



PROJECT on Middle East Democracy

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"After Mubarak"

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
1779 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC
Wednesday, February 16, 8:30am-10:00am

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace hosted a panel discussion on Wednesday entitled, "After Mubarak," discussing the difficulties that lay ahead for Egypt in the aftermath of Hosni Mubarak's ouster by protesters and implications for U.S. policy. **Marwan Muasher**, Vice President for Studies at the Carnegie Endowment and former Foreign and deputy Prime Minister of Jordan, moderated the panel. **Marina Ottaway**, Director of the Carnegie Endowment's Middle East Program, and **Michele Dunne**, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment and editor of the *Arab Reform Bulletin*, also spoke on the panel. **Amr Hamzawy**, Research Director and Senior Associate at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, was scheduled to be teleconferenced in live from Cairo, but technical difficulties prevented his participation.

Marina Ottaway began the discussion by stating that although **Hosni Mubarak** and **Zine Ben Ali** had been removed from office, much of their regimes remain intact. In some ways, the remnants of those regimes are fighting back. Ottaway said that the Egyptian military is the same establishment that supported Mubarak for three decades and now has absolute power in the country. The head of the Supreme Military Council running the country, Field Marshall **Mohamed Hussein Tantahwi**, is very much and "old school conservative," she argues, and thus asks how ultimate military control can dismantle the regime. She said that the military has initiated a slow process of making additional concessions to protesters but has set in place a quick timetable for reform and thus there seems to be very little consulting between the military and the protesters. She also argues that the military views constitutional reform as a "technical issue" rather than as a political process or agreement between the rulers and the ruled. The jurist committee tasked by the council to amend the constitution will simply rewrite or strike from record the most offensive amendments, leaving much of the rest of the document standing.

Briefly making comparisons to Tunisia, Ottaway points out that a similar transitional process is underway, but it is taking place under a civilian regime. The civilian regime has made a number of concessions but there have yet to occur any big changes. Individuals have resigned from the ruling RCD party, and the current transitional government is distancing itself from the RCD "one step at a time." In drawing lessons from Tunisia for Egypt, Ottaway said that continued pressure on the military regime is what will keep it from simply replicating the Mubarak regime in another form as there is no current indication over any future election laws such as registration for political parties, etc. She also mentioned that the street protests are actually bad for trying to maintain continued pressure on the military as protests cannot negotiate constitutional changes or political reforms. She also warned that the political opposition is weak and already established parties suffer from internal autocracy. The Muslim Brotherhood is also extremely divided and secular parties are not very strong to begin with.

The protest movement is beginning to witness internal divisions and squabbling between emerging leaders and factions that are common during times of upheaval she said. However, this presents a problem in dealing with a united military command. Furthermore, she cautions against the assumption that Mubarak's party, the NDP, has totally disappeared as a political force. New parties may emerge from within the NDP, with prominent former members of the ruling party at their respective heads, a development which must be watched closely. Ottaway said she doubted the media attention focusing on the demise of ruling parties and stated that their situation was not necessarily "terminal."

Michele Dunne spoke about the "balancing act" that the Egyptian military currently faces. On the one hand, the military must be seen as to be moving quickly enough towards reform and the handing over of power to an elected civilian government, but also has come under fire more "moving too quickly." She noted that the military has made a number of concessions in recent days, including the formation of a constitutional reform committee and the promise of reshuffling the cabinet, although she speculated that current Prime Minister **Ahmed Shafiq** may be kept on in his post. However, the state of emergency law is still in place and the primary task of the reform committee is to amend the constitution, despite increasing calls for a complete revision of the document. There is no indication as to what will happen to the infamous Article 5 which prohibits political parties based on religion. She noted that although there are consultations between the military and the opposition/protesters they are not negotiations. She also stated that there are definitely efforts by the protesters and opposition to try and pull together to present a somewhat united front on core issues. Dunne also spoke about efforts on the part of the NDP to "pull themselves back together in some fashion." She cautioned that a re-emergence of VP **Omar Suleiman** would be a troublesome development.

Dunne went on to discuss the economic situation in Egypt. She said the economy was a major vulnerability, even if the political process went relatively smoothly. Labor strikes and worker protests in Egypt underscore the need to address economic problems. Popular sentiments may demand an increased state role in the economy, particularly in welfare and subsidies; policies that would "sweep away" some of the economic reforms of the last six to seven years. The U.S. and the international community will have to consider if it is willing to give or increase economic aid to Egypt if the government will use it for subsidy and welfare programs to which donors are opposed, she cautioned. Dunne also noted the change in U.S. rhetoric on Egypt and said that President Barack Obama is determined to "ride the wave." She reminded the audience that the U.S. is reacting to events on the ground under very confusing conditions.

In a response to a variety of questions, Ottaway stated that she believed that the U.S. has and will continue to prefer "reform from the top" over regime change in the region. She also remarked that the U.S. will not be a major player in dictating internal processes in Egypt, Tunisia, or elsewhere in the Middle East. Commenting on the Muslim Brotherhood, Ottaway said that there is no way to avoid the organization becoming a party or have a democratic system without their participation noting that Islamist political participation in Arab countries is not unprecedented. She warned that premature elections can be dangerous and that she would prefer to see a "two-stage" reform process but understood that a overly lengthy military transition was not feasible. She stated that she thought Egypt would need more than six months to prepare for elections.

Dunne spoke about the need for the U.S. to rethink its aid package to Egypt with a more robust focus on economic assistance, even if that means having to come to terms with Egyptian economic decisions that the U.S. is uncomfortable with. She warned that Egyptians might have unrealistic expectations about immediate economic improvement in the post-Mubarak era, particularly on the benefits of frozen

assets of Mubarak family members possibly being returned to Egypt. Even fixing the endemic corruption in the government would yield little for most of the country's 85 million people.