



PROJECT on Middle East Democracy

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The Protection Project
**“The Egyptian Perspective:
Towards a New Approach to Achieving Peace in the Middle East”**
SAIS, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, April 28, 2009, 12 P.M.

The Protection Project at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) hosted a panel on Egypt’s role in the Middle East peace process. The panelists were Professor **Hossam Badrawi**, a member of the reformist wing of the ruling National Democratic Party and a member of the National Council for Human Rights, Mr. **Mounir Fakhri AbdelNour**, Secretary General of Al Wafd Party and also a member of the National Council for Human Rights, and Dr. **Abdel Monem Said**, Director of Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo. **Mohamed Mattar**, Executive Director of the Protection Project and a professor at Georgetown’s Elliott School of International Affairs, moderated.

Dr. Said described a conflict in the region between those who believed in diplomacy – such as the Egyptian government – and those who desire a return to “existential conflict” between Jews and Muslims – such as Iran and Hezbollah. **While Egypt is in a “confrontation” with Hezbollah and sees Iran as a “threat”, it is working to bring Hamas and Syria “back into the fold.”** Mr. AbdelNour said Egypt would accept the new Israeli administration as a negotiating partner, but was concerned that **the “radical rhetoric” of Avigdor Lieberman and other officials is enflaming Egyptian public opinion.** Badrawi called for regional leaders to practice the kind of courage shown by Sadat in overcoming obstacles to the peace process, and he **condemned Iran for establishing an “infrastructure for violence” in the region**, particularly through its involvement with Hezbollah. He noted that conflicts involving Israel (such as the clashes in recent years with Hezbollah and Hamas) create pressure on the Egyptian government by opening a gap between public opinion and the government’s diplomatic position.

The panelists also discussed Egypt’s domestic politics. Badrawi said that all three members of the delegation shared a “common core” set of principles including “respecting democracy, free expression of opinion, and human rights,” although they “differ on the speed and tools” for implementing those ideals. He described Egypt as a “dynamic society,” citing the work of the National Council for Human Rights and others in the government to bring about reform from within. He said that **“internal stability comes from democracy”** and noted that the council was attempting to replace Egypt’s decades-long emergency rule with new legislation that would “balance security and human rights.” Going against NDP’s official position, he also criticized the government’s record of jailing dissident journalists and bloggers and said the rights council was pressing the security services to end this type of repression. However, he also pointed out that the Egyptian government has stood by its peace agreement with Israel for three decades, even when public opinion was against it, and had managed to bring the public around to supporting peace.

AbdelNour said Al Wafd is a **“liberal, secular opposition party”** which wants to reform the **Egyptian constitution to separate the ruling party and the state, establish greater respect for human rights, and strengthen the rule of law.** Wafd is economically to the left of the NDP and wants to see a move away from the Washington Consensus.

Discussing the April 6 youth movement – which has sought an increase in the minimum wage, presidential term limits, and other economic and political reforms – AbdelNour criticized the movement’s demonstrations this year for lacking specific aims. He also said the demonstrations were illegal because they were not approved by the government, and claimed that most protestors are able to get official approval for their demonstrations. He noted, however, that Wafd had supported the original labor strikes last year in the town of al-Mahalla al-Kubra that sparked the movement. Said remarked that citizen participation in politics is generally desirable, but he **dismissed this year’s April 6 protests as a “virtual strike” organized over the Internet, which “didn’t affect the Egyptian political scene.”**