# Beyond Borders: An Egyptian-American Dialogue
## May 2 & 3, 2008
## Cairo, Egypt

# Conference Report

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On May 2-3, 2008, 48 young Egyptians and Americans assembled to discuss a range of critical issues impacting the U.S.-Egypt relationship. During the two-day conference participants listened and questioned twelve expert guest speakers who participated in four panel discussions. Between the four panels participants met in small groups to discuss their opinions and impressions of the topics raised by the panelists while working together to draft 48 policy recommendations, 22 of which were ratified by the participants.

The conference provided participants with a space to discuss the changing role of media in Egypt, culture and art as an alternative pathway for cross-cultural understanding, Egypt's role in the region, and the impact of U.S. aid on parties and organizations working for democratic change in Egypt. Drawing on the ideas and criticisms raised by panelists and consolidating the suggested recommendations coming out of small group sessions, the participants gathered at the end of the second day to discuss, amend, and ultimately ratify or veto the suggested policy recommendations. The ratified recommendations represent both the culmination of a democratic process and an agreement between the participants for the best way forward in the Egypt-U.S. relationship.

The conference was sponsored by the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), Americans for Informed Democracy (AID), The American University in Cairo's American Studies Center, and the Annual Conference for Engineering Students (ACES) from Ain Shams University. It was planned and administered by an Egyptian-American Planning Committee composed of two Americans studying at the American University in Cairo and one Egyptian studying at Ain Shams University. This conference is one of a series of three conferences in the Middle East and was funded through the U.S. Department of State, Bureau for Near Eastern Affairs, Office of Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI).

**PARTICIPANTS**

Of the 48 conference participants, 27 were Egyptian and 21 were American. All were under the age of 35.

American participants included Fulbright scholars conducting research in Cairo; students from the London School of Economics, the University of Texas, Wheaton College, the University of Washington, the University of Puget Sound, American University in Cairo, and the University of South Carolina; and young professionals working with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Kabul and non-governmental organizations in Cairo and Ramallah. Americans traveled, largely at their own expense, from the U.S., Europe, and Jordan to attend the conference in Cairo. The American participants included 12 women and 9 men.

Egyptian participants included current students at Cairo University, Ain Shams University, Al Azhar University, University of Alexandria, Kuwait University, and Menoufiya University; recent graduates from Cairo University and Assiut University; young professionals at the Ministry of Justice, the League of Arab States, *Al Ahram Al Arabi* magazine, Al JazeeraTalk.net, Sawasya Center for Human Rights, Islam Online, and the American Islamic Congress. The Egyptian participants included 12 women and 15 men.

**OPENING REMARKS**

The conference began with a brief welcome by Planning Committee member Jamie Arnett, and an introduction to the work of Americans for Informed Democracy by Planning Committee member Emma Deputy. POMED's Deputy Director of Dialogue, Mohammed Loraoui, introduced the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED).

Jerry Leach, Director of the American University in Cairo's American Studies Center, followed the welcome with an address situating the conference's dialogue activities within the framework of international diplomacy, and he laid out the ways in which Track 3, or people-to-people diplomacy, makes a difference in the realm of international relations. Leach began with an overview of the three forms of diplomacy: Track 1 (negotiations between governments), Track 2 (talks between individuals, though not formally representing a given government, that aim to restart governmental dialogue), and Track 3 (people-to-people diplomacy which is open to anyone and aims to build bridges where hostility exists but rarely attempts to affect negotiations or decisions at the governmental level). While affirming that people-to-people diplomacy is not a "failed process," Leach played devil's advocate, asserting that many officials at high levels of

government dismiss this type of diplomacy as mere entertainment, citing the absence of any solid evidence pointing to success. Individuals who relegate Track 3 diplomacy to the margins of diplomacy are, in Dr. Leach's estimation, "power thinkers" and a prime example of this type of thinking is found among the so-called neo-conservatives in the current Bush administration.

Despite this skepticism at some of the highest levels of government, support for people-to-people diplomacy is widespread both geographically and socially. Leach attributes this intuitive support to an often under-reported feature of international relations: people around the world dislike, even despise, a given government's policies but will still espouse affinity and support for the people living under that government. After making specific reference to the case of Egypt and the U.S., Leach continued by stating that this is not unique. In fact it is repeated time after time in India, China, Iran, Jordan, and other countries. Leach marked this phenomenon as the key to understanding continued and widespread support for people-to-people diplomacy. This form of diplomacy includes travel, educational exchanges, and other interactions that serve to disturb mutual stereotypes and humanize the other side. The most important element of Track 3 diplomacy rests in its role as the primary means for building cross-cultural empathy. He credits rising empathy in the 20th century, at least in part, with the move to protect civilians in war zones, the significant reduction in cross-border warfare, and the increasing difficulty of demonizing other peoples. In closing his remarks, Leach described empathy as the critical counterweight to the pessimism and fear so common in international relations and credited it for the difficulty some in the U.S. government currently face in their efforts to dehumanize Iranians in preparation for a military assault on that nation.

**PANEL ONE: AL JAZEERA VS. YOUTUBE: CHANGES IN MASS MEDIA**

The first panel discussion, "Al Jazeera vs. YouTube," featured:
- Ethar El-Katatney, Reporter for Egypt Today and Blogger
- Heba Saleh, Correspondent, BBC-Cairo
- Lucas Welch, President, Soliya

Panelists were asked to address the following four questions in their presentations:

1. What is the form of journalism that you work with and its role in the future of social engagement?
2. What are the cultural implications of independent media?
3. What are the social and political implications for independent media in Egypt?
4. What are the implications of Middle Eastern media being accessible in America and, conversely, what are the implications of American media being accessible in the Middle East; and how does this relate to such programs as Al-Hurra radio and Al-Jazeera English?

Ethar El-Katatney started with an explanation of her role as a writer at the print media publication *Egypt Today*, emphasizing that print media is written for and attracts a

particular audience. In an era of rapid information consumption print media is losing some readership, though she does not believe print media is on the brink of death. In assessing the challenges journalists face in Egypt, she emphasized that censorship exists in Egypt, which was put on Reporters Without Borders' blacklist. The government controls the situation by opening and closing the tap for free press, actions that affect even online journalists who have been the target of crackdowns and government arrests. Despite this interference, the internet and blogging as a platform for media tends to offer Egyptians far more freedom for expressing ideas than traditional media.

El-Katatney emphasized that independent media, particularly blogging and Facebook, allow non-governmental actors an outlet for political aspirations. This mobilization opportunity is particularly important given that 60% of Egyptians are under 25 and the level of political apathy is high among this group. As an example El-Katatney referred to the fact that protests and the April 6th general strike were organized on Facebook. In El-Katatney's estimation this is a critical change from only a few years ago, when protests were called for by the Muslim Brotherhood or Kefaya, whereas now the primary impetus for protests comes from activists on Facebook, leaving these movements to merely decide if they will participate or not.

Heba Saleh described her role as a correspondent for BBC as a traditional role in journalism. She noted that the BBC and other print and broadcast media institutions face competition from new media and, at the same time, mediate between old and new media by experimenting with new mediums like the internet and blogging technology. Saleh asserted that the presence of Western media in Egypt and the availability of Al Jazeera English in the U.S. have the potential to build empathy across cultures and eliminate the concept of the "other."

The changes in electronic media and the use of Facebook for organizing protests are still in its beginning. As a result, Saleh argued it is difficult to look to the future and see where it will lead. She hesitated to use the term "mobilize" with regard to Facebook's impact among Egyptian youth, preferring the expression "arousing the interest" of young people. However, Saleh took care to emphasize that Facebook and other online media sources pose a real challenge to governments and longstanding authorities. These institutions will try to control it but, she said, they will not necessarily be effective.

Lucas Welch started by describing the evolution in how people get information. In the broadcast era, the flow of information was mediated by large institutions like ABC or the BBC. In the information age, individuals are able to choose from a variety of news

sources. This is important in Welch's view because change in communication foments change in the alignment of power. In this regard Welch referenced the ability of the American civil rights movement to connect their struggle with a wider American audience by way of television. In the current environment with the changes in how people share information, small groups and individuals can wield an unprecedented amount of power. This power may be negative, as in the case of one cartoonist in the Danish cartoons controversy, or positive, as in the case of people-powered movements capable of impacting governments because the nature of power as we know it is changing.

From exchange and exposure to Egyptian media sources, Welch sees an opportunity to build empathy and for people to access others directly without the intervention of governments or large media institutions. With this change, Welch observes an expansion in the identity of groups. Welch cautioned that there is a push back from those who fear that an influx of ideas threatens their specific group identity. At the same time, this expansion of ideas creates a common ground between people. In terms of shared media, Welch points to the asymmetry whereby people in the Middle East are generally more aware of public discourse in the West than people in the West are aware of events in the Middle East. He also pointed out that Egyptians are far more sophisticated consumers of media than Americans due to the history of government control of media in Egypt. Welch warned of the false sense of security Americans have because they believe that as a free society, America enjoys the gift of abundant, independent media establishments. He argues that this hides the narrow range of perspectives available in traditional media, making the issue of access and asymmetry incredibly relevant and the role of dialogue and interpersonal relationships all the more important.

## PANEL TWO: DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS: COMMUNICATING THROUGH ART

The second panel discussion, Dialogue of Civilizations: Communicating Through Art, featured:

- Amal El-Hadary, Professor of English, Ain Shams University
- Osama Madany, Professor of English Literature, Menoufiya University
- William Wells, Director, Townhouse Gallery

Panelists were asked to address the four following questions in their presentations:

1) How do literature, music, and poetry present a different avenue for cultural expression?
2) What is the role of self-expression not only in one's own culture but in its ability to impact global culture?
3) How does literature and art preserve culture and foster cultural understanding and how can one understand foreign culture though these different mediums?
4) What could politics learn from art and what is the role of art in understanding other cultures' political views and political needs?

William Wells prefaced his presentation with an introduction to the work of the Townhouse Gallery which, in his words, primarily works with young emerging artists producing socially engaged art that raises questions. To address the issue of the role of art and music as a means of cross-cultural expression, Wells drew on the emergence of a hip-hop culture among refugee communities in Cairo, especially Sudanese, Eritrean, and Palestinian communities. Rap and hip-hop come out of a uniquely American experience and operate in English, but have found a large following among young people who use hip-hop as a means of creative expression to separate themselves from a society to which they feel they do not belong. Wells explained that a common trend in the Sudanese and Eritrean hip-hop community is to use English rather than Arabic as a symbol of their separation from Egyptian culture, a separation that is brought on by the stigma of refugee status and the inaccessibility of education, health services, and employment. Wells emphasized that music provides an excellent avenue for a marginalized group to assert its own voice and needs while, at the same time, allowing it to integrate with the very society from which it feels excluded because the audience for these hip-hop performances is largely Egyptian.

The Townhouse Gallery offers a unique opportunity for dialogue among people (even from the same culture) who would otherwise never interact on a personal level because of differences in class or ethnicity. A key principle of the Townhouse Gallery is that every person has the right to create and express themselves. Wells closed his presentation with the observation that an organic institution tied to the community in which it operates is able to break down these barriers within and between cultures.

Amal El-Hadary presented a personal story related to a well-known and often translated book by Greek author Rhea Galanaki on the life of a Greek slave, Ismail Ferik Pasha, who rose to the peak of power in Mohamed Ali's government. Galanaki's book not only crossed political boundaries after being translated into Turkish, despite its description of Turkish atrocities, but shocked the family of Ismail Ferik Pasha, to which El-Hadary belongs, by telling the story of his Greek origins and his enslavement by Turkish powers.

Using this story as a springboard, El-Hadary emphasized the core of the story which deals with the idea of man's determination to rise from slavery and lead a successful life. The story line taps into universal human culture. This type of original literature, when delivered through creative translation or interpretation, serves to unify culture. It is this kind of communication that fosters the notion of universal human culture while at the same time promoting, protecting, and preserving linguistic and cultural diversity.

Osama Madany delivered a presentation on the unique capacity of literature to provide a path to cultural reconciliation. After assessing the current state of U.S.-Egyptian relations, Madany ventured that literature must step in where politics has failed. It is only through the domains of art and literature that we can truly reach and understand one another. Literature helps to explode stereotypes and promote appreciation for different belief and value systems while promoting the uniqueness of each culture. Madany asserted that the primacy of literature and culture in reconciliation makes the declarations of Samuel Huntington regarding the cultural nature of conflict today all the more disturbing.

As evidence of the conciliatory role of literature and poetry in cultural conflict, Madany touched on a number of literary works from Scotland, America, and the Arab World. One example came from the work of Dianna Abu-Jaber, an Arab-American author exploring the alienation felt by an Arab-American woman during her repeated clashes with racism in mainstream America. Madany detailed the way literature, and Abu-Jaber in particular, raise the difficult issues of racism and hostility without leaving the reader to drown in such emotions. Instead, Abu-Jaber's story seeks a sense of reconciliation. In so doing, it offers the reader the possibility of dual identity and the possibility of belonging.

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS: THE NEW ENEMY OF THE STATE**
Ahmed Samih, Director of the Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies, opened the address with two video clips illustrating the difference between Western (primarily British and American) views and Egyptian views on Facebook. In the first clip, a group of young boys sing a silly song highlighting the many features of Facebook from loading pictures to "poking." The second clip, taken by an Egyptian blogger, shows a group of young men in the Egyptian industrial city of Mahalla protesting during the April 6th strikes. The clip closes with them throwing a picture of President Hosni Mubarak to the ground and destroying it with their feet. Facebook in the U.S. is far from dangerous, but in Egypt both the government and young people see Facebook as a potential threat to existing power, as the April 6th general strike (with its strong connection to the Facebook network) attests.

Samih then outlined the political history of Egypt, touching on the popular struggle against British occupation, the unrest and violence marking the period immediately prior to the 1952 Officers Revolution, the subsequent abolishment of political parties under Nasser, followed by the student movements of the '60s and '70s which called for democracy and economic and social justice. These movements faced strong and often violent opposition from the government then under President Anwar Sadat. After Sadat's assassination in 1981, Hosni Mubarak took over as president and has kept that position until today.

The political regime, according to Samih, relies on and receives uncritical support from religious institutions, the armed forces, the police force, and the cloak of a democratic parliament. In contrast, the Bush administration is emblematic of those forces that at times support the regime and at times oppose it by issuing critiques of the regime's inability to implement reform. Forces strongly opposing the regime include the

independent press, judiciary, unions, and of course political opposition movements. Samih provided an overview of the political movements in Egypt starting with the Muslim Brotherhood, one of the largest and most popular opposition groups, liberal organizations (most important among them the Wafd party), and finally the socialist and communist parties, the most popular of which is the Tagammu' party. Alongside these opposition parties is the National Democratic Party (NDP), the ruling party which controls both houses of Parliament and all the local councils. In addition to these parties and movements is Kefaya, a movement which is a collection of activists from a variety of political currents who agreed on a very simple platform: opposition to the extension of Mubarak's presidential term and the succession of his son, Gamal Mubarak.

Among opposition groups – Kefaya, Muslim Brotherhood, Wafd, and Tagammu' – Samih identified a shared agenda: Opposition to military tribunals, torture, random searches and other violations of civil liberties allowed under the Emergency Law, limits on the press and political parties, constitutional amendments restricting political rights, a hand-chosen successor to the presidency, and other barriers to free elections. When looking at Facebook, Samih points out that the largest group within the Egypt network is the group created for the April 6$^{th}$ strike, which actually increased after the strike, currently including 74,000 members. Samih described the Egyptian political situation in terms of supply and demand—there is a demand for political change especially among youth that current political movements, including the Muslim Brothers and the NDP, are not meeting. This new movement demands changes to the minimum wage, immediate steps to address inflation of food costs, and an end to corporate monopolies, as well as the release of activists arrested on April 6$^{th}$.

This is a new voice, according to Samih, and no one knows how to respond. Though largely focused on prices, Samih argued that the group's ultimate goal is simple: change. This group, which includes young people with education, English skills, and access to the internet from the wealthiest of the lower class, the entire middle class, and certain segments of the wealthiest classes, does not have a specific agenda and is not even aware of the aforementioned agenda agreed upon by most opposition groups. The real danger posed by this "new enemy of the state" comes from the ease of communication between like-minded young people. The group uses technology arising from the very policies the government pushed for to make Egypt an economic force—reducing the cost of the internet and making it accessible for all Egyptian families. Samih likens the current generational gap in Egypt to the gap between the French student movement of 1968 and the French leadership that had returned to power after WWII. The new generation of Egyptians wants an opening in the system and has turned to the internet as a forum for discussion and tool for organization. Samih closed by saying that, given the nature of this movement, it is impossible to predict what its future will be.

**PANEL THREE: EGYPT'S ROLE IN THE ARAB WORLD**
The third panel discussion, Egypt's Role in the Arab World, featured:
- Michael Bracy, Professor of Middle Eastern Studies, Oklahoma State University
- Gamal Soltan, Professor of Political Science, American University in Cairo

Michael Bracy provided the conference with an overview of Egypt's historic role in the Arab World, focusing on the traditional arena of foreign policy as well as the economic and cultural levels of interaction. Traditional U.S. scholarship casts Egypt as isolated in the Arab World after the 1979 completion of the Camp David Accords and subsequent trade embargo and expulsion of Egypt from the League of Arab States. In Bracy's analysis these steps were largely symbolic, as the embargo (primarily on the part of the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)) collapsed only a few years after its announcement. Both the import-export traffic and remittances from Egyptians working in the GCC states increased to record levels during this period of isolation and have continued to rise through the 1990s and 2000s. This state of affairs leads Bracy to conclude that Camp David did not isolate Egypt from other Arab states; rather, it integrated Egypt with the region, although unevenly across different sectors.

Moving to the political arena, Bracy argued that the rise of George W. Bush and the accompanying decline of U.S. popularity and maneuverability in the region have allowed Egypt to take on a more aggressive role, opposing U.S. calls to open an embassy in Baghdad and resisting U.S. caution regarding talks between Hamas and Israel. Despite serious internal issues, Bracy argues that Egypt finds itself in a unique position to provide regional leadership in political and economic affairs.

Gamal Soltan began by emphasizing Egypt's centrality in the Arab World despite the country's widespread poverty, political authoritarianism, and appearance of stagnation, especially in comparison to spots like Dubai that seem to be blooming. There are many reasons for Egypt's centrality or potential centrality:

- Population: Egypt is too huge to ignore. The sheer number of Egyptians plays a role in the configuration of power and influence.
- Political Identity: Egypt enjoys a national identity far more developed than other Arab states. States with a strong sense of national and political identity are better able to exert control over developments in the region.
- Geostrategic location: Egypt's geographic centrality in the region makes the previous two elements operational by virtue of Egypt's location. Egypt's position as a front-line state in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict puts it in the middle of a key political dynamic in the region.
- Modernity: Egypt's role as a pioneer in modernizing numerous sectors: agriculture, military, and more broadly economic and political systems. Egypt has set the standard for negotiating between the demands of the global economy and maintaining tradition and authenticity for the rest of the Arab World.

This role for Egypt has been marked by a conflict between two dimensions of Egyptian foreign policy: Egypt as a role model or central state in the region, and the state's limited

resources in that Egypt is limited by prevailing political concerns from engaging in regional conflicts especially via traditional military means.

Soltan then outlined the different roles Egypt has played in the region: the proponent of liberal nationalism from 1919 to 1952, the leader of a revolutionary movement that challenged the dominance of the upper class and the hegemonic role of major powers, and then its quietist role as a protector of the status quo after 1967. The role Egypt has failed to fill, in Soltan's opinion, is that of a political, social, or cultural reformer. Egypt must play a critical role in reconciling national identity with the forces of globalization.

## PANEL FOUR: U.S. FOREIGN AID TO EGYPT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS
The fourth panel discussion, U.S. Foreign Aid to Egypt and Its Implications, featured:

- John Groarke, Deputy Mission Director of USAID in Egypt
- Dina Shehata, Researcher, Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies
- Ashraf Swelam, Executive Director, Egypt's International Economic Forum

John Groarke opened with an overview of USAID operations and the process by which aid levels are determined and programmatic funds allocated. USAID consults with the government of Egypt to decide how and where money should be spent. Over the past 30 years USAID funds have gone to a number of areas. The largest include health, education, democracy and governance, economic reform, agriculture, and antiquities. In addition to the government-to-government consultation, USAID conducts extensive talks with stakeholders in various projects including municipalities, community leaders, employees, and beneficiaries of a given institution. Groarke explained that following the 1979 Camp David Accords the U.S. committed to provide both economic and military assistance totaling $1.3 billion for military aid and $815 million for economic aid per year. This level continued until 1999 when the U.S. and Egypt agreed to reduce economic aid by $40 million per year over 10 years. The amount of aid in 2008 is at $415 million per year. This year the U.S. has requested that Congress allocate $200 million per year over the next five years. Despite the steady decline in U.S. economic assistance, Groarke assured conference participants that USAID expects to continue operating in Egypt for the foreseeable future. Over the past 32 years, Egypt has received $28 billion in economic assistance. Despite the drop in present aid levels, Egypt remains the top recipient of U.S. economic assistance.

Groarke pointed to the significant changes Egypt has experienced over this period, from improved access to electricity and clean drinking water to advancements in health. As a result USAID's focus has shifted from large-scale infrastructure projects to providing services and support for a favorable environment for economic activity, strengthening the tools available to government and citizens to develop democratic institutions, and pushing for education reform. In the long run USAID is confident trade and economic growth will play a larger role than U.S. economic aid in Egypt's development.

Groarke commented that USAID's current role is to ensure that Egyptians are able to capture the benefits of economic growth. From his perspective, this can be accomplished

by building institutions that are accountable to the needs and wishes of the people. In the Democracy and Governance sector of USAID, half of the projects are designed and implemented jointly with the Government of Egypt targeting judicial modernization, decentralization, human rights, and media reform. USAID also provides direct grants to Egyptian and American civil society organizations that operate within the Egyptian legal system. Refuting claims of U.S. interference, Groarke asserted that USAID provides economic support to Egyptian initiatives for democracy.

Dina Shehata focused on how opposition parties view U.S. democracy promotion strategies. Until 2003 only a fraction of USAID funds went to democracy and governance. The change is related to the shift in the Bush administration's priorities after 9/11 and the linkage made at that time between authoritarian regimes and economic and social underdevelopment and extremism. Shehata distinguished between the grand strategies, like the Broader Middle East Initiative and the Middle East Partnership Initiative, and discrete programs that USAID and affiliated contractors carry out in Egypt. Shehata separates them because of the difference in how opposition groups respond to these two approaches to democracy promotion. The response to the broad initiatives has been multilayered. Shehata described a blanket rejection of grand strategies by opposition groups at the rhetorical level, with accusations of meddling with Egypt's Arab and Islamic identity and linking it to the New Middle East Initiative proposed by Shimon Peres in the 1990s. Criticisms came from leftists, Nasserists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and liberals of many kinds. At the same time, U.S. reform initiatives prompted opposition leaders to issue their own reform initiatives. In practice, opposition movements saw this as an opportunity to push for initiatives they had had for decades. Formal political parties have been less receptive due to their fears that reform would embolden the Muslim Brotherhood.

Shehata explained that reactions to specific programs administered by USAID or its contractors can be divorced from the larger strategic initiatives and, consequently, are far more palatable to opposition and civil society organizations. This acceptance is not complete. Though Shehata conceded that USAID funding for democracy initiatives may increase the capacity of the non-governmental sector, she emphasized that the benefits have been unequal due to some organizations' refusal to take U.S. money, the common use (by the Egyptian government) of external funding to discredit an organization's activities or legal status, and the refusal of the U.S. and Egyptian governments to engage other key organizations. Since 2006 Shehata has seen a noticeable change in US policy. The focus has returned to stability and security, turning away from reform. Shehata closed by calling for a greater alignment between U.S. policy and USAID programs.

Ashraf Swelam laid out the political context in which U.S. assistance is given to Egypt. Aid began in 1975 with a mixture of loans and grants but it was not until 1979 that there

was a major breakthrough in the aid relationship. The U.S. agreed to supply aid to Israel and Egypt on a 3:2 ratio to secure each country's commitment to the Camp David Accords. U.S. interests in the region rested on stability, Israel's security, and the flow of cheap oil from the Middle East.  By Cold War calculations having Egypt in the U.S. camp was well worth any money spent to that end. From this period to the mid-1990s the possibility of cutting U.S. aid to Egypt seemed unthinkable.  The change came about with the election of Benjamin Netanyhu in 1996 and his call to reduce U.S. economic aid and increase U.S. military aid to Israel. Netanyahu's plan put pressure on Egypt to respond. The result was the 1998 understanding to gradually and steadily cut economic assistance to Egypt.

After 2001, Swelam explained, the U.S. perception of national security shifted focus, its relationships with allies in the region changed, and the freedom agenda rose to importance. The attempts to cut U.S. aid to Egypt continued, reflecting a perfect storm of coordination between allies of Israel, advocates of democratization, and others upset about internal issues in Egypt. In 2003 Egypt witnessed the imposition of strict conditionality related to political conditions and benchmarks. The current state of assistance and the move to cut economic assistance to Egypt is wrong, in Swelam's opinion. The problem is that during an election year the U.S. is unwilling to consider switching from economic aid to trade. Without this alternative, all effort is focused on simply cutting aid.  In Swelam's estimation, the actual figure for aid is not important; the critical factor is the consultation that takes place between the two governments. Consultation provides a space for putting forward reform initiatives and gathering the political will to continue with such reform efforts.

## OPEN FLOOR DISCUSSION ON MUTUAL MISCONCEPTIONS: ARAB AND AMERICAN STEREOTYPES OF EACH OTHER

During a dinner session at Le Pacha Restaurant, Jerry Leach led an open and frank discussion on stereotypes held by Americans about Egyptians and vice versa. Leach opened the conversation with a short explanation of his work on collecting misunderstandings and stereotypes from students, colleagues, acquaintances, and relatives from the U.S. and Egypt. Leach started each discussion with a provocative comment including bribes and money in Arab and Egyptian society, morals in the U.S., and women's role in Egyptian families. His statements were followed by comments from participants in a session that lasted well over an hour, giving participants an opportunity to address stereotypes in a collegial and friendly environment.

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS



After the day's panel discussions, the participants left the formality of the Rare Books Library to meet in the Library's courtyard to discuss the ideas and policies presented by panelists. Participants separated into five small groups with 6-8 participants each. The groups were chosen to reflect the diversity of the conference as

a whole and to overcome language barriers without the help of official conference translators. Each group had co-leaders (one Egyptian and one American) selected based on their previous experience with dialogue and conference activities. While going over the ideas broached in the panels, participants began the process of composing policy recommendations.

On the morning of the second day, participants voted to stay in their groups from the first day to build on the relationships they had already established with their colleagues and to ensure they finished with the recommendations on the media and cultural dialogue topics from the first day. The groups worked diligently through lunch on the second day articulating their thoughts on the last two panels and finishing up with the policy recommendations. All groups were asked to hand in their proposed policy recommendations by 2pm and reconvene for a general session to read out, edit, and vote on the 48 proposed policy recommendations.

After an initial reading of all recommendations, which were displayed in English and simultaneously translated verbally into Arabic, the participants voted to amend the policy recommendation process. The participants approved a system whereby an initial round of voting was held to determine whether a given recommendation would be open for amendment. Those proposals open to amendment were edited by conference participants and the amendments were then approved or rejected by a majority. This session was followed by a second round of voting with a yes or no ballot vote for the full list of 48 recommendations. The participants ultimately approved 22 policy recommendations on topics ranging from supporting cultural exchange to opening negotiations with Hamas and Iran.

**CONFERENCE AMBASSADORS**
At the beginning of the conference all participants were informed of a unique opportunity available upon the conference's completion. Two participants (one Egyptian and one American) would be elected by her or his peers to represent the conference's policy recommendations during an advocacy visit to Washington DC in July 2008.

Conference participants elected their Ambassadors through two rounds of voting. The first round of voting in which all eligible participants were listed on the ballot took place at the end of the first day after participants had a chance to interact with their colleagues. The second round of voting had the names of the four top Egyptians and four top Americans from the previous round on the ballot. This final vote was held at the end of

the conference after the policy recommendation process had ended. Dina ElShinnawi (American) and Mohammed Sabbah (Egyptian) were chosen as Ambassadors and the alternates with the second highest number of votes were Mushira Sabry (Egyptian) and Victoria Webster (American). The Egypt Conference ambassadors will join the ambassadors from the Jordan and Morocco conferences in Washington DC from July 26-30, 2008 in meetings with legislators, policymakers and civil society leaders.

**FOLLOW-UP**

Immediately before the conference began, the organizers created a Facebook page for the conference participants, entitled "Beyond Borders: An Egyptian-American Dialogue." The group now has 56 members including participants, organizers, and students invited to join the conference but unable to attend. The Facebook group offers updates on conference materials such as policy recommendations and overviews, and the group will serve as a platform for communication about the conference ambassadors' advocacy trip to Washington and planned follow-up activities.

The Project on Middle East Democracy is currently organizing two follow-up projects with the Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies. The first project is a series of blogging seminars for conference participants to introduce them to the field of blogging and offer them a blogging site that can be shared via the Facebook group. The second project will build on the Andalus Institute's online broadcasting station, Horytna, to offer participants the chance to create both English and Arabic language material for broadcast on the station.

Americans for Informed Democracy is organizing a series of videoconference sessions for participants from Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, and the U.S. to discuss recent events in the U.S.-Middle East relationship.

**MEDIA COVERAGE**

The newspaper *Rosa Al Yousef* covered the conference and its reporter interviewed several participants and organizers. The article below appeared in the May 4th issue of the paper.



Other blogs covering the conference include:

http://the-earth-reporter.blogspot.com/2008/05/blog-post_12.html

http://upspolitics.blogspot.com/2008/05/colin-cronin-09-cairo-conference-recap_20.html

## CONFERENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Jamie Arnett is a founding member of the Project on Middle East Democracy and recently finished a fellowship with the Center for Arabic Study Abroad (CASA) at the American University in Cairo. Arnett received a MA degree in Arab Studies from Georgetown University in 2006. While a Master's student she worked as a research assistant at the US Institute of Peace on a project evaluating the US role in the Middle East peace process from 1991 to the present. Prior to her graduate study at Georgetown, Arnett attended Earlham College where she was actively involved in the Model UN club and organized a Model UN conference for local high school students in Indiana and Ohio. After graduating from Earlham College, Arnett worked as an Electoral Affairs Officer at the Palestinian Central Elections Commission in Ramallah where she coordinated the activities of international election observers for the 2005 Palestinian Presidential Election.

Emma Deputy is currently Master's candidate at the American University in Cairo, where she is pursuing a MA in Arabic Studies. Emma has received Bachelors degrees in Economics and Political Science from Oklahoma State University. At Oklahoma State University Deputy served on the student senate and was a student representative on the Diversity Advisory Board. Deputy has also studied Arabic at Al-Akhawayn University in Morocco.

Lina Gomaa is a language instructor having taught Arabic to students at Beloit College in Wisconsin and English to students at Misr International University in Cairo. She holds a BA in Creative Writing from Beloit College and obtained a BA in Arabic-English Translation and English Literature from Ain Shams University in 2008. While a student in the U.S., Gomaa interned with Karamah, a group of female Muslim lawyers advocating for human rights, and for the Hunt Alternatives Fund in the Inclusive Security Initiative. Gomaa also worked at the Binational Fulbright Commission in Cairo, coordinating a lecture series and meetings between Fulbright Scholars and their Egyptian advisors.

## SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS, FUNDERS, AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**American Studies Center, The American University in Cairo.** The American Studies Center promotes a scholarly multidisciplinary approach to the study of the United States of America addressing the concerns and needs of Egypt and the Arab world. To this end, the Center's programs facilitate, encourage and disseminate objective, in-depth research on American subjects. It organizes conferences, seminars, lectures, short courses and publications designed to contribute to a more sophisticated analysis of America's varied societies and cultures among academics, professional groups and interested publics in Egypt and the Middle East. Located at the American University in Cairo, the Center reaches out to Arab scholars promoting collaborative scholarly activities with research institutions across the Arab world and throughout the globe.

**Americans for Informed Democracy (AID).** AID is a non-partisan 501(c)(3) organization that brings the world home through programming on more than 500 U.S.

university campuses and in more than 10 countries. AID fulfills its mission by coordinating town hall meetings on America's role in the world, hosting leadership retreats, publishing opinion pieces and reports on issues of global importance, and providing workshops on civic engagement and advocacy. Through these efforts, AID seeks to build a new generation of globally conscious leaders who can shape an American foreign policy appropriate for our increasingly interdependent world.

**The Annual Conference for Engineering Students (ACES).** ACES is a student-run organization of engineering students at Ain Shams University with more than 100 crew members and 250 participants each year, making it is one of the largest student-led organizations in Egypt. The organization is a simulation of a professional organization that aims to provide engineering students with the skills they will need upon graduation to succeed in the job market. Typical activities sponsored by ACES include presentations, debates, brainstorming sessions on business concepts, and crisis simulations.

**The Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED).** The Project on Middle East Democracy is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to examining the impact of American policy on political reform and democratization in the Middle East. Through dialogue, policy analysis, and advocacy, we hope to promote understanding of how genuine, authentic democracies can develop in the Middle East and how the U.S. can best support that process.