



PROJECT on Middle East Democracy

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“Egypt’s Political Future: The Parliamentary Elections and Beyond”

Carnegie Endowment of International Peace

1779 Massachusetts Ave. NW Washington, D.C.

Thursday, November 18, 2010 12:15-1:45

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace held an event on Thursday titled “Egypt’s Political Future: The Parliamentary Elections and Beyond.” The speakers for the event were **Michele Dunne**, senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment and editor of the online journal, the *Arab Reform Bulletin*, and **Amr Hamzawy**, research director and senior associate at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut. The discussion was moderated by **Jennifer Windsor**, the associate dean for Programs and Studies at the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown.

Michele Dunne was the first to speak, using her time to look at how the November 28 elections will be run and how it might affect U.S. policy. She began by posing two questions that would guide the rest of her talk. First, how are the upcoming elections going to be similar or different to the elections of 2005, and second, what should outside observers watch for, particularly as it pertains to U.S. policy towards Egypt?

Dunne said that the 2010 elections are similar to the 2005 elections in the sense that there are many candidates contesting for seats in a parliament that has little power. The players are also the same, with the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), Muslim Brotherhood, Wafd party, and independents (among others) all participating to some degree. There will also be no international elections observers, although there will be domestic observers, a topic Dunne would later explore in some detail. **The major differences, Dunne explained, include the addition of seats to the parliament, 64 more than in 2005 as a result of the addition of female quota seats, the holding of the election on a single day rather than over the course of three days, and the amendments to the Egyptian constitution passed in 2007 that include changes to Article 88.** The changes to Article 88 removed the sole responsibility for monitoring elections from judges, and created the High Elections Commission (HEC). In 2005, there were not enough judges to monitor the whole process and in the upcoming elections, judges will still supervise the counting of ballots. Dunne described the campaign environment as “less permissive” than in 2005, with the Muslim Brotherhood’s slogan “Islam is the Solution” banned from use. As Dunne pointed out, numerous Muslim Brothers have been arrested because of this ban, 130 or so in recent weeks.

She then moved on to what to watch for. In the 10 days between the event and the election, **Dunne suggested watching for the number of candidates ultimately disqualified from participation. The Muslim Brotherhood, who had fielded 145 candidates originally, have seen 20% of their candidates disqualified. These disqualifications have caused tensions, including demonstrations by the Brotherhood.** Another issue on Dunne’s list was the effectiveness of domestic election monitors. In light of the Egyptian governments “steadfast resistance” to international monitoring,

Dunne questioned the amount of support domestic NGO's would see from the government. **These NGO's have trained "well over 10,000" observers, and the outstanding question is whether or not the government will credential the trained observers in time for the election.** In the past, Dunne said, the government would only give credentials to a "small number" of observers. She also suggested that the government needed to "get the word out" to the people that are running the polling stations to cooperate with the monitors, and to do all of it in a timely manner, not on the eve of the elections.

On the day of the election, Dunne warned of possible violence, from both government security forces and "thugs." According to Dunne, the police have cordoned off polling places in the past, either to prevent people from voting out NDP candidates, or to simply stop people from voting at all. The "thugs," as described by Dunne, could work for either candidates or the government, and there may even be violence between rival candidate's supporters. **She called for special attention to be paid to the city of Alexandria, a stronghold of the Muslim Brotherhood that has also seen many of that group arrested in recent weeks.**

Dunne also suggested that the parliamentary elections may affect the way next year's presidential elections are held. The issue of domestic monitors getting full access will be difficult to deflect if the government allows them access to the parliamentary elections. The results of the parliamentary elections will also affect who gets to run for the presidency, as eligibility is partially determined by membership in a party that holds a certain number of seats in the People's Assembly.

As for U.S. policy, Dunne pointed to the recent State Department comments on Egypt, and the stated desire to see free and fair elections, as a guide post. **How members of Egyptian civil society are treated, how get-out-the-vote efforts are dealt with, and how the media are treated will all influence the U.S. reaction.** Dunne did stress that the recent comments from the Egyptian Foreign Ministry about international observers being a violation of Egypt's sovereignty were presented in "particularly harsh tones," signaling that perhaps the government was beginning to feel pressured. **In Dunne's view, it is important to keep pushing for democratic reform regardless of the results of the November 28 elections because "the next president" of Egypt is already "on the scene" and listening.**

Amr Hamzawy highlighted the politics of the election. **Hamzawy described the upcoming political calendar as "difficult for everybody," especially the Egyptian government. With the presidential election closely following the parliamentary elections, the government is under a great deal of pressure to not "come away from both with a bad reputation."** In comparing 2005 to 2010, Hamzawy found that having the presidential election after the parliamentary election (the order was reversed in 2005) had increased the importance of the parliamentary elections. Unlike in 2005, when both the government and the opposition supported participation, there is a "divided scene" this time, especially within the opposition. **Those that argue in favor of a boycott, led by ElBaradei's National Association for Change (NAC) and Ayman Nour's branch of al-Ghad, say that participation has not worked. Their two main points of contention are that the NDP still controls the People's Assembly in spite of efforts by the opposition to have some sway in that chamber, and that Egypt is still fundamentally un-democratic.**

Hamzawy also spoke about the amendments to Article 88 of the constitution. The HEC has "two arms," according to Hamzawy. The general committees, made up of nominated judges, and the sub-

committees, made up of civil servants. The president nominates the judges and the NDP has “penetrated” the civil service, again calling the HEC’s neutrality into question.

Hamzawy then moved on to who is contesting the election. **He said that as of November 18, there were over 5,000 candidates, including 379 women, contesting 508 seats.** Twelve hundred of the candidates are running as members of parties while the rest are running as independents (this number includes Muslim Brotherhood candidates). The parties that are running include Wafd (207 candidates, including 30 or more female candidates), al-Ghad (even with Ayman Nour leading a boycott with the support of some members, the party is fielding 38 candidates), and Taggamu (78 candidates, including over 20 female candidates). These parties are considered liberal and secular, and have not had any of their members banned from running. Hamzawy said that there is an “expectation” in Egypt that these parties will gain seats. **Even parties that chose to run suffered from internal divisions about participation, best illustrated by party votes. One-third of Taggamu’s general secretariat voted against participation and Wafd voted 54 to 46 in favor of participation.**

The Muslim Brotherhood is running fewer candidates this year than in 2005, according to Hamzawy. Presently, there are 104 or 105 candidates standing for election, although the Brotherhood intended to run 135. This number would still have been a decrease from the 150 candidates initially fielded in 2005. **Not unlike some of the secular groups, the Muslim Brotherhood has experienced a lively and contentious internal debate about the efficacy of participation. This has led to the formation of an opposition front inside the organization calling for a boycott of the elections and for the Brotherhood to institute internal reforms.** Hamzawy relayed predictions that the Muslim Brotherhood would win significantly fewer seats in the parliament than the currently hold, with estimates going as low as 15.

The ruling NDP, in a move Hamzawy called “striking,” is not running 508 candidates for the 508 seats in the parliament, but is instead running around 800, all of whom are NDP party candidates, not independents or disqualified NDP members. NDP also has 69 total female candidates, two of whom are running for non-quota seats.

The discussion moved to the Q&A, where the moderator asked in light of the Bush Administration “stepping back” from its democratization program after 2005 and the Obama Administration’s “mixed messages,” what will the American response to NDP claims of “positive change” and what would be the most effective policy to pursue with respect to reform in Egypt.

Dunne responded that the Obama Administration’s message had indeed been “inconsistent,” but also said that with the “looming” presidential succession the Egyptian government had become particularly “stubborn.” The inconsistency has “taught” the Egyptians that they can ignore the U.S. and the pressure will go away, she said. **Dunne called for the U.S. to be “more consistent, persistent, and patient” in pursuing democratic reforms in Egypt.** She reminded the audience that the U.S. is an “outside actor” and cannot “make things happen.” But it is important to pursue the reform issue now before the presidential succession takes place in order to build an understanding with the new leadership.

A questioner from the audience asked whether it was wise to support truly free and fair elections in Egypt no matter the outcome of those elections (the questioner referred to the frequent claim by the Egyptian government that free elections could bring extremists to power, including the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood).

Dunne began her response by asking, **what really fosters extremism and disunity? Are they simply constants, perpetually present in a society, or does an authoritarian government and lack of political opportunity create them?** No one is pushing Egypt towards a “radical change,” Dunne said. She pointed out that the areas of discussion at the event, international observers, letting candidates freely contest elections, and allowing civil society groups more space to operate, were fairly uncontroversial. **She also called the idea of a Muslim Brotherhood take over a “bugaboo,” in large part because the Brotherhood itself has publicly stated that it would not run for the presidency even if it were allowed to.**

Hamzawy called the present political climate worse than in “the 1970’s, the 80’s, or the 90’s,” adding that the Egyptian government is now “semi-authoritarian.” He concluded with four points. First, restrictions on participation have created an “extremely distorted political environment.” Second, the divisions within the parties are a result of the “semi-authoritarian” nature of the government, and the challenges it poses to participation. Third, the Muslim Brotherhood has no desire to take over, a position demonstrated by the slogan, “Participation, Not Domination.” **The fourth and final point was that the actions of the Egyptian government were “not the actions of a group interested in reform”. The legitimacy of the system may be challenged even more strongly if reform is not pursued, Hamzawy warned.**