Egypt in Williamsburg

Challenges of a Post-Revolutionary Era

EDITOR
Reginald Dale
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A report on the first conference in the Williamsburg–CSIS Forum

A partnership of

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Financial support for the conference came from Colonial Williamsburg benefactors Anita and James Timmons, the Ford Foundation, and an anonymous donor.

The Egyptian revolution is still unfolding. And yet the policy world in Washington is uninformed about it. We want to bring this debate more vividly to the Washington policy community, looking beyond the daily news to the important strategic issues.”

John Hamre, President & CEO, CSIS

“In the second half of the 18th century, Williamsburg became a focal point of extraordinary intellectual and political activity and revolutionary action. It was a center for the exchange of ideas about the organization of human society and the principles of self-government. Today it remains a place for exchanging ideas and, we hope, for shaping the path forward.”

Colin Campbell, President, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

“Egypt did not undergo a big revolution, like the French, Russian, or Chinese Revolutions. It was a political uprising that removed the head of a system, and the major task now is to dismantle the structures of authoritarian rule and to consolidate power in a democratic way with democratic institutions.”

Emad Shahin, American University in Cairo

“The upheaval is not only in Egypt. It’s the Middle East. It is Syria, it is Libya, it is Gaza, it is Israel. The wave of change is engulfing the whole region, and it is impossible for any regime to stop it. No way.”

Mostafa Al Hassan, Global Consolidated Contractors

“President Morsi was elected partly on a mandate to fulfill the wishes of the protestors, and he has just utterly not done anything to advance their claims. That is why there are persistent protests.”

Josh Stacher, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
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In April 2013, a remarkable event took place in Colonial Williamsburg. An outstanding group of leading Egyptians—including politicians, economists, business leaders, academics, journalists, policy analysts, and military experts—gathered for the first conference in the Williamsburg-CSIS Forum, established earlier in the year. Participants included representatives of the then-ruling Freedom and Justice Party (the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood) and many others grouped along the country’s broad political and religious spectrum, as well as leading American experts. It was the first such high-level gathering of Egyptian leaders, inside or outside Egypt, since the fall of President Mubarak in early 2011.

Shortly after the conference, Egypt was again up-ended by huge protests and a military intervention that removed the Muslim Brotherhood from power and installed a new government committed to democratic reform. But the change of regime did not supersede many of the views expressed in Williamsburg and subsequently at CSIS in Washington, DC. Most of the issues raised—including potential lessons from America’s own revolution—remain highly relevant to Egypt’s future.

Among the questions of continuing and pressing interest debated at the conference were the future of U.S.-Egyptian military relations, the nature of “political Islam,” the desirability of U.S. attempts to exert political influence in Egypt, and the requirements for establishing a genuine democracy beyond simply holding elections and referendums. An important lesson was that transitions to democracy have almost always been difficult and “messy,” as in late 18th century America.

One aim of the conference was to analyze Egypt’s problems and possible solutions; another to explore whether dialogue is possible among people from such different ideological and religious backgrounds. At least in the relaxed confines of Colonial Williamsburg, the meeting showed that frank and friendly exchanges of view are indeed possible, despite wide areas of sometimes strong disagreement.

This report draws on conference sessions that were on the record—mainly public panel discussions in Williamsburg and Washington and set-piece speeches—to summarize the flavor and content of the exchanges. Other, private discussions did not reveal major differences in substance from the public sessions.

Details of the conference program and the list of participants can be found on the report’s final two pages. Among the many distinguished participants, Amr Darrag later became a cabinet minister in the FJP government, and Ziad Bahaa-Eldin a deputy prime minister in the government that succeeded it.

Reginald Dale
Director, Williamsburg-CSIS Forum
By the mid-1780s, however, that contradiction was smashed. It was very evident to many people that democracies could indeed be despotic, and James Madison, the father of the constitution, explained their so-called excesses.

Madison said the central problem was the multiplicity of state laws, their changeability, and often their injustice. More laws were passed in the decade following independence than in the entire colonial period. Judges scarcely knew what the law was. There was a risk that the democracy created in 1776 would fail.

Madison faced one of the most basic dilemmas of democracy: how to establish majority rule while protecting individual and minority rights. How do you curb majorities, as he put it, without doing violence to the democratic principle of majority rule?

Many thought the answer was to counteract too much democracy with a dose of authoritarianism, if not monarchy. But George Washington himself rejected such a solution, as did Madison, arguing that republican ills needed a republican remedy.

Madison’s solution was the creation of a powerful federal government in 1787. Madison and his colleagues succeeded in scrapping the previous Articles of Confederation, which the original intention was to amend, and introducing a totally new form of government. The aim was not only to strengthen the central government vis-à-vis foreign powers and give it a limited taxing power, but to go beyond that and solve the problem of excessive democracy in the states. We know it’s a strong government, because it’s essentially the government we still have in the United States today.
When they saw this constitution, people were stunned. It was ratified, however, because by this point—the winter of 1787–1788—there was no alternative. The Confederation had essentially collapsed, and, as one disgusted anti-Federalist opponent said, it’s this or nothing. And nobody wanted nothing.

Now, the question was raised, why will this federal government not succumb to the same vices that afflicted the state governments? Conventional wisdom was that a republic or democracy must be small and homogenous. Madison turned that on its head and called for expanding the size of the republic so that all the interests would circulate and none of them would be able to cohere and dominate or oppress minorities or other groups—or each other. The factions would neutralize one another.

Similarly, Madison concluded that religious freedom is made possible by the very multiplicity of religious groups and sects. It became possible to abolish the state role in religion because each denomination—Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Quaker, and so on—feared that their opponents might gain control of the state apparatus if there were an established religion.

That didn’t mean any lessening of religious faith. In fact, religion was very powerful among the American people—and remains so. Americans today are certainly more religious than most Europeans, but there’s no connection between religion and the state.

Now, what lessons can we draw from the American Revolution? One is that democracy is more than majority rule, though that, of course, is a prerequisite. But democracy also requires respect for the rights of minorities and individuals.

A second is that the separation of church and state does not have to mean a loss of faith among the people. In fact, if religious feelings are intense, the only solution is to separate church and state, or else each of the groups will fight to gain control of the state and persecute the others.

Of course, Americans in the 18th century lived in a very different world, and not all these lessons may apply today. But the Declaration of Independence of 1776—with its claim that all men are created equal and that all have inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—surely still has resonance throughout the world.
Democracy Can and Will Work—in Time

JOSHUA STACHER: We should not talk about the upheavals in the Arab world in the past tense or ask whether revolutions have succeeded. We are seeing the continuation of a social struggle that has deep roots before January 2011 and will keep unfolding. The revolution is not over, and there is no way to repress it unless the elites of these countries decide to take their countries down very dark paths.

AMR HAMZAWY: Two days ago I was at the University of Alexandria, and the students kept asking, “Are you satisfied with what your politicians are doing?” Today, participants at this conference, including entrepreneurs and investors, have been asking me and other politicians exactly the same question.

That must mean that the question reflects a key reality in Egypt today. Two years after the revolution of January 2011, Egyptian politics has not delivered responses that meet people's demands.

Broad segments of our population took to the streets to demand dignity, social justice, and freedom, an end to human rights violations and restrictions on freedom of expression, space to articulate their demands, and the ability to hold elected and appointed public officials accountable. Egyptians are no closer to attaining those goals, and they are increasingly disenchanted with politics.

Politicians have primarily been occupied with high politics and have largely ignored the day-to-day management that would address people’s needs. The country is in a severe social and economic crisis that is affecting people’s daily lives, and it is becoming increasingly ungovernable. Poverty and unemployment continue to grow.

The political parties have been unable to agree on a roadmap for transition to a democracy, which is admittedly not easy. If functioning democracies are messy, as everyone knows in the United States and elsewhere, transitions to democracy are even messier.

The ballot box is being respected, but other democratic procedures and values—building consensus, including opposition movements, creating room for maneuver for different political actors, and sharing responsibility—are lacking.

The opposition has also made mistakes. It did not appreciate the value of building institutions to transition to democracy; it failed to offer its own roadmap; it fell into the trap of playing politics in a way that did not meet the people’s needs; and it has yet to shape a viable alternative government.

JOSHUA STACHER: Before the 2011 revolution, I would have to go to see all the panelists here individually to hear their points of view. So the fact that we can get them on the same stage talking and interacting is really a tremendous feat when you consider what President Hosni Mubarak’s regime was like.

AMR HAMZAWY: When people ask whether democracy is just something that does not work in Egypt, we should put the question in the context of comparable citizens’ revolutions in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. While the transition is painful and tiring, we are not an exceptional case. The compatibility between our society and democracy is not in question. We can make it, and probably and hopefully we will—even though it will take time just as it did everywhere else.

JOSHUA STACHER: There are important questions concerning how Islam works with democracy, how the Muslim Brotherhood works with democracy, and the role of the minorities.
AMR DARRAG: We have a problem because, in many countries that have been governed in the name of Islam, real Islamic values have not been applied correctly. This gave the impression to many people around the world that there is a contradiction between the basic values of Islam and the values of modernity and democracy. In our opinion, however, there is actually very little difference between the two.

In both disciplines, the choice of ruler stems from the people—not from the authority of God or anyone else. In fact, our Islamic government is far superior to the generally secular dictatorship that preceded the Egyptian revolution and closer to the standards of modern values.

As for minorities, Christians in Egypt constitute about 10 percent of the population in number, but as citizens they are not a minority. In terms of citizenship, we do not acknowledge any difference between Christians, Muslims, and Jews. The word “minority” does not appear in the new constitution, whether in reference to religion, gender, or anything else.

The Freedom and Justice Party bases our model on the values of Islam, and we hope to prove to the whole world that there is no real contradiction between the two systems. In fact, I don’t want to say that Islamic values are consistent with modern values; I prefer to say that modern values are consistent with Islam. Islamic values actually preceded modern values by a long time but have not been applied in the right context in modern times. We hope to develop the systems, the disciplines, and the modern institutions that will prove that the Islamic system is viable, that it can really make a difference, achieve progress, and can do what is best for all our citizens.

Public panel on the Arab Spring. (From left to right) Amr Hamzany, Samy Atya, Joshua Stacher (moderator), Manar El Shorbagy, and Amr Darrag.
What Role for the United States?

MANAR EL-SHORBAGY: My advice to Washington is to stay away from Egyptian domestic politics because there is no consensus in our country over core issues. This is something Egyptians have to figure out themselves.

A more independent Egypt would be much more beneficial to U.S. interests in the Middle East. If Egypt has different and more diverse relations with other countries in the region—and does not exactly reflect U.S. policies—that will actually be very helpful to Washington in solving regional problems.

At the moment, Egypt is polarized, and each side is accusing the United States of siding with the other. I appreciate that Washington will work pragmatically with whomever the people vote for, but it is very dangerous for Washington actually to take sides. Nevertheless, Egyptians still expect a lot from the United States. In the last few days of the revolution one young protestors carried a banner saying, “Obama, we do not want to hate you.”

JOSH STACHER: Essentially all Egyptians want is to be treated as equals, rather than in a neo-imperial sort of way in which the United States is the patron and Egypt is responsible for securing U.S. interests—whether those concern the peace agreement with Israel, the Suez Canal, or the very generous military overflights Egypt allows almost daily.

SAMEH SEIF EL YAZAL: Strong U.S.-Egypt relations are very important for both countries in light of American interests in the area and the threat from Iran—not just to the region but to the United States as well. With Iranian missiles able to reach American bases in the Gulf, as well as Southern Europe, anything could happen. That’s why the United States needs the ability to move naval vessels, and particularly aircraft carriers, through the Suez Canal to get to the Gulf at any time. Secondly, Washington wants to be sure that the Israeli-Egyptian border is safe and that there are no more wars between Egypt and Israel, which could escalate to involve the entire region. Both Americans and Egyptians want strategic stability.

From the Egyptian side, Cairo wants to maintain good military cooperation, not least because up to 80 percent of the Egyptian military is equipped with American weapons. Good relations with the United States ensure that Egypt will continue to benefit from American spare parts, ammunition, and technical support.

Washington made a mistake after the 2011 revolution in concentrating too much on the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements and paying less attention to liberal, secular, and opposition groups. Most Egyptians believe that the United States helped the Muslim Brotherhood take power, but army officers, including generals and young officers, still want good cooperation with the United States and do not have any significant issues with Washington.

KHALED ISMAIL: The United States has always been searching for the Holy Grail, which is a regime in the Middle East that is both popular and fully aligned with American policies and standards. For a long time now, however, governments have been either popular or aligned with the United States. Washington’s dream has not been achieved.

Meanwhile, we should put our commercial relations with Washington in perspective. Non-military U.S. aid to Egypt is very small, in the hundreds of millions of dollars, which is almost insignificant in an economy the size of Egypt’s. And the European Union is a much bigger trading partner for Egypt than the United States.
MOSTAFA AL HASSAN: The United States should intervene in one respect, by updating the Camp David agreement to include development of the Suez Canal and Sinai and promote regional and global security. The United States should play a big part in these developments, because they are going to shape the politics of the Middle East.

NAGUIB SAWIRIS: The problem is every time the United States interferes it screws up, and we end up in a bigger mess. I mean, if you want to call the Iraq War a success, just think, you go to war, you spend $200 billion, and you deliver the country to Iran. What a great result! So I'm not so sure we want the United States to intervene.

Nevertheless, I don't think the United States can afford not to be engaged. We don't have the luxury of leaving the country to fail. If Egypt falls, the whole region will go down with it. But please remind whoever is governing that Egyptians will not accept a return to a dictatorship or a fascistic regime or a regime that attacks the judicial system, neglects the rule of law and public order, refuses to have transparent and fair elections under international supervision, and refuses to listen to the opposition.

We need help and support, but not unconditional support. Support should be conditional on whoever is governing the country adhering to five principles. These are a real democratic government that accepts the opposition and does not harass it; belief in the private sector; commitment to women’s rights; equal treatment for minorities, Christians, and others; and media freedom.

Bring Our Tourists Back

SHERIF KAMEL: The year before the revolution, Egypt attracted around 14 million tourists. But there are islands around the world that have 40 million or 50 million. With the amount of monuments we have—Greco-Roman, Pharaonic, Islamic, Coptic, you name it—we ought to do much better. Tourism employs 2 million people directly and 4 million indirectly, with 32 industries involved. That’s huge. Theoretically, the whole of Egypt could rely on tourism, but then of course you need infrastructure, you need hotels, you need a whole lot of other kinds of support.

KHALED ISMAIL: To bring the tourists back we have to improve security and launch a publicity campaign to persuade people that the country is safe and back to normal. Given all the cultural heritage we have, even the amount of tourists who came before the revolution was pathetic. Unfortunately, we are now even below that level. We need to fix the problem immediately because tourism is a resource we cannot live without.

AYMAN HINDY: The sun hasn’t changed because of the revolution, nor have our museums and beaches. Egypt is open for business, but the tourists are not coming. We have to stabilize the security situation to bring them back.
It is very important to understand the background of the U.S.-Egyptian military relationship. At the time of the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement in 1979, the Egyptian military made a commitment to move from their Soviet roots, equipment, and training, to a U.S. model. That was a big decision, because it involved a major transfer of military concepts, doctrine, and equipment between the two countries, and it was difficult. Over time, however, the Egyptian military has really adjusted to a U.S. style of operations and equipment.

Today, people often wonder why we give so much military support to Egypt, because they think it is merely a relic of the 1979 agreement. They do not realize all the other benefits we get from the relationship.

After the 1979 agreement, President Jimmy Carter created what was to become U.S. Central Command (Centcom), in Tampa, FL, with a range of missions in the Middle East. These included ensuring the free flow of energy resources, access to the region, freedom of navigation, and more generally underpinning regional stability. We built a strong military-to-military relationship through the major security assistance program we ran with the Egyptian military.

The Egyptians sent a division to join us in the Gulf War and a brigade to Somalia. The interoperability between our forces and a shared training doctrine made it much easier to work together. With the creation of Centcom, we understood that we could not get a major military force into the region without Egypt, which was considered the keystone. Without priority access through the Suez Canal, overflight, basing, and refueling rights in Cairo and elsewhere, we could not deploy forces and reinforcements in an emergency. Egypt has always quickly approved such requests.

Like Start-ups, Revolutions Mostly Fail

KHALED ISMAEL: Any revolution is an entrepreneurial act. It involves people feeling pain, sensing an opportunity, making a change, trying to make things better. Basically that’s what a revolution does, and that’s what an entrepreneur does. And very much like start-ups, revolutions make a lot of mistakes. Most early-stage start-ups fail, as do revolutions. History typically tells us of the few revolutions that have succeeded; we do not read much about the hundreds of revolutions that have failed. There are two reasons why start-ups fail. Either the business plan is not right or the shareholders disagree on what they want to do. The Egyptian revolution of 2011 did not have a clear plan—there was only a will to change. And the desire for change evolved over time, so people wanted more and more change. But the protestors had no coherent idea of what they really wanted. They did not sit down together and agree on a business plan, like successful entrepreneurs. We are suffering today because of those twin failures. But the jury is still out. Start-ups can change course until they find the right way; they can find new shareholders who can inject new blood and succeed—and so can revolutions.
In addition, Egypt has offered training space, which is very hard to find in most of the world. Egypt provides contiguous air, land, and sea space in which we can operate on the scale we need. We conduct the largest military exercise in the world, Bright Star, every other year, and our European forces were able to participate. That kind of maneuver space and that kind of agreement to provide training space are not available anywhere in Europe.

People seem to think that the $1.3 billion in U.S. military aid to Egypt is a gift that just arrives. Much of it, however, is supplied in kind, with U.S. equipment and U.S. training of officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in American schools. That cooperation has been critical to us since 1979 in accomplishing our military missions. And the officer-to-officer relationship has also been very close.

I watched very carefully the reaction of the Egyptian military during the upheaval in early 2011. Compared to what happened in Libya and what is happening now in Syria, the Egyptian military were very restrained. I believe they continue to want to act in the best interests of the people and ensure that Egypt becomes a prosperous country with a kind of democracy that we would appreciate.

The military is now figuring out its role, and I would not, at this critical moment, want to break the ties between the U.S. and Egyptian militaries. Those ties have been very strong; we have been on battlefields together, and they have given us everything we needed to respond to critical situations. I think it is important to get through this and work with them to find the best way of continuing that cooperation in this evolving and emerging Egyptian political system and society.
There is a sense of optimism in that developments in Egypt are so dynamic and exciting and it is a great time to be living in Cairo. But the country faces six main challenges.

1. The political crisis. One of the main issues is the whole notion of ballot-box democracy, majority rule, and what it means to win elections. Egyptians accepted the victory of President Morsi at the ballot box. But there is a problem with what kinds of powers elections bestow on a leader, what it means to be in power, and what it means to have a whole process of democracy that includes other aspects before and after elections and is not just a snapshot of people queuing up at the election booth. The constitution endorsed by President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood suffered from this problem. Most of the resistance to the constitution—aside from opposition to specific provisions and the absence of specific guarantees—was due to the way it was agreed, the lack of proper process.

A large part of the population has lost interest in political parties in general and maybe in formal politics to a large extent. There is much less enthusiasm today about parties, about elections, than there was about contesting the first post-revolutionary elections, and that is a very worrying sign. The youth that were in the first line of the revolution have found themselves pretty much outside the political process, and many people who hoped that the democratic process would grow and continue have lost faith in that.

2. The economy. In the Egyptian dialogue, there continues to be a confusion between cause and effect. You often hear people talking about the decline of the Egyptian pound or the stock exchange index as the problem, whereas these are obviously not the problem but the symptoms of it.

The causes are a slowing economy, collapsing foreign direct investment, declining tourism, and out-of-control spending in some areas. These developments are creating rising prices, rising unemployment, slowing demand, and a decline in bank reserves.

Underlying these factors are the root causes, which are political instability, the security situation, legal uncertainty, and a confused vision of the country’s long-term future.

Discussion of some of these issues has come into the open as a result of visits to Cairo by IMF missions. There is disagreement over the proposed IMF loan, but it is mostly due not to the loan’s details and conditions but to insufficient transparency in the whole process. I think the Egyptian public is now generally readier to consider the effects of such a program with more honesty and transparency. Ultimately, however, the only way we can get out of our economic deadlock is to find a political solution.

There is very little that any government can do today with traditional tools and methods. The type of solution we need is much bigger than moving around a few millions in the budget, a small tax increase here, or cuts in some benefits there. We need big solutions, really radical changes, and to rethink the whole way the economy is run. This cannot be done without a broader social consensus. We need breakthroughs, not just simple solutions that might have been suitable in the past.

3. Security, law, order, and public safety. This is a very complex challenge because, simply put, the institutions of law and order are not functioning. There is a background of repression by police that has to be understood before we can begin thinking of a solution. The fact that the turning point in the 2011 revolution was the moment when the lines of police broke down continues to be an important part of the imagery of the revolution.
No country can run without a police force. The problem is that nothing has been done in the last two years to reform the role of the police in our society. In other words, we are still in a situation where you either take what you had before, or you get nothing at all and you are not protected. That is a choice that nobody is willing to accept today. There is no way that the Egyptian people would be willing to accept a return to the ways and means of the old police force in order to get some security. So, if there is no serious effort to reform and restructure the whole way the police force is managed, we will continue to be faced with that impossible choice.

There is another law and order dilemma: we have to distinguish between judges and the judiciary. They are not the same thing. It is extremely important that following the revolution we all defend the concept of the judiciary, the concept of law, and the concept of justice, even though some of us may have issues with some judges and some members of the judiciary. These are issues that can be resolved, but it is very dangerous to jump from being against some judges to being against the whole notion of an independent judiciary.

4. The challenge of government. From the prime minister down to the youngest member of the bureaucracy, government in Egypt is in a big crisis—it is practically at a standstill. True, there is a lack of technocratic skills among the Muslim Brotherhood. But who would have expected the Muslim Brotherhood to come to power with a full set of the economists, statisticians, and experts in every field required to run a country? I think it is fair to give the Brotherhood the benefit of the doubt of not having been prepared with all the skills that are needed.

But the Brotherhood made the mistake of failing to gain the trust and cooperation of the neutral, middle-level bureaucrats, who in the first few months after President Morsi’s election were willing to try to work with him. That willingness declined significantly over time. The result is that we are in a very difficult situation. Ministries, banks, and public institutions are operating, but there is a paralysis of government that is affecting our capacity to grow.

5. A challenge of expectations. There has been a revolution in expectations since the 2011 revolution. This could have been an opportunity to be more honest with the people about the real state of the economy and what needs to be done. Instead, there has been an exaggerated sense of confidence, an exaggerated sense of optimism over such things as inflows of foreign direct investment and reductions in the budget deficit. Managing the expectations needed for us to overcome our economic problems is a separate challenge from managing the economy itself.

6. The opposition. There is too much emphasis among the opposition on a negative approach. We should not be the parties that are against the Freedom and Justice Party and the Muslim Brotherhood. We should have a much more positive and proactive program to submit. But something much bigger is going on. It is a big mistake by the current regime to behave as if the current political parties are the only opposition. There is a much wider protest movement in Egypt that is not going to go away.

So we have colossal problems, but I think these six challenges have some common features—they are interconnected. So they cannot be tackled one at a time. You cannot, for example, tackle the economic problem without tackling the political deadlock. It is not possible to focus on the political issue, to complete the constitution, hold elections and so on, and then try to deal with the economic problems. All these challenges require a larger consensus than a simple vote of confidence or a simple majority at the ballot box. And they are all time sensitive. They are not problems and challenges that can be postponed for long.
Egyptians are not passive and do not tolerate injustice and oppression. Where else in the world have the people undertaken five major revolutions in the last 200 years, including the most recent in January 2011? Egyptians could definitely lead a sixth and a seventh one if someone took them back to an autocratic path.

THREE CHALLENGES
The first challenge in the transition to democracy is the role of the military. We have to lay the foundations for clear, sustainable, professional civil-military relations to consolidate the civilian aspects of the state. We have made good progress, but it may take some time for this framework to develop and mature.

The second challenge is to deal with the problems inherited from the previous regime, especially rampant corruption and the violation of human rights, which have affected all our institutions. The most urgent task of the new leadership is to rebuild democratic institutions to act in a more transparent and accountable manner to achieve good governance.

The third challenge is to deal with the revolution’s enemies: counterrevolutionary forces, remnants of the previous regime, external actors fueling unrest to destabilize the country, and a number of irresponsible media outlets. Despite the complexity of the challenges, we are determined not to allow anyone to derail our democratic quest.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE REVOLUTION
Egypt has embarked on a serious effort to rebuild democratic institutions, going through five major electoral exercises since the revolution—two constitutional referendums, two parliamentary elections, and one presidential election.

The three landmark achievements were the election of a civilian president for the first time in Egyptian history; establishment of the most progressive constitution in the country’s constitutional history; and the adoption of that constitution in a free and fair referendum by a two-thirds majority. The completion of this transition will occur with the election of a new Egyptian House of Representatives.

POLITICAL ISLAM
One issue that has emerged in the Arab Spring is the role of “political Islam,” a new dimension that has enriched political life and created new political dynamism. We are committed to ensuring that this new dimension coexists and cooperates constructively with other political actors. Exercising leadership is new for political Islam in Egypt, and that is why we are open to engage all possible stakeholders in this vital political process. Political Islam has been systematically excluded and demonized, and so we will not do that to anybody else.

What values can political Islam bring to humanity? Promoting a new paradigm is not easy, especially in the face of some negative prejudices. The religious component of all civilizations provides a safety net for our shared human values within the broader context of diversity. This means that one specific set of cultural values cannot be imposed, but should interact and engage with other cultures to ensure global harmony.

We propose a new model based on the ideas, beliefs, and values entrenched in our norms and traditions. This model is comprehensive enough to respond to global issues related to development; combating injustice, tyranny, and aggression; giving globalization a human dimension; promoting international civil society and human rights; and combating violence.

By adopting genuine, responsible, and objective attitudes, we can explore new avenues of cooperation together. The great system of values that built and consolidated American democracy can serve as a bridge of understanding and mutual respect. Can we succeed in working together to achieve our mutual interests and prosperity? Definitely.
Egypt today is still in a revolutionary state—the 18 days that toppled Mubarak were simply the beginning. That was a revolt against not just corruption and brutality and the way the Mubarak regime undermined the whole of society and its different institutions; it was also against colossal failure at all levels.

Now there is a potential for democracy in Egypt, but we should keep in mind the lesson of America’s transition to democracy after its revolution, which, as Professor Gordon Wood has explained, was extremely messy for a number of years.

We are facing an ongoing struggle to establish democracy in Egypt. Democracy is not a place that you reach and then celebrate. We have to keep fighting to achieve our dream of a democratic future and for women to enjoy equal rights.

Relations between religion and state are an issue everywhere in the world, and Egyptian democracy is going to have its own coloration in this respect—Egypt is not Pakistan or Turkey. In the United States, there is separation between state and religion, but there is a very close relationship between religion and politics, which does not exist in Europe. Islam’s role in Egyptian democracy will be closer to the American model than the European.

I am not a politician—I am an independent—but I call on my political colleagues to face up to this important responsibility and start a dialogue on relations between religion and state in Egypt so that we can reach a national consensus.

We are currently moving in vicious circles, because we are talking about details such as the election law and Islamic bonds, when the real issue is that the political forces in Egypt do not trust each other on the issue of state and religion. Everybody has to compromise on this—Muslims, Christians, liberals, leftists, and Islamists.

The New Egypt Is the Old Egypt

NAGUIB SAWIRIS: The new Egypt is nothing but the old Egypt. We made a revolution to acquire new freedoms and rights—freedom of speech, human and minority rights, a real democratic process—but I can’t say that we have that today. The media are under pressure, and the opposition is being targeted. It is not safe to be in opposition. I wish I could be optimistic, but I cannot. The only way out of the deadlock is for each party to reach out to the others, sit down, and talk about the way forward. The attempt to rule with your friends alone, and completely ignore other people, is not going to work. The young people of Egypt are still fighting; they are on the streets and will not give up until the revolution has achieved what they really fought for. It was not a religious revolution—all Egyptians believe in God and are religious—it was about freedom and justice. We will not be able to start reaching a consensus until the present government understands that their attempt to grab all the key power points in Egypt’s ruling mechanisms will fail. Egyptians want equality, and the first rule is that you should not put your friends in positions so that you can control everything. You will not see a real democracy until you understand that this is a country for everyone.
Given the many domestic challenges facing Egypt—constitutional, social, political, and economic—our top foreign and regional policy priority must be to improve economic and trade relations in the region and beyond. That means taking Egyptian diplomacy in new directions.

In the region, I am not in principle against reaching out to Iran. But Egypt should focus on economic and trade links when it engages the Gulf region and other countries, and we must evaluate those links based on our own national interests.

A note of caution: I am increasingly worried that Egypt is borrowing far too much from Qatar. I am equally critical of the widespread debate on Iran under way in Egypt. The debate should not be reduced to extremist, doctrinal positions. How can 90 million Egyptians, with such a great history as the center of Sunni Islam, be afraid of a tiny number of Iranian tourists? I feel bad whenever a liberal sides with the radical Salafists against Iranian tourists.

I supported President Morsi in defending the Syrian quest for democracy and human rights. I did not, however, understand how he could reach out to Iran without discussing Syria, as Iran is the prime supporter of the Syrian dictatorship. We must demand conditions on Syria if we are to improve relations with Iran.

The first thing missing here is a clear and well-defined insistence on promoting freedom and human rights, which were at the core of the Egyptian revolution. The second is a clear vision of Egypt’s foreign policy priorities. We don’t have a domestic vision either. And both these failures are our own fault and very much due to the inefficiency of the current government.

Foreign policy issues ought to be conducted on a bipartisan basis, even if we disagree on a wide range of domestic issues. But we do not have bipartisanship because we lack democratic deliberations in Egypt.

Egypt can inspire its neighbors by maintaining political pluralism. People throughout the region are closely watching our debates on religion and politics, equal citizenship rights and the rule of law, and how we handle sectarian tensions and violence.

If we do not backslide, we will definitely offer the region a model, without having to go around saying so. Our influence completely depends on our domestic and internal developments, and if they go in the right direction, which I continue to hope, the region will definitely take us seriously.
The economic challenges are daunting, and we need quick action. Unfortunately the political situation makes it difficult to reach a consensus even on short-term measures. So, a crisis has actually to materialize before a response is forthcoming, and I am afraid this is going to happen.

Egypt has two major deficits—in food and energy. It cannot produce enough food to feed its people, and it does not have enough energy resources. On the other hand, Egypt has a surplus of labor and over the last 20 years has exported workers to the neighboring region, who send money back home. We also have a surplus of history, which has brought in tourists and foreign currency, and we have revenue from the Suez Canal.

Since the 2011 revolution, revenue from tourism has been pretty much zero. So a major drop in foreign revenue has made the deficits in food and energy very difficult to fund.

We need foreign currency for people to eat, drive their cars, and turn on their lights and air conditioners. But our foreign currency reserves are running down quickly. If we do not get more foreign revenue, there will be food and electricity shortages, leading to social chaos.

The easiest quick solution is to get tourism back. If we can attract tourists by stabilizing the security situation, we will solve a lot of the problem. If not, we will need to borrow money until we find a midterm solution—and that will mean dealing with international organizations and with friendly countries in the region.

Two other important things need to be done. Firstly, we must agree on the country’s future business model and where to invest foreign money. Secondly, we need to generate a feeling of stability, confidence in the rule of law and respect for contractual obligations, and reduce political uncertainty. That is how to attract foreign investors.

If we do not get more foreign exchange revenue, there will be food and electricity shortages, leading to social chaos.
**Time for the Young to Take Over**

**MANAR EL-SHORBAGY:** The next struggle in Egypt will be generational. After the toppling of Mubarak, the younger generation that triggered the revolution made the fatal mistake of deferring to the older generation, which went back to politics as usual.

Now the young generation is sick and tired of the political elite—not just with the Muslim Brotherhood, but with the leadership of the other parties as well. This is actually a very positive development because it’s now time for the next generation to start ruling Egypt. The whole political elite has proved to be inept.

**SHERIF KAMEL:** The most important resource Egypt has is its people. They are young, passionate, and determined to change the country. They took the lead in the revolution of January 2011, and there are vast numbers of them. Fifty-eight percent of the population is under 25, with the majority under 18. We have to ensure that in five or six years we start benefiting from the dividends of investing in education and human capital.

**KHALED ISMAIL:** Under the Mubarak regime, young people felt very isolated; they did not care any more. You would see them in coffee shops talking about anything but their country. But all of a sudden they woke up, and I was astonished that the young were the first to go to the streets.

The bright side is that the young people are taking things in their own hands, and this time they are not giving up. They are entrepreneurial, and they have a sense of urgency. That entrepreneurship will continue, regardless of political deadlock, and it is irreversible.

The success or failure of this revolution in Egypt, as well as in the Arab world, will be judged by only one thing down the road—whether we empower the young people. One day we want to see a president, a prime minister, governors, who are 35 or 40 years old. In Egypt’s elite management positions today, 95 percent are men over 60 (not women), who represent 3 percent of the population; men and women below 40 compose 80 percent. Why on earth would 3 percent rule 80 percent? This has to change—the young will not let it continue.

**AMR DARAG:** I actually put some blame on the youth of Egypt. I keep hearing the complaint that young people have never been empowered, and they are not getting their chance. But this is my question: if 80 percent of the population is younger than 40, who is preventing young people from being actively involved in the political scene and tackling this big mess? Who is electing older people?

If so many young people are still electing the older people, there must be something wrong. They must believe either that other young people are not ready and able to take care of politics or that older people are better qualified.

Young people may be full of revolutionary enthusiasm, but at least some of them must move beyond that phase in order to build their own political parties and institutions and formulate their
ideas for reform. Then they can propose a program to their peers, get elected, and pursue the reforms they want. This is actually what will happen, because in 10 years’ time the share of young people in the population will be even higher. Meanwhile, they must take some of the blame.

**We Must Not Depend on Government**  |  SHERIF KAMEL

There is an overwhelming sense that things need to happen now, but we must start with a minimal consensus on where to go. The government alone cannot achieve this. There has to be an equal system that includes government, the public sector, and civil society—and empowers the young. There will never be a solution that pleases everyone, but the well-being of all Egyptians must be the top priority.

The future must not depend on the government. A large share of our population is already working for the government—about 7 million people or a little more. It is time to focus on the private sector. And the mindset of young people is changing. There is a new readiness to take risks, start companies, fail, and learn from mistakes.

It is also important to reconcile with the past and with different elements in the community. We need to work on our problems in parallel. Over the past two years there was a major focus on political issues, and the economic issues were left aside. That has not left us in a good place. Our problems will not be easy to tackle, but I am optimistic, provided we find somewhere to start and work together to build on it.

**Subsidies Belong to the Past**

KHALED ISMAIL: Subsidies belong to the past—to the Soviet Union and other communist countries. They all had an illusion that the state could be in charge of helping people this way, and it has proven wrong in one place after another. It means creating fictitious market prices for a lot of things, and you cannot keep doing that forever. But you also need to find a solution to help the poor. In Egypt, at least 20 million people are below the poverty line. So if you suddenly say, “bread is going up to 50 cents from 10 cents, and the price of gasoline and electricity will rise by 300 percent,” you will have a huge impact on the poor. While you are removing the subsidies, you must at the same time provide alternative solutions to make life possible for them. You need some smart people who can think outside the box to fix these structural problems.
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The New Egypt: Challenges of a Post-Revolutionary Era
April 21–25, 2013

FRIDAY, APRIL 26
SUNDAY, APRIL 21
Arrival in Washington, DC

MONDAY, APRIL 22
Travel to Williamsburg, VA
Lunch with remarks by Colin Campbell and Reginald Dale
Opening address by Gordon Wood

TUESDAY, APRIL 23
Postrevolutionary Eras: Lessons & Challenges

THURSDAY, APRIL 25
Private lunch with introduction by John J. Hamre and address by Naguib Sawiris

FRIDAY, APRIL 26
Departure