reformists.

The response by Western diplomats to the arrest of hundreds of other political activists, however, has not drawn this kind of assertive response. This includes the numerous members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt who have been jailed in recent years. While the State Department's annual Country Report on Human Rights in Egypt has regularly noted the use of closed military tribunals and emergency courts to detain and convict members of the Brotherhood, they have clearly not received the same kind of support from the West as the celebrated cases described above.

CONCLUSION

Outside governments have had mixed, uneven success in using diplomatic assets to support democratic development in Egypt. Periods of progress on reform issues have been followed by periods of stagnation or regression. Most recently, pressure from the United States, accompanied by a renewed interest in Egyptian reform by the EU and European governments, peaked in 2004 and 2005. Not coincidentally, this was the last period during which the Egyptian government undertook a series of positive steps toward reform. Western countries seemed to lack a longer-term strategy for supporting Egyptian democracy, however, and numerous measures undertaken during this period to spur the government in the direction of reform have since been reversed. Also, due to Egypt's unique strategic importance as a critical Western ally, support for Egyptian democracy has tended to come directly from Western capitals, and has often been the purview of higher ranking diplomats and government officials than is the case in most other countries. In fact, when human rights and democracy has been the purview of lower-ranking diplomats alone, the issue is more easily side-stepped by Egyptian counterparts.

It is clear that strategies for supporting democratic development in Egypt cannot rely on the political will of the Egyptian regime. While some diplomats advocate following the relatively successful model of engaging Egypt on economic reform issues, others note that the regime's genuine desire for economic reform is not present on the political side and caution that other strategies must be employed. And the Egyptian government is quite adept at manipulating and undermining attempts to encourage reform. In addition, it appears that no single diplomatic tool or approach has succeeded in spurring progress on democratic reform in Egypt.

Rather, a multifaceted approach, in which private dialogue and selective public criticism are complemented by leveraging assets like foreign assistance, seems to show the greatest promise. Direct

engagement with civil society actors in Egypt is productive and should be continued, but must be complemented by direct engagement and pressure upon the Egyptian regime. In applying such pressure, foreign governments should not be afraid to condition economic benefits such as trade agreements and foreign assistance on positive steps toward reform. Support for civil society should include increases in funding for civil society organizations through direct grants, with an emphasis on reaching groups that are truly independent. In addition, a more consistent policy of protesting human rights violations against all peaceful activists, including Islamists, would have greater credibility with the Egyptian public. And whenever possible, US, EU, and other diplomats from democracies should coordinate closely and express united support for such victims of human rights violations.

Applying pressure through private, behind-closed-doors dialogue has been effective at times, but when the Egyptian government resists such pressure, it seems that a willingness to apply increasing leverage in private, while accompanied by public criticisms and conditioning of benefits such as foreign aid and trade benefits, may be more effective to spur desired reforms. Another lesson from the past several years has been the need for foreign governments to engage a broad coalition of actors on reform issues and not to rely on narrow groups of apparently reform-minded elites. In addition, diplomats should be wary of Egyptian government officials who may speak on behalf of reform but may lack the power or authority to deliver such reforms. Several Western diplomats noted the need to directly engage Egyptian government officials at the very highest levels on issues of democratic development.

Many observers note that the next couple of years could present a real opportunity for renewing democratic reform in Egypt. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for November 2010, with presidential elections scheduled for the fall of 2011. It is possible that President Mubarak will step down at the time of these presidential elections, if not before, and that Egypt will undergo its first presidential transition in 30 years. While these elections and the potential transition provide an opportunity for opening a new era of reform in Egypt, the regression on political issues that has marked the period since 2006 could also continue.

The coming post-Mubarak period offers intriguing possibilities. The new president, whoever he is, will be considerably weaker than Mubarak and thus more susceptible to foreign pressure. Western engagement on political reform as a legitimizing factor for the new regime (domestically and internationally) could be one approach. Another would be to make it clear that what was tolerated under Mubarak will no longer be acceptable. Unfortunately, the behavior of the US and some European states in the last few years suggests more importance will be given to ensuring a stable Egypt than a democratic Egypt. Reform advocates can prepare the argument that the two are one and the same: i.e., that a truly stable Egypt necessarily needs to be more democratic. Yet another approach would be to prepare a clear agenda that various stakeholders could endorse for gradual reform, one that could for instance start with the right to political association and tackling the problem of torture, administrative arrests, the Emergency Law and other practices that have undermined the rule of law and the quality of police work in the country.

Finally, governments such as the US, but also major donors like the EU, can accompany an Egyptian government genuinely interested in reform by providing incentives. Models for this already exist: the US has the Millennium Challenge Account, which provides funding for countries that meet certain benchmarks and/or are working towards meeting them. The US also has the carrot of a Free Trade Agreement with Egypt.

The EU has the experience of the criteria for reform used for Eastern European countries that became full members. Richard Youngs, a scholar of European democracy promotion efforts at FRIDE, has suggested that this — the Copenhagen Criteria — should be adopted towards Mediterranean countries that working towards Advanced Status with the EU — the “everything but membership” status that offers economic

integration but not political union. Other countries can model their own approach based on the same principle of conditionality and explicit benchmarking.

It is extremely unlikely that the Egyptian government will possess the political will to make progress on democratic development without clear international support for government reform and for independent Egyptian civil society actors. Ultimately, it is up to the Egyptian people to bring reform and work for the transition to a genuinely democratic Egypt in the years ahead, rather than merely the transition to a new autocratic president. But if international actors learn the lessons of the past decade and are committed to supporting political reform through a patient, persistent strategy that does not fold in the face of obstacles or setbacks, then the international community can become a strong ally of the Egyptian people in their struggle for improved human and political rights.