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**"Post-Revolutionary Egypt: New Trends in Islam"
The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
1779 Massachusetts Avenue, NW Washington, D.C. 20036
Thursday, October 6, 2011, 12:00 pm to 1:30 pm**

On Thursday, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace hosted an event titled Post-Revolutionary Egypt: New Trends in Islam. The panel was moderated by **Marina Ottaway**, a senior associate of the Carnegie Middle East Program, and featured **Jonathan Brown**, an assistant professor at Georgetown University, **Nathan Brown**, a professor at George Washington University, and **Khaled Elgindy**, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. The panelists focused their discussion mostly around Islamist trends in Egypt, notably that of Sufis and Salafis, and what implications this has for the political future of the country.

Marina Ottaway introduced the discussion by remarking that while there are very significant political changes happening in Egypt right now, it is also necessary to look at the “small revolutions” happening within society. That is, changes that are taking place in the private sector, media and religious establishment.

Nathan Brown opened the panel by comparing changes in Egypt at the macro and micro level. While noting that a lot of prominent change is happening at the macro political levels in Egypt, such as major rules and laws being rewritten, he emphasized that he is convinced the smaller institutions and civil society of Egypt will have a large influence over Egypt's future. However, when he goes to Egypt he sees that institutions are in great turmoil, both over the control of the institutions and the role these institutions will have in greater Egyptian society. N. Brown asserted that following the fall of Mubarak, much of the tight control from his regime was removed from the institutions, and so they suddenly had to figure out their own direction and leadership. This, he continued, is particularly true with Al-Azhar University, the center of Islamic studies in Egypt. It is currently experiencing a series of contests among its leadership and Egyptian society over what its role should be. While Al-Azhar has been historically under tight state control, N. Brown indicated that much of Egyptian society, as well as figures within the Al-Azhar community, believe the university should become much more independent. However, the debate centers around what that new independence will look like. On the one side, there is the Sheikh of Al-Azhar who, along with a group of intellectuals, released the Al-Azhar Document. This document advocates for an independent Al-Azhar which would ensure there was a voice for liberal Islam to counter the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis. Concurrently, there is a large Islamist contingent within Egypt that are much more ambitious about Al-Azhar's role, saying that it should have unilateral control over all Islamic issues within the state. N. Brown concluded by mentioning that if a parliament sits next year according to plan, it will be hit with a large number of institutions demanding autonomy, and at the head of this will be Al-Azhar. The future of Al-Azhar will define and influence Islam within Egypt: how it is taught, practiced and perceived.

Jonathan Brown then moved the discussion to Sufism and Salafism within Egypt. He started with a description of Sufism as a very hierarchical community of Muslim holy men that function as “social guides” in Egyptian society. While Sufis were one of the first groups following the January

Revolution to call for the formation of a political party, their political aspirations were short-lived as they were more focused on developing their religious society through Al-Azhar and other venues. The Salafis, on the other hand, have become much more politically active. J. Brown likened the Salafi movement against Sufism to Martin Luther's Protestant movement against Catholicism. Salafis are opposed to the Sufis in almost every way, including their hierarchy, miracles and saints. Additionally, Salafis see themselves as a return to the “roots” of Islam, from which Sufis have strayed. While historically Salafis have not been politically active in Egypt, following the protests in January, they have become incredibly political. However, Salafis are met with much skepticism and derision in Egyptian media. Despite this, J. Brown argued that many Salafis are relatively moderate and advocate for a “civil Islamic state” that derives many of its laws from Islam, but allows for freedom of religion. He concluded by presenting the “big question” that remains in politics in Egypt: who will get more votes among Islamists, the Muslim Brotherhood or Salafis?

The last speaker, Khaled Elgindy, broadened the topic of discussion by focusing on wider trends of Egypt. He posited that one of the greatest outcomes of the Arab Spring in Egypt is that previously held assumptions have been overturned, and listed two main ones. First, the belief that dictators were the “keepers of stability” has been disproven. Second, a number of previously held dichotomies are being challenged, namely that of secularists and Islamists. Both of these groups have been allowed to show their real diversity following the ouster of Mubarak, but many observers are still focusing on the Muslim Brotherhood without taking into account the other important actors in the region. Elgindy continued by noting that in a society which is historically top heavy -with much executive regulation from the Mubarak regime- the lid has been removed and released a “chaotic” proliferation of parties and trends, which is not necessarily constructive. However, he emphasized that the Muslim Brotherhood, being the oldest and most experienced party, is still the strongest voice in politics. Because of the Islamists' unity, Elgindy characterized the political landscape as being Islamists verse seculars, with the latter being scared of the former. He described the division between the two groups as becoming more polarized and cited protests which either had full Islamist support or had none. He wrapped up his speech by bringing the topic back to Al-Azhar, saying that the future of the institution will have huge implications on the future of Egyptian society as a whole, especially with regards to the Islamists.

The floor was then opened to questions, which revolved around women in Islam, the future for Al-Azhar, and the dichotomy of Islamism/secularism. The panelists all agreed that Islamists are wary of allowing women into the political arena, although according to N. Brown the Muslim Brotherhood said while they would never field a woman candidate, they would accept one if she was elected legitimately. With regards to Al-Azhar, N. Brown reiterated that there is a discord within the Islamic community, but the Sheikh of Al-Azhar has been steadfast that he “does not want to turn into the Vatican.” When asked to elaborate on the Islamic/secular divide, Elgindy downplayed the importance of the dichotomy but emphasized that one cannot divorce Islam and the state. He expressed his pessimism about the prospects of Egypt turning into a liberal democracy and that this will have serious implications for the seculars in Egypt.