

# THE MEANING OF EGYPT'S ELECTIONS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO THE MIDDLE EAST



October 12, 2005

Briefing of the  
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

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Washington: 2006

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The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

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The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <[www.csce.gov](http://www.csce.gov)>.

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**OCTOBER 12, 2005**

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October 12, 2005

## Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Washington, DC

The briefing was held at 10 a.m. in room 2360, Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, Chadwick R. Gore, Staff Advisor, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, moderating.

*Panalists present;* Chadwick R. Gore, Staff Advisor, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Thomas Garrett, Director of Middle East and North Africa Program, International Republican Institute; Khairi Abaza, Past Secretary, Wafd Party, Visiting Fellow, The Washington Institute; Amr Hamzawy, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; and Wael Aboulmagd, Counselor, Egyptian Embassy to the United States.

Mr. GORE. Well, good morning. My name's Chadwick Gore. I'm on the staff of the Helsinki Commission. Welcome to our briefing on the meaning of Egypt's elections and their relevance to the Middle East.

The intent of the briefing is to cover the relevance and what happened in the presidential elections of last month, and also, however, we can divine what's coming up in the parliamentary elections that have been announced starting on November 9th.

Now, notice I said "starting." That's because the structure of the forthcoming parliamentary elections will be that the first stage will cover Cairo, Giza and their environs, with any runoffs taking place a week later.

The second stage, on November 14th, will cover nine other jurisdictions. And then the third stage will take place on December 7th, covering the remaining provinces.

This is an unusual structure, something that, frankly—I've been following elections for I hate to tell you how many decades, and I've never seen anything like this for the same body. So there are some ramifications there.

The other areas that we want to talk about: What exactly are the indications for Egypt with this kind of progress in presidential and parliamentary elections?

What does it mean for the region, meaning the Near East right around Egypt and then the broader Middle East as well—some people look at the Middle East going from Morocco all the way to Afghanistan—Does it have an effect on that geographic region as far as democratic progress is concerned?

And then, sort of, a parochial concern that we have here at the commission: What does it portend for the use of the OSCE model in the region? We can discuss that kind of issue. Is the OSCE model transportable? And is this the kind of harbinger, along with, say, the Palestinian elections that have taken place, the kind of progressiveness that we have in Jordan, which would lead to a regional kind of self-identified OSCE Middle East?

So those are the kinds of areas that we hope to cover in this discussion.

Now, our presenters this morning are Thomas Garrett, who was named director of the Middle East and North Africa programs at the International Republican Institute in January 2005. Prior to that, he spent 10 years overseas with the IRI, serving as country director in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, Mongolia and Indonesia.

Mr. Garrett was the legislative assistant in the Senate office of Senator Murkowski and prior to that was director of congressional and legislative affairs at the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Khairi Abaza is a visiting fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, focusing on Egyptian politics and democratic reform. He previously served as cultural committee secretary and foreign affairs committee member of the Egyptian Wafd Party. He holds a master's degree in Near and Middle Eastern studies from the University of London, where he's currently a Ph.D. candidate in politics.

And, due to his intimate knowledge of party politics in Egypt, I'm hoping that he will discuss the front that has been formed among the opposition parties within the last several days.

Dr. Amr Hamzawy is a noted Egyptian political scientist who previously taught at Cairo University and the Free University of Berlin. His research interests include the changing dynamics of political participation in the Arab world, including the role of Islamist opposition groups, with special attention both to Egypt and the Gulf countries.

Dr. Hamzawy's studies at Cairo University focused on political reform and democratization in the Arab world, civil society, Islamism, and the cultural impacts of globalization processes.

He received his Ph.D. from the Free University of Berlin, where he worked at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies. He is an external expert on Middle Eastern politics for the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development. And he is widely published in German and Arabic periodicals and media.

We're also quite pleased to have a representative of the Egyptian Government with us this morning, Counselor Wahel Aboulmagd, from the Embassy of Egypt. And we look forward to his presentation as well.

Now, our format is that each of our presenters will give their remarks and, at the end, we will open it up for discussion and questions from the audience. And I will probably reserve the right of the moderator to ask the first question.

So, Mr. Garrett?

Mr. GARRETT. The International Republican Institute took a 15-member assessment team to Egypt from August the 15th to September the 9th—a 15-member delegation made up of folks from seven different nations—to look at the pre-election and election day environment in the country.

We did that because we saw the September 7th presidential elections as a very historic and a very meaningful event for the country of Egypt and for the region as well.

For the first time in history, Egyptian voters were given the opportunity to choose from among several candidates for the position of president. And, most importantly, open campaigning was permitted for all the candidates representing opposition political parties.

One of the things that we noted that also was very critical: Voting occurred in a safe and nonviolent atmosphere without the overt intimidation that one has seen in other elections and has occurred at times in the past.

Those 15 members that were on our delegation included elected officials, but also people who have—among us, combined, we have observed more than 50 elections worldwide. So we did bring a broad experience to what we were looking at in Egypt on September 7th.

We were able to take people—over that period of time, August the 15th to September 9th—to Alexandria, Port Said, Asyut. We spent a lot of time in Cairo and we spent time in Giza.

We were not able to receive official accreditation as election observers from the Egyptian Government. So on election day itself, we were out and about in various teams in various cities trying to more or less capture the atmospherics of election day. We did not have official credentials, so we were not allowed to go into voting stations and we were not able to necessarily meet with election officials or to question election poll station workers on how things were going.

However, in many cases, we were asked into various polling stations by the individual judges who oversaw specific sites.

Election day itself in Egypt—well, let me stop for a moment and go back to the lead-up to that.

One of the things that was occurring in the days leading up to the elections, which only took place over 19 days—which is a very short period of time, I think we would all recognize—the opposition political parties were able to campaign, they were able to hold rallies; that much is true.

But we do want to point out and we do point out in the report that we have forthcoming that such important matters as having access to the voter lists was not provided to the opposition parties until two days before the election took place. So it was therefore very difficult to do a voter contact program. It was very difficult to try to reach out to registered voters, which are a small number among the overall population in Egypt.

As well, if you were to have political party agents—if your campaign was to have a representative in the election place on election day, you had to have in advance the list of polling stations so that you could certify someone into the various polling stations to be the official representative.

That list, unfortunately, was also given to the political parties, in some cases, less than 36 hours before the election. And so, as we visited the various political parties in those last few hours—literally, the waning hours of the campaign—they were rushing to try to identify people in the various stations, get letters of authority to them notarized and get these people out on election day itself.

Chad mentioned that there are going to be a series of elections taking place over a period of time for the upcoming parliamentary cycle. Perhaps someone else can elaborate on that a bit more than myself, but it's my understanding, from our visits to Egypt, the rationale behind that is to provide for independent judges to be able to be at each of the polling stations to try to oversee voting.

There's only a certain number, a few thousand judges and there were, in the year 2000, over 50,000 polling stations.

And so they try to do this. The rationale, at least as publicly stated, is this is done so that the judges can be at the various locations over a period of several weeks.

This would be a very good thing. The judges do have a very important and a very credible role in the country. People look to them for neutrality and for fairness on election day.

However, one of the things that occurred in the presidential election that we hope we would not see again in parliamentary elections is out of that limited number of a few thousand judges, 1,500 were barred from participating in the election. And, of course, these 1,500 were the judges who were the most outspoken and the most critical of the way things were done.

Probably one of the greatest challenges we were able to observe during our period in Egypt going into the presidential election was the establishment of a presidential election commission, which in its beginning steps it appeared to be a very positive thing, and that was election-day activities, the conduct of the polls itself was removed from the Ministry of the Interior and it was placed in an independent commission.

However, once again going back to our experience, we asked everyone who has seen multiple elections around the world, "Have you ever seen anything like this commission?" And it was something quite different to us. It was a commission that basically made informal decisions, off-the-cuff remarks that had the impact of law, but were not promulgated in regulations, were not publicly stated in written codes.

As well, the election commission itself could not be legally challenged. Any decision they made was final, and it was not allowed for anyone to challenge them in court.

From what we could see, they met seldom with the campaigns. They did not provide a rationale for their decision. For instance, to say no judges, these 1,500, can participate. And when they were established, parliament was able to place up to five members on this election commission, a parliament which, of course, is dominated primarily by one party.

We are going to be presenting, later this week, actually, a list of 11 recommendations from what we saw in the presidential cycle that we would encourage Egypt to look at doing something differently with on the next parliamentary rounds.

One of those that we think would be very, very important would be the idea of providing for, in a timely fashion, domestic observers.

From the beginning of our visits there last April, we were told that international observers would not be provided for in this election and that that would not be a problem because there would be domestic observers, the judges, as well as independent media, in the polling station on election day and that would suffice.

However, as we came very, very close to the election itself, in September, the chairman of this election commission I've referred to made a comment, which, again, did not seem to have the written force of law that took the force, that there would be no domestic observers on election day.

You may have heard that there were domestic observers on election day, but it was around 11 o'clock on the morning of the elections that the news came out to everyone, "Yes, you can send domestic observers into the stations today."

We would like to see international observers present. A number of countries have expressed an interest in going to Egypt for the parliamentary cycle and providing election



monitors, which, let me be clear, these are not people who would interfere on the day of the election, and they would not challenge or question what they see, but they would simply be there and they would monitor and they would observe and provide written recommendations after the election is over.

These are not an intrusive force.

But more importantly than the international observers certainly would be the domestic observers. Egyptian people want to know that this is a credible, legitimate election process. And there's really no way to do that when people are basically banned from serving as independent, impartial observers on election day.

Some of the other things we would recommend: We would recommend that campaigning, which, according to the law, is supposed to stop 48 hours before the elections take place, the polling opens, actually does stop. We saw numerous instances of sound trucks, candidate literature, candidate representatives acting in a political fashion on election day itself.

As I say, we have 11 recommendations. We'll be releasing those soon. You can find those on our Web site at IRI.

With that, let me just say, concerning the upcoming—no, I should say one other thing in conclusion.

These were historic elections. They were very, very important for the region. And I would like for you to think of them within the overall region and that was the Lebanese elections, the Palestinian presidential elections. Something very, very different is occurring.

People said to us, "One of the things that's occurred is the taboo has been broken in the nation of Egypt." And that was people are now speaking openly and speaking critically of the policies of their government and of the way things are done. That has changed with these elections.

Having said that, and listening to some of the challenges that occurred, it was not the feeling of IRI and, I think, as well as the other groups that were present on the ground, that the aspirations of the voters of Egypt were subverted in any major way on election day.

There was clearly an intent on the part of the voters of Egypt to return President Mubarak for a fifth term. As a matter of fact, some of the voters that we saw who were not able to find their voting place or who did not have an adequate voting card said to us, "We're Mubarak voters. We want to vote for the president."

So we would like to say that this was an important election. We at IRI would like to commend the 10 political parties, the 10 groups, which did participate in this election. This was an historic opportunity and they have changed their country as a result of being a part of that.

We met with those political actors who boycotted this last election. And, happily, they appear not to be doing that in the future because these are important opportunities for the people of Egypt to express themselves.

So with that, let me stop and turn it to my colleagues. And then I'll get questions later.

Mr. ABAZA. Concerning the presidential elections, I will start where you ended, the participation of the opposition.

There were several reports of irregularities during these elections. And with the low turnout, there is news that the old practices remained the same in many circumstances.

As you mentioned, the voter lists that were handed in very late to the candidates; the observers were only allowed a few hours before the ballot and had to have very specific papers to be able to attend, which was not possible for many people who were not in Cairo.

But perhaps an important thing that happened during the elections is the gains of the opposition. For the first time in Egypt, or in the last 50 years, there was a real debate about political reform and change. The limited margin of freedom that was allowed for opposition candidates allowed them, for the first time, to interact freely with the Egyptian public.

Holding rallies in some of the provincial towns, opposition candidates were able to mobilize up to 10,000, 20,000 people, which is a huge number for Egypt. The press was quite free to speak and to criticize the regime, criticize the president.

And also, a very important factor, the promises by President Mubarak to carry on with the political reform while the very talk about political reform was completely almost forbidden. In the last 20 years, President Mubarak always said, "We will not reform the constitution. It's not time for political reform."

While now, he made many promises, and among them to end the emergency law, to replace it by the terrorist law. But many of the promises are still vague and need to be clarified.

Concerning the issue of the opposition creating a united front, the last few months have witnessed a development in the Egyptian opposition. For the first time, many secular groups started to appear, like the Kifaya movement or "Enough" movement.

Also some former dignitaries of the Nasserite era and the Saddat era also got together and asked for reform. They created the Coalition for Democratic Change.

The opposition started to be less shy when it comes to interacting with the external world. In the presidential elections, the opposition agreed not to be in favor of having international observers. After the presidential elections, the opposition says having international observers is not an intrusion in our internal affairs. So this is also a change that happened.

Also, the opposition is trying to create a united front, and it's a new thing in Egypt. We cannot say it's entirely successful, but the recent creation of the united front was able to unite the liberal party; the Nasserite Party, that's traditionally a rival of the al-Wafd Party, but they were able to get together; the Tagammu Party that has Marxist roots; the Kifaya movement that is a protest movement; the liberal Islamists, if we may say so; the al-Karama Party, which split from the Nasserite Party.

The Muslim Brotherhood decided to cooperate with the united front, but the Muslim Brotherhood will not run in the same list. It preferred to run under the slogan of "Islam is the Solution" and also to have its own candidates. And it declared that they would cooperate with the united front.

One of the successes of this united front—I'm sorry, I used the word coalition for united front—is the Tagammu Party, that is the party with Marxist roots, had always vetoed any work with the Muslim Brotherhood. But they ended up accepting. It's really a good development.

Now, this does not mean that we might have elections that will truly reflect the will of the Egyptian people. There's still a long way to go before we can see free and fair elections in Egypt.

Free and fair elections in Egypt don't only mean no corruption or violence during election days, but preparing an environment that would be conducive to free and fair elections; that is, allowing for the creation of political parties in a much freer manner, removing the state control over political parties. There is something called the Political Party Committee in Egypt that is governed by what we call the consultative council. That is NDP-controlled. It has the authority to freeze any political party. It has the authority to give license to a political party or not give licenses to political parties.

Also, the media—it's important to have impartial media. There was some effort on the part of the state-controlled media in the presidential election to give a certain margin of exposure for independent candidates, but still it is far from being totally impartial.

It would be important to create a truly independent authority that would rule on the status of the media.

Also it would be very important to change the regulations concerning the registration in order to vote. In Egypt, people, in order to vote, have to [obtain] an electoral card, and this could only happen in December every year. Many people who wanted to participate in the multi-candidate presidential elections were not able to do so because the constitution was only amended in May, and it was too late for them to register and to [obtain] electoral cards.

The same is happening for the parliamentary elections.

And to conclude, what happened in Egypt is probably a step toward a freer system, but it should only be considered a step if it's promptly followed by many other steps.

And also, Egypt, when we come to the implications in the region, Egypt is a much easier case than many other countries for a democratic transition. First, Egypt is the oldest nation-state in the region. It has a population that has a very strong sense of national identity. It has very clear voters. It doesn't have any ethnic differences.

There is a large Christian minority, but that does not have any ethnic or linguistic differences or social differences with the majority Muslim population. The large Christian minority figures vary, depending on the source, but we could say it's between 7 million and 15 million. They could be a very good element in elections to counter any radical Islamist threats.

Also, the Egyptian people are familiar with the concept of a parliament, elections, political parties. It had its first legislative assembly created in 1866. And despite the half-century of authoritarian rule, parliament never ceased to exist. The political parties—or at least we had a single political party—existed for a long time during the Nasserite era and part of the Saddat era.

So the Egyptian people are familiar with these institutions, and they only need to be activated.

It could be a good example for the region. It could influence the political progress and development in the region, as the region has also influenced Egypt. When Egyptians saw the elections in Iraq, elections in Palestine, people taking to the street in Lebanon, it had an effect on the Egyptian.

So the same, if people in the region see that there is a successful transition to democracy and also that the international community is supporting the Egyptian Government

and the Egyptian opposition in an evolution toward a democracy, this would enhance the image of countries like the United States who are supportive of democratic reform in the region.

I leave the floor to my colleagues now.

Mr. HAMZAWY. Let me try to position my colleague's very valuable remarks in a broader picture, looking at the Egyptian political scene and maybe to indicate some points where I do differ or I beg to differ in relation to their assessment.

One, I do not see the presidential election of September the 7th as representing an historical step or an historical breakthrough. This was a step forward, an important step forward, but yet, a step which followed clear logic in the Egyptian political scene which has been moving along the line of reforming Egypt's polity, opening up Egypt's political space over last five to 10 years, if not longer.

Actually, Egypt's experience of limited pluralism, of political pluralism, started back in the second half of the 1970s. The presidential election of September the 7th, to me, did not represent an historical step.

One, the elections were not competitive. We had nine contenders for President Mubarak, but no serious competition over the presidency. It was clear from the very beginning that President Mubarak was going to win.

And the only question, which was critical, was actually the question of the voter turnout, whether the NDP, the ruling National Democratic Party of President Mubarak and other opposition parties—nine parties which decided to participate—would manage to mobilize both segments of the Egyptian population to participate and to vote on September 7 or not.

And the voter turnout turned out to be extremely low. According to official or government statements, 23 percent. Independent NGOs and monitoring groups, domestic monitoring groups, put it somewhere between 15 and 18 percent.

And here—a quick remark—15 and 18 percent, very indicative is the fact that in rural areas, the voter turnout reached 18 percent, up to 20 percent; whereas in urban centers, where we have Egypt's middle class, the voter turnout was between 5 percent and 8 percent. This means that the Egyptian middle class, which is actually the base for any democratic transition, stayed away, did not participate in the presidential election.

So I'm not questioning whether it was relevant or not. It certainly opened up the political space. As Tom Garrett did indicate already, and Khairi indicated as well, it gave opposition parties and platforms a chance to get out the message, to communicate with constituencies and reach out to potential voters.

However, we have to see it in its own limitations. And I find the description "historical breakthrough" a bit misleading.

My second point is on—and here I'm jumping to the final question which we were asked to address—regional implications. Well, clearly, Egypt is one of the political and cultural centers of the region.

But here, again, I'm hesitant to describe any potential regional impact, simply for two reasons.

One, the region as it looks right now is extremely heterogeneous. We do not have only experience in political elections and political opening, we have threatening civil wars in Iraq and elsewhere in the region.

I am cautious when it comes to describing a grand narrative across the region of political openings and democratization and pointing out to elections in Lebanon to elections in Egypt to even in the Palestinian territories as indicating a general trend in the region.

This is only part of the regional reality. This is only one aspect, one component of a very complex regional reality which does not only go in the direction of democratization, opening up, civil wars, a majority/minority conflict and clashes in different Gulf countries.

Leave the Gulf countries and look to North Africa or elsewhere in the region, it's not a story of democratization opening up.

So the regional implications or regional impact of Egypt's opening up, to me, are simply to indicate, if we are going to have success in the upcoming parliamentary election, if we are to have a real, competitive election starting November 8th and up to the first week of December, simply to indicate the possibility of what I would term or describe as getting Arab citizens to rediscover politics.

Arab citizens stayed away, remained far away from politics for a long time. The half century, second half of the 20th century, meant all over the region, across the region, basically authoritarian or semi-authoritarian rule, regimes which alienated their constituencies, which alienated citizens.

So the practice of elections is, to me, relevant in terms of indicating the possibility of rediscovering politics for citizens, but not to present a new model of democracy which can be adopted across the region.

So I'm cautious when it comes to regional impact as well.

Now, let me look at the scene briefly, approaching the parliamentary elections.

To me there are three key actors in the Egyptian political scene. One is the government or the regime. A second key group of actors is the opposition. And thirdly we have what I would describe as opposition from within: Egyptian judges and other state institutions formulating, articulating in the last couple of years, especially in the last couple of months, reform ideas and calling on the government to reform Egypt's policies.

Now, let me start with the government, just to clarify the impression of bad guys, good guys.

The government itself is extremely divided over reform measures and reform policies. We have a clear reform-minded segment within the government, within the ruling NDP, and we still have conservative politicians, leading figures of the NDP and of the government, who are, to me, still very much in favor of a policy of securitization, who see national security or stability as indicating security, and security as indicating closing up and limiting the room of maneuver and space given to opposition parties.

So we have a reform-minded segment and we have a conservative faction within the government itself. And partially what we see in government policies throughout the last 2 years, or the last 2 to 3 years, is a step forward and two steps backward in relation to political opening, in relation to democratization, which is very much an outcome of this inner conflict within the government itself.

I'll give you one example, which is a constitutional amendment of article 76, which opens the door for multi-candidate presidential elections and which was suggested and introduced by the president last summer and adopted by the People's Assembly, the lower house of the Egyptian parliament, last summer as well. An initiative by the president to amend the constitution went in the right direction.

The amendment itself is extremely undemocratic. The amendment rules out the possibility of independence, practically the possibility of independent politicians to run for the presidency, and it makes it very difficult for opposition parties, starting from 2011, to field candidates for the presidential election.

Each party will need to have at least 5 percent of the seats of the People's Assembly, of the lower house of the Egyptian parliament.

If you look at the current People's Assembly, the NDP controls over 90 percent, and four opposition parties have less than 8 percent—between 8 percent and 9 percent.

So the effort to amend the constitution, to open up, went in the right direction; the implementation was less democratic as everyone hoped in Egypt.

So here we have to keep an eye on inner-government dynamics. President Mubarak, as my colleague Khairi said, pledged in his election campaign to institute reform measures, where he basically touched on all major claims and all major perceptions of opposition platforms.

The question will be whether it's going to be implemented or not. Another question will be how it's going to be implemented. Replacing the emergency law with an anti-terror law sounds good, but it depends on the stipulations of the new law.

Opening up and giving the opposition more space sounds very relevant to opening up political space, but again it depends on the implementation.

So, one, to the inner dynamics of the government.

Second, on the opposition. Here Khairi touched on the united opposition front. And let me tell you that what I see right now in Egypt's opposition seems two things.

One, as Khairi said, the trend to develop a united opposition front to compete or to field candidates who are able to compete against the NDP, the dominant ruling political party.

The problem comes when we consider the fact that opposition parties also are engaged in building up or articulating a united opposition front—when we consider the fact that they don't have constituents. These parties are extremely small, not due to their own failures, but primarily due to the fact of Egypt's political system, of this limited pluralism which we have been experiencing throughout the last four decades. These parties are marginal. They are marginal in Egypt's social realities. They are marginal in Egypt's political realities.

The two major candidates in the presidential election, one of them took over 7 percent, 7.6 percent, Ayman Nour. And Numan Gumaa of the Wafd Party took less than 3 percent. To me, for these parties to engage in opposition-building activities is problematic, because they lose a chance of independent constituency building, of getting out their own message, of getting out their own electoral objective, to convince Egyptian voters to go and vote.

Actually the united opposition front confuses voters. How come the differences between a Marxist party, or a leftist party, like Tagammu, and the liberal party like NOR are forgotten, and they act according to one objective, which is to struggle against the leading party of the scene.

I see that as problematic.

The second trend, where I do see a bit more of potential to compete and to try to build independent constituencies, is the stand represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and the al-Ghad Party, Tomorrow Party, of Ayman Nour.

Both of them, for different reasons, seem to be determined to stay away from the united opposition front, to field their own candidates and to compete in a limited number of districts.

Egypt has 220 electoral districts. For each district, we have two seats in the parliament. So the total number of seats of the People's Assembly is 440.

Each district has two. One is, according to the constitution, which has—one retains the traces of the former socialist era of the 1950s and 1960s; one for the peasantry and one for the working class. No: peasantry and working class one, and professionals, one.

So the strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Ghad of competing in a limited number of districts but fielding their own candidates and getting out their own message with their own slogans—regardless of my own assessment of the slogans, whether they are misleading, whether they are realistic or not—my impression is that it will give them a chance to exist in a moving political scene.

My final remark on my expectations for the parliamentary elections: The People's Assembly today is highly dominated by the ruling NDP—over 90 percent. And we have between 8 or 9 percent opposition representation.

My impression is opposition parties, movements, independents are able to win anywhere between 15 and 20 percent of the upcoming People's Assembly.

My impression is that irregularities which happened on September the 7th in relation to the presidential election will be minimized due to high media attention, domestically and internationally.

Judges are again playing an extremely important role in pushing forward for better monitoring. And this is why, as some said, the issue of different stages of the parliamentary elections is basically to guarantee for the presence of judges at all polls which cannot be a guarantee if elections were to be conducted on one day.

So between 15 and 20 percent.

The last faction, which I mentioned—this opposition from within—judges. And here, the relevance for Egyptian judges have been putting forward throughout the last month in terms of reform codes on Mubarak and on the government is simply to restore Egyptians' belief in the neutrality of state institutions.

Regardless of the outcome, regardless of whether their government will manage to limit the capacity to independently monitor the elections or not, judges are restoring public belief in the neutrality of state institutions, which is crucial for a country undergoing a democratic transition, or undergoing a phase of democratic development.

So here again, we have to keep an eye on the role, on the implication and not simply by tying—less by tying implications to results, to outcomes and more by taking the reality into consideration.

Let me stop here.

Mr. GORE. Counselor?

Mr. ABOULMAGD. Thank you very much, Chad. And it's always hard to be the last person to talk about any topic, and particularly after such a distinguished panel, a diverse panel, in fact, has covered pretty much every aspect of the Egyptian election.

I still think there are a couple of issues that I will try to tie together from the comments made by my distinguished colleagues here. And I'd just like to indicate that—I think it was Tom that indicated earlier, these were our first presidential elections. This is a point of assessment that I have noticed has been absent, not in this presentation but in many commentaries about the Egyptian election.

It is a factor that we have to take into consideration when we look at what is happening in Egypt. Every single thing we are going through we are going through for the first time.

You have to put that in real terms to realize that candidates were for the first time ever in their modern history, I think, Egypt's long history, had to campaign nationwide. We've had parliamentary election over the years; and, of course, that is local politics. To campaign nationally, to understand how to raise funds, how to address people in different parts of the country with different concerns, when to talk substance, when to talk style, all of those things that people in the West and other more established democracies are accustomed to, were very novel to us and first-time events.

Same applied to voters. And I happen to be fortunate enough to be on my annual leave in Cairo for those 3, 4 months building up to the election and I saw it firsthand. People were asking very legitimate questions. People did not know how to vote. They did not know where to vote. They did not know what was required for them to put a ballot in the box.

These were all things because of the voter apathy—and I'll come to that when we talk about the low turnout, in a minute—but it's just a fact of life. Not one person I know personally had ever voted. Basically, they just are indifferent and didn't have much trust in the process. So it was new for the voters.

It was also new for civil society. They had never been called upon to play that active a role. They performed admirably. I was very impressed to see the established organizations that we had, but even more impressed to see the newcomers.

People, average people, Egyptians who wanted to become involved who, I thought, were marginalized over the years, felt, again, indifferent to the process and now thought, "Well, this is a good time," and they used their technology.

I just want to mention very quickly one group which I really was impressed by. They're called "shayfeenkom." It's a smart play on words. It means, "We're watching you"—we're basically watching you. It's a Web site. They don't have too many resources. They're a group of individuals that established this Web site.

All they could do was have links on their Web site. They asked people to contact them whenever they noted any irregularity happening in any of the balloting stations—"Please just send us a message."

And when the lady talking about this organization was asked, "So what are you going to do about it?" She said, "All we can do is send a camera. When we find 5, 10, 11 reports coming from one district, we'll just send one of our reps with a camera crew. That's all we can do."

But that was very, very indicative of a new trend in politics of average people becoming more involved and feeling that they have a stake in the process.

Media played an amazing role. I think they did well. I was personally not happy to see some of the personalization of the attack between candidates—not between candidates, in fact, but between supporters in the press on adversaries or other candidates.



But still, all in all, I think they enjoyed a huge margin of freedom. Nothing was out-of-bounds. Everything was on the table. And, as I said, a lot of people were even not very happy with the personalization of the performance.

But still, Television Egypt was pretty balanced in its coverage. Some criticisms were leveled against the three main state-owned newspapers. There may be reasons for that, but I think the effect was minimal because it was balanced out by the large number of opposition independent papers operating in Egypt now.

Judges: One issue that isn't very much touched upon when we talk about the much-maligned presidential elections commission was that they, in effect, cut down the number of districts in Egypt.

Regarding polling stations and the judicial supervision issue, we had 54,000 polling stations. We have 13,000 judges. What they did was, in effect, they merged a number of auxiliary stations into one central station, creating 9,737, I think.

So that brought it a little bit less than the number of judges we had and enabled us to hold the entire nation's presidential elections on one day.

That was something that was, I must say, to the credit of PEC, the presidential election commission.

Another thing that is not mentioned—and I'm not defending them personally, I wasn't happy with their initial opposition to the issue of national monitors, but we'll come to that in a minute again.

They established for the first time—something we didn't have—issues of campaign financing, campaign accountability, how you're going to spend the money, where you're going to deposit it and how you're going to be audited when there's irregularities and how these issues are dealt with.

They also established the principle of equal access to the media and they sort of enforced it to a large extent, and I think people were happy with that.

So I'm just balancing out some of the negatives of the presidential election commission—which are justified and understandable—with other things that we shouldn't take for granted.

Basically, despite a lot of the criticism—and much of it is warranted—that has been leveled against some of the cases of irregularities that have taken place in these elections, I think there are a number of firsts that we witnessed, and they were mostly positive.

For the first time, an incumbent president in Egypt had to campaign nationwide to present his political, economic and social agenda for public scrutiny: to be held, in effect, accountable.

This is something that presidents in Egypt simply did not do in the past. Literally in this case—and those of us Egyptians, perhaps, who followed the campaigns—literally saw the president roll up his sleeves, take off his coat and tie. It was even a matter of some joking in Egyptian media; they're not used to presidents doing that, and that casual attitude toward voters.

But he went out. He had to ask for the trust of the voters.

He made a number of promises, as did his opponents. I've also referred to other statements and a lot of people are waiting to see when and how these promises are going to be delivered.

This is the important thing. People are looking. People are watching. People are scrutinizing. People are expecting things.

This was not the case in the past. That's why I wouldn't go as far—I may be agreeing with Amr on this—I wouldn't necessarily call it historic, but it is very, very significant by Egyptian standards.

The president, again, was unable to—or did not, at least—use state-owned media to broadcast his main keynote speech. He had to go out and buy time on a private television station.

That, granted, is symbolic. But again, it is very important and it means a lot to people. It makes the clear distinction that these are not public funds; you are not to use them when you are campaigning; you use them as in your capacity as president, but not as a campaigner for public office.

Civil society: We addressed that.

On the issue of international monitors, I know it is a big issue here in the United States and outside of Egypt.

It's not such a big issue in Egypt. But I just want to address that very quickly.

International monitors: First of all, it is not accurate to say that the Government of Egypt rejected or refused to allow international monitors. This was a decision that was made by the presidential election commission. Whether we agree with it or not is a different matter, but it should not be attributed necessarily directly to the government, but to the PEC. They have their reasons.

But also, let's not portray it as an isolated, stubborn position by the government. Nine out of 10 candidates—at that time, at least—opposed it. Many, many judges opposed it. Activists opposed it. So it's not like it was an isolated position. I stress that.

Again, I'm saying things have changed in Egypt. I think Tom has witnessed that himself, that maybe a few months back there was stronger opposition to it. A number of people who have had the opportunity to visit Egypt have witnessed that that has been the case. There's a gradual shift.

But just to justify and explain it and put it in some context, forget about the international elements. Look at the problem, the issue of local Egyptian monitors vis-à-vis or versus the judges.

The judiciary in Egypt are very proud, right or wrong. But this is how I heard a number of them articulate their position: they felt they were responsible for conducting these free and fair elections, and they took it as sort of questioning their own integrity to say, "Well, who are these activists from civil society of Egypt who are going to come and supervise us?"

Another linguistic thing—I don't know if it's relevant at all, but I'll just mention it for what it's worth—the word "rekabah" in Arabic implies a little bit more connotation than just simply "observing" in English. It does, that word. So maybe the gut reaction of a lot of people to see foreign rekabah, foreign "observers," I don't know the exact term to give you, the exact connotation or sense of the word, but it just implies something foreign and unwanted.

When people settle down and look at it reasonably, they might see: Well, wait a minute, we're doing pretty good here, and it might be in our own benefit to have people coming and certifying that these things are happening and the good things that are taking place in Egypt. As Tom mentioned, and other people from foreign countries who happened

to be there, they were repeatedly asked by judges: “Hey, come on in, come on in.” There was no apprehension, or worry that, “We’re doing something wrong and let’s hope these foreigners don’t see what we’re doing and go out and report it.”

So that’s the issue of international monitors. I thought I’d touch upon it real quick.

Of course, there were disappointing issues, two main ones.

The first one, the large number of candidates at this first presidential election tended to distract the voters and almost discredit the process because not all of them—with all due respect—could be considered serious contenders for the seat of the presidency of Egypt.

The other issue is the issue of turnout. I’ll just give three reasons for the low turnout, and then I’ll take a sort of rosy look at that figure.

First of all, if actually 23 percent was the turnout, it’s not a very low number when we take these three issues into consideration.

First of all, Amr mentioned, this was not, in the eyes of the Egyptian people, a seriously tough, challenged, contested election.

When there’s a ball game in Egypt, or in any country, and you know the outcome, you’re pretty certain who’s going to win, people are more likely to sit at home and watch it on TV rather than actually go and root for their teams.

So there was a certainty in the minds of most Egyptians that, “Hey, this is good, a lot of interesting things are happening, but Mubarak is still going to be president, I really don’t need to bother since we haven’t bothered in the past anyway.”

Second thing, or first—I’m not doing them in any particular order—is voter apathy. Egyptians have been apathetic toward the political process for many, many—let me say for decades, if not longer. So it is logical that they are reluctant, and they are not blaming anybody for their suspicion or for their skepticism. That’s a natural impulse.

So Egyptians have been apathetic toward the political process.

The third issue which wasn’t mentioned is the fact that—or was mentioned in passing—was that two major political parties out of what I consider the three—in addition to NDP, we have the Wafd, we have the Tagammu and we have the Nasserites. Those are the three legitimate, well-established political parties in Egypt, along with the NDP. And I’m not disrespectful of al-Ghad, but it’s a relatively new party compared to these better established, larger parties.

Two of them decided to boycott. In fact, al-Wafd only joined at a very late hour. I was elated to hear that news when I was here and heard that al-Wafd would join and contest these elections. It was a democratic decision, I must say, within al-Wafd Party against—again, what we heard—against the will of Dr. Numan Gumaa, the head of the party.

Nonetheless, so the turnout in Egypt was low. If you reverse all three of those factors for the parliamentary elections coming up: hopefully, so far there is any serious call for boycott, they will be contested as are all of our parliamentary elections, and voter apathy will have been addressed a little bit at least by the fact that we had a reasonably fair and free presidential election that will bring back some confidence into the process.

Last point I’ll just address—I hope I haven’t taken up too much time—pertains to the regional issue. Of course, we’d love to see good things happen across the board in the region because of our elections.

I'm not as skeptical. I'll try to be a little bit more optimistic on the issue of the potential influence. I don't know why it happens. I hope I'm not chauvinistic or nationalistic about it. Egypt influences its neighbors, has influenced its neighbors for many, many years.

It could be because of relative moderation: We are always somewhere in the middle on every issue, whether it's social, economic, conservative, liberal, centrist. Egypt is somehow always going to end up on the middle of it in the Arab world. Maybe it's the sheer size. Maybe it's the exposure to our arts or cinema or television. I do not know why, but people tend to follow Egypt's example on many occasions.

The condition here is that we have to achieve this in a manner that gives confidence to others with minimum turbulence and problems and instability to encourage others to follow in our steps.

I just beg to differ—very minor difference—with Khairi that Egypt was influenced by events in Palestine, Iraq, or Lebanon.

With all due respect, and I say this from an intellectual perspective, Egyptians did not need to see the Lebanese people go out in demonstrations to know that democracy is good. They did not need to see Iraqis with ink on their fingers to know that there was a better way to elect their officials. We've known that; there were other reasons that we weren't moving forward in that.

And my own sense is that the influence, the effect of any other event in Palestine, in Lebanon, in Iraq, I will not say minimal, I will say it is zero. And I know this might be a little bit challenging to a lot of people who see it differently, but I think that the influence on the average Egyptian voter—he did not sit there and say, "Wow, what's happening in Iraq is encouraging me. I'm going to have to press and I'm going to have presidential elections on the 7th of September."

So that's why I just have some doubts about that.

I'll leave it at that. And thank you very much for your patience.

Mr. GORE. Well, thank you very much. I think we've covered quite a bit of territory in these comments. And I think your closing was a perfect lead-in to exactly the question that I was going to ask.

Egypt certainly is a leader in the region, certainly has an extremely close and special relationship with the United States. I don't think there's anything on the horizon that indicates that that's about to change. President Mubarak has had basically unfettered control over the state for quite some time.

And, really, there was no need for this change. There was really no need on the horizon, for the sake of continuing the power of the state and the status quo in Egypt, to go ahead and have these elections.

I mean, we have several Mediterranean Partners of the OSCE that come to the meetings of the OSCE and talk about various OSCE principles. And so what is it exactly that brought this about?

I mean, all of a sudden, has there been a nascent democratic strain that's been hidden in Egypt all this time that all of a sudden came to the fore and all of a sudden there was this domestic need to have these elections? I mean, what brought this about?

And if that's the case—whatever the case is—it could have been more progressive. There could have been a change in the constitution, not just to hold elections but actually to allow people that weren't registered to be registered so they could vote not only in the

presidential election but also in the parliamentary election, instead of having this shortcoming where you have a large number of people that just can't participate because of this structure in the law.

So one could begin to question the sincerity of the intent behind this amendment.

So what is it that brought about these changes now, or at least this apparent activity in this election process? And I'll leave that open for all of you. [Laughter.]

Mr. HAMZAWY. If you wish.

Let me start by saying that I agree, as well, on the issue of regional impact of events in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine. But by the same token, this applies to the potential Egyptian influence as well.

I mean, the region—every country in the region is preoccupied with domestic politics—and this is a big shift—as compared to the 1960s, '70s, and '80s.

Arab politics in the last four decades was basically about Israel or Palestine, about national liberation and Palestine, the Arab-Israeli conflict. What we see in today's Arab world in different countries is a clear preoccupation with domestic politics: Moroccan politics matters much more for Moroccans than any other regional events.

The same applies to Egypt. Egyptians are very interested in their own domestic politics, less interested in regional events. And the same argument, to me, can be extended to other places in the region.

So the issue of cross-regional synergy effect, or impact, is, to me, minimal. However, this does not mean that we do not have just the issue of a regional environment but it's an international environment as well. We have a regional and international environment less preferable to undemocratic forms of government, and this has materialized in different ways.

We have an international environment to which the Bush administration, American foreign policy in the last couple of years in the Middle East and elsewhere—Central Asia and other countries—did contribute, as well as European policies as well.

There's an international environment less preferable to undemocratic forms of governance, and it exerts a degree, a diverse degree—in a very heterogeneous way, a degree of pressure on undemocratic rulers to open up, to embark on the road of democratic progress.

And we have a regional environment in the Middle East which is, again, less preferable to state suppression, less preferable to minimizing, limiting citizens' capacity to participate. But beyond this level, I would very much doubt the issue of regional relevance.

Now, why has this happened in Egypt? To me, you gave the answer. We do have a process, since the second half of the 1970s, of gradually opening up; as I said, a step forward and two steps backward. However, the process itself as a process was sustained throughout the last three decades.

And what's happening right now, to me, is not historic. This is a gradual evolution which is taking place, with a lot of limitations, and we have addressed the limitations.

I do not see Egypt as entering a qualitatively new state in terms of political transition or change. I see us as accumulating experiences, as gradually opening up, with a lot of limitations. And the basic question will be that there are two central issues that need

to be addressed: one, how to empower citizens to get them to participate, how to get them out of their apathy, which the state is responsible for.

Because if you have a state which marginalized its constituencies, its civic institutions, which do not go out and reach out to constituencies, it's no wonder that they are less interested in participating.

So how to minimize citizens' apathy, and how to get the Egyptian political space better populated, not in terms of numbers, not in terms of having 20 contenders for President Mubarak in 2011 or for the NDP candidates, but of having powerful contenders who can really compete, having opposition parties which can really compete with the NDP. To get Egypt's political space better populated and more in quality and less in quantity.

And here, the issue of moderate participation or liberal participation is key. And the issue of opposition parties rediscovering themselves and their internal structures, reactivating, reinventing their image as powerful, viable opposition parties.

Mr. ABOULMAGD. I ceded to Amr, because I saw him on television actually making a very good argument about—there was this debate about was it external factors or were they internal factors. And he made a great point on that.

I just want to build up on that and mention that my own sense is that the main factor—and as Amr said, this has been a gradual process. It has been slower at times. But it was not noticed. But we noticed it; we knew that things were happening, things were opening up in various areas.

Democracy is not only elections. There are other aspects. There is human rights. Nobody in this room perhaps, or very few, will be aware that we have created a National Council for Human Rights. That national council—which is a worldwide practice; they're created according to something called the Paris principles of independence, and this fits those criteria—has been working in Egypt for over a year. They issued a very, very harsh, tough, critical report on human rights records of the government of Egypt.

The refreshing part was the response of the government. They didn't do the old dismissive attitude. They said, "Well, we have problems with A, B, and C, but we're going to look at D, E, and F," And that's the whole process, you're establishing a culture of human rights.

My point, so I don't stray too far away, is that other issues of reform toward more democratic governance have been taking place in Egypt. The most attention-grabbing one, obviously, was the presidential elections.

And some people who give this credit to the president—and I was, in fact, skeptical. I'm a lawyer by training and education, and I thought, "I'm sorry, I don't understand this. I believe in working from bottom down. We have to work on the political parties; we have to work on other laws. And then end and culminate in that."

The response by some people from the party side was, "You don't understand. If the president did all of that and did not start with this flashy issue of his own job, he would have been criticized." The traditional thing is, "As long as it's not touching my own job, you guys, Egyptians do whatever you want. Criticize, do this and do that."

So that was one of the explanations given to me to explain why the president chose to start by the end, the way I saw it. The last issue on this, what motivated this: If anybody has been to Egypt—and I hope you don't think this is a small issue, it is a big issue—you have to see the satellite dishes on the roofs. It is amazing.

I've lived many, many years in this country, as I have lived in my own, and the exposure to regional and international events of the average Egyptian sitting sipping his tea in the evening is, I hate to say, double or triple the amount of exposure that a much more affluent, better educated American is exposed to. It's a fact of life.

I was not aware that the much-maligned, again, Al Jazeera has more foreign correspondents than ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox put together.

The average Egyptian now can afford to have a tiny satellite dish on his roof and get pretty much close to free of charge 50, 60 channels. They're not Egyptian channels.

The state can govern the three, four channels they have as much as they want. You've got something called Orbit, you've got Showtime, you've got Al Jazeera and their gang. Tons of news, tons of issues are covered.

So these things have introduced people to a lot of change that's happening in Bangladesh, in the United States, in Latin America, and we're aware of it. That's why I minimize the impact of the recent events around us, not because they aren't significant, but because we already knew that; we've been seeing these things happen.

So that's my take on a couple of factors that may have contributed to these events taking place.

Mr. ABAZA. Concerning the point of Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon influencing Egypt, I do not agree that they did not influence Egypt. Having elections in Iraq and Palestine were not a signal to the Egyptian citizens to go and vote, but it was a clear signal to the Egyptian citizens to seek change and to hope that there would be change and to go into demonstrations and to find it legitimate to call for change.

So in that sense, there was an impact and there was an influence.

It was also a clear signal that the region is not stagnant. The region was stagnant for decades. Nothing happened in the region, with the only exception of the Algerian elections of 1991 that were perceived as disasters and dangerous for any democratic process. But, then, that was the only thing.

So it was a clear signal for Egyptians that they can carry on, that they can ask for reform.

The other point concerning the international observers, I agree that many of the magistrates, of course, are proud and would be happy to supervise the elections.

But the problem with magistrates are, as with problems with the regime, because their independence is not granted by the regime. Their promotion and salaries are governed by the executive body. They're calling for more independence so that they can have no pressure on them when overseeing the electoral process. Also, another thing: Many of the so-called magistrates are also administrative magistrates. They depend in the executive branch of government, so they are not fully independent.

And this is also the problem and one of the points of disagreement between the judges and the regime.

Also, concerning the united front of the opposition, I don't think that parties lose their program or their identities when joining in the united front.

The united front, it's not only for the elections, but the united front wants to call for constitutional reform. And this is the main point of emphasis of the unity of the opposition and in their call for reform. So it's not only a matter of elections, but they agree on certain democratic principles and this is what they want to see.

And al-Ghad did not choose—I don't think al-Ghad chose to be out of this united front. It's very unfortunate that the relation between the Wafd Party leader and the al-Ghad leader are not good.

Mr. GORE. Can I just say, my understanding on the united front is that they have a united front in looking for reform and in looking for a progressive outlook on the future, but each of the parties retains its individualism, retains its own candidates.

Mr. ABAZA. Absolutely.

Mr. GORE. They're not going to run, that is, nobody's running as a candidate as part of the united front. They don't give a united front label.

Mr. ABAZA. Absolutely.

Mr. HAMZAWY. What you said applies to the position of the Muslim Brotherhood as far as they are concerned.

But when it comes to the major parties, which tried and managed to develop this united front, they are coordinating the candidates they are fielding, joint candidates. Each candidate will run according to his or her own party label, but these are going to be considered as joint candidates of the united opposition front. They are called the united opposition candidates.

There is a degree of consensus over broad political objectives which I welcome and which I see as very relevant.

But they are coordinating, they are going to coordinate the candidates and here I see the potential—

Mr. GORE. So on the ballot, they'll have the same label?

Mr. HAMZAWY. On the ballot, yes, they will have joint candidates; they will field joint candidates for the parliamentary election.

And here I see them as losing a chance, an opportunity to get out their respective message. And they have different messages. And this should be conveyed to the voters. Otherwise, the voter doesn't know why to vote for a united opposition candidate and not for the NDP. I mean, if it really doesn't matter, in terms of profiles and preferences, why should he or she vote for an opposition candidate?

This is where I see the disadvantage.

Mr. ABAZA. Why to vote? It's either vote government or vote for reform and change and confidence. This is why to vote. It's not whether they agree on certain principles and to vote for change or to vote for the status quo.

Mr. HAMZAWY. Right. But, if I may continue, this is a crucial issue.

Experiences of democratic transition, if you leave the Arab world aside, and look at Central Europe, Eastern Europe or Latin America or other Asian countries, united fronts where you did have parties acting by transcending ideological and political barriers and differences and trying to portray the political game as a game of government versus opposition, did not lead or did not actually materialize any potential political gain.

What did materialize in substantial political gains was to reach a degree of national consensus on broad objectives and for each party to keep its own platform.

So you cannot go—I mean, to me, these parties are not going to convince Egyptian voters to vote for them if they lobby according to a game of government versus opposition—government as being bad and we are going to do better, simply because Egyptian citizens have a great degree of confidence in state institutions, not in the government.



Here we have to consider the political culture of the state. Egypt's political culture is very much state-driven. Egyptians believe in the neutrality and in the capacity of state institutions to introduce changes and to run their own daily business and socio-economic aspects in a somehow just, good way.

So you cannot compete with this kind of state-driven political culture if you simply portray it as a game of government versus opposition.

I'm just saying, they need their own title. They have to get out their message; convince Egyptians why they should vote for them, as Wafd or Tagammu or as leftists or Nasserites or liberals.

Mr. ABAZA. It's important to coordinate their efforts. If they stay divided, they work in an environment that is not a free environment, and this is the best they could do so that they could unify their efforts for change, for constitutional change, for a real transition to democracy.

The Tagammu that has Marxist roots never claimed to be liberal. The Wafd never claimed to be Marxist. The Nasserites never claimed to be liberal. But they all agree on democratic principles, and they try to manage these parliamentary elections as best as they could.

What's the other alternative? To stay divided as Egyptian opposition? This would not be of any help.

But I agree that each party has to show its platform, and this would be the best-case scenario.

But the reality is that they have to unify their efforts for now.

Mr. GORE. I was also thinking, you know, a lot of united fronts end up in the bush because things get desperate when they fail. But that's for a future time I hope. Or maybe no time.

Mr. GARRETT. Some of these political parties that are in the united front now, they've all campaigned on individual platforms. They all did compete, except for Ayman Nour's party, which is staying separate from this.

So it's not as if they have just appeared on the scene and they've coalesced immediately. But these are historic parties that have competed, and you see where it's gotten them to this point. So they are trying something different.

Mr. GORE. OK, since we have complete unanimity on everything, I'd like to have some questions from the audience.

And if you could please step to the microphone so we can—for the recorder, because this is being transcribed and it will be on the commission Web site—what?—in 12 hours, 10 hours, five hours—but if you could step to the microphone and identify yourself and your organization, please.

QUESTIONER. My name is Mohamed Elshinnawi. I'm a reporter with the Voice of America.

The Arab rulers managed to convince the United States that if free elections are held tomorrow, Islamists will take over. And that makes the United States a little bit nervous on seeing the future of democracy in the Middle East.

Now, having said that, I think, if we are talking about the impact of the Egyptian elections on the region, that could confine us to one element: how to engage the Islamists

in the democratic process without having this fear of Islamic terrorism or fanatics or radicals.

So the question would be, would Egypt allow the Islamists to participate? And would the United States encourage this movement?

On the other aspect, the United States was talking when President Bush said priority in his second term would be for spreading democracy, on replacing desperation and frustration with hope. The other aspect of the Egyptian impact would be what Egypt is providing the young generation in the Egyptian community in terms of hope to replace the frustration that leads to violence.

Mr. GORE. So there's basically two questions, OK. Free elections—will Egypt allow an Islamist party in the conduct of free elections?

Anybody?

Counselor?

Mr. ABOULMAGD. OK. Of course, there's a legal aspect and there's a political aspect.

The legal aspect, the legal reality in Egypt, says that of course they can participate in political life in Egypt. What is not allowed by our laws is the creation of a political party on a religious basis. It does not say Islamist, it says you cannot base the Christian or the Jewish or the Islamic Party of Egypt.

There's a sense of excluding the other, because the majority of Egyptians are Muslims. And by the nature of things, if you say, "This is the Islamic Party," then the other guy or lady is not the Islamic representative.

So that is the legal side. You cannot create a party.

Yes, they can run, as Amr indicated. They will run, and they probably will do well in parliamentary elections. So Islamists do participate in Egyptian political life.

However, it's not only the legal aspect, whether they can run as independents or under another party. The issue is deeper and more complicated and, in fact, unresolved.

As Egyptians—as intellectual Egyptians—we are still grappling with this issue. You have very strong sentiments about this. There's the moral position that you cannot start any democratic process on the premise of excluding any group, particularly one that has a sizable constituency.

And on the other hand, there's a fear of the left in particular in Egypt, like the Tagammu and other left-leaning intellectuals in Egypt, that Islamists would have an undue advantage, so to speak a trump card, in any political debate. They would say, "Islam or the faith says so and so and so," so we're not discussing issues based on merit or logic, but based on faith.

So there is an issue that we are still seriously grappling with. This is a matter that Egyptians need to resolve on their own.

The outside world can maybe contribute one way or the other by opinion, but eventually and ultimately this will only be resolved by honest Egyptians getting together and reaching a common ground on this issue.

Mr. GORE. Well, how do you reconcile this view of not having a religious-based political party with the way that policies are conducted in certain aspects of Egyptian life?

For example, the main university—Al-Azhar—Christians can't attend the school. I mean, if I get my facts correctly, there's been one graduate student in the religion depart-

ment who was a Christian but Christians are forbidden. Only Muslims are allowed to attend the university.

And is that true? Is that not the case?

Mr. HAMZAWY. Al-Azhar University as a university is, is an Islamic institution. It has its own school. So the issue of excluding non-Muslims is the definition of the very identity of this place.

This does not mean that Copts in Egypt do not have their own schools as well. They do not have a university. They do have, related to the church, different religious institutions.

So Al-Azhar is one institution, leading institution, just as other institutions of the Islamic religious spectrum, official spectrum in Egypt is controlled by the state.

And here its not in terms of excluding non-Muslims. And Copt Christians do have their own religious institutions as well.

And the question is more the dynamics of state control, of state hegemony over religious institutions and state instrumentalization of religion and religious discourses for legitimizing its own government policies.

We had the Grand Sheik of Al-Azhar and the Patriarch of the Coptic Church in Egypt recommending to Egyptians to vote for President Mubarak, which was a clear intervention in politics.

The question is far more the hegemony of state over official religious institutions.

Let me just, in a second, get back to what Wael said. I agree, it's a very tough issue, and I agree with Wael's argument that it has to be decided within the local context itself. It's an issue which is extremely sensitive and Egyptians—opposition forces as well as government factions—have to figure out how to deal with a movement which does exist out there and which you cannot marginalize because they exist and they are powerful and they have their own constituencies.

To me, what modern Islamists are looking for is not to establish a party which is called the Party of the Muslim Brothers, they are looking or trying to establish a political party and they have different initiatives as you mentioned and Khairi mentioned, as well. These are initiatives by liberal, moderate Islamists trying to establish modern, civil political parties whose ideological frame of reference is somewhere based in Islamic understanding and perception of politics on society.

And here they make a solid argument that means that, well, this can be compared to any other ideology. But what is the basic issue here is whether they are willing to recognize and to accept the plurality of Egypt's political space without excluding any one of these leftists or liberals or whether they are still reluctant to do so.

I see them as moving in the first direction. Clearly, there are still groups within the Brotherhood which are reluctant to accepting pluralism and recognizing the existence of other political forces, but the bulk of the movement really shifted in the direction of accepting plurality and opening up.

So I do hope that they will not only participate as independents, but that their attempts to legalize authority, somehow affiliated to the movement or to the sector, will be accepted by the Egyptian Government.

But I agree, as well, that it's a local, domestic issue which should not be manipulated or influenced by outsiders, by externals.

Mr. ABAZA. Yes, I fully support what you've mentioned concerning the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamists in general. This is an internal process and, if there is any external impact on the reform in Egypt, it should be support to the general process but not to this group or this party.

So it should be support to a whole process, be it the ruling National Democratic Party, the opposition party, the opposition—but to a process in general, not to talk specifically to this group or that group. And they talk to us, as Egyptians, to include them, consult with them and also to find a way for their political parties.

Ms. BAHGAT. Good morning. My name is Mina Bahgat. I work with Jubilee Campaign USA here.

My question is: Without generalizing, I feel that there is a general sentiment that it is a slow and natural progression, rather than an historic moment, that led to the presidential election.

My concern is that you spoke about the amendments that led to this or allowed this and how that, in 2007, there could be a subtle disenfranchisement due to the 5 percent parliamentary requirement in order to be an official party of opposition, if I'm correct.

My concern is that, from a practical standpoint, you have President Mubarak who's in his mid-70s I believe. And what will happen in 2007? What is the next generation of candidates? Who will be the successor through this amendment?

And that's what my concern is from a democratic standpoint: How will the next successor rise to power? Will it be through a disenfranchisement through this amendment? Was this something that was taken into consideration when the national party passed this amendment?

Just from a practical standpoint, Mubarak will not be around, maybe, in 2007 or 2011, where one of you mentioned him to be president, today, in your comments.

So that's what my concern is: What is the foresight in that sense?

Mr. GARRETT. I would say one of the things that you pick up on when you speak with Egyptians that are both here in this country but also there in Egypt, there is this sense that this is not settled, that there are major changes ahead and that what one sees today is not necessarily what one may see as recently as 2007.

So I'm not sure what any kind of very complex reasoning might have been behind that. Someone else addressed that, but there's also this sense people are really looking at these elections now, they're trying to get into the parliament now, and they're trying to do that with the idea of changing all these things.

Mr. HAMZAWY. Let me add two points, one on the stipulations of the constitutional amendment, of the amendment part 76 of the constitution.

There are two barriers. One barrier starts from 2011, which is exactly the requirement which you mentioned. Each party will have to have at least 5 percent of the seats of the lower house of the Egyptian parliament, of the People's Assembly, to be eligible to field a candidate in the upcoming presidential election of 2011.

As we said, if you look at the current representation of opposition parties in the People's Assembly: extremely minimal. Not a single party will qualify. So here is a real barrier.

The second barrier which ruled out independents was to stipulate that each independent will have to secure 250 endorsing signatures of members of the lower house of

the parliament, of the upper house of the parliament—which is a consultative council—and of municipal council.

If you look at the scene right now, the NDP, the ruling National Democratic Party, dominates all these three institutions by 90-plus majority.

So again, I mean, who is independent, who can secure 250 signatures.

So, yes, these are real barriers. I 100 percent agree with what Tom said. These are issues which are not settled yet. These are issues which are going to be debated and contested in the coming years, which are going to be addressed in the newly elected People's Assembly.

Although the president ruled out the possibility of amending the amendment—well, I have to remind you that the president himself ruled out the possibility of amending the constitution one month before he initiated this amendment.

So this is really a moving thing. So we should not take statements regardless of where they are coming from, the government or opposition, as meaning ultimately reality. It's very much changing.

On the issue of secession, yes, the question will be whether Egypt will really manage to—its political opening will create new dynamics for political succession, or whether we will stick to or get back to older forms of succession which we all knew.

Maybe one is more or less to be ruled out, which is to get representatives of the military establishment to be the president. This is the only positive aspect of the amendment: It ruled out the possibility of military playing a dominant role in eliminating candidates for the presidency.

Whether we will shift to what's widely debated to a form of Syrian-driven experience or not, I guess these are challenges which will have to be addressed by government forces and by opposition forces as well. But we have to wait and see what will come out.

Mr. ABOULMAGD. Just a quick comment on that.

Of course, I think we're all in agreement with Tom that things between now and 2006 will be very different.

There's still talk about, as Amr mentioned, amending the amendment. There's talk about reopening the entire constitution. There's talk about Article 77 and successive terms for presidents. A lot of things are on the table. People within the NDP have repeatedly insisted from day one, when the president announced Article 76 amendment, that this will not be the last. There are other issues that are being considered after the elections.

And, in fact, if we all recall correctly, there was even an inclination to postpone the entire process until after the elections, but that was not followed.

On the issue of Article 76, I'll differ slightly with Amr on those two issues. The 250-endorsement requirement for independent candidates, nonparty candidates, in the eyes of many is restrictive and very difficult to obtain. I've heard other people, particularly from the party scene, grateful and hoping for more.

If you had had no restrictions on independents, I think that may have been the end of party life in Egypt—some charismatic personality. The system had led to a weakening of political parties. It confined their space for many, many years. And all of a sudden you're opening it up for independents, maybe a charismatic Islamist is the solution type. Or I'm not only using that example, but just a charismatic fellow would come along and would demolish all those political parties.

In fact, what happened this election was that a gentleman who has no political party did twice as well as the largest, oldest political party in Egypt. So party politics needed that strengthening—call it a protective measure. I hope it's a temporary protective measure until the parties are in better shape.

Also, on the 5 percent, there's two factors here, two issues. First of all, there are two parliamentary elections between today and the next presidential election. So between just the past election and the coming one there are two parliamentary elections.

In most countries that follow the parliamentary system, you need 50 percent in order to form a government.

I think requiring the leader of a party that wants to rule the nation to become president of the land and requiring him to have 5 percent of the support of the people and 5 percent of the districts of the nation is not very restrictive.

It does look restrictive when you look at the current picture, where the NDP—nobody has 5 percent because a lot of people boycotted the past elections and were apathetic. That's behind us now.

I think, in the new environment, any serious, legitimate party in Egypt, over two coming elections, should be in a position to obtain 5 percent. If they don't, I think there's some questions about their eligibility to hold the presidency.

I'm just putting it into a little bit of perspective. I'm not denying that they may appear a little restrictive. But there's a little bit of context there. The last point—I'm sorry, because the first gentleman addressed the issue of economic issues. What about hope? What is being done to give hope?

I didn't want that to go uncommented upon. The Government of Egypt has been accused of using economic reforms and other issues as an excuse not to introduce political reforms.

It was intentional that I did not refer once to any of the economic reforms that are taking place in Egypt. We are undergoing significant economic reforms. Taxes have been cut across the board. Custom duties—there's a complete overhaul of the customs law, of the tax code.

I could go on and on. I could provide specific documentation. It is well known and well documented and highly praised by many circles.

The thing is that this is, again, a gradual process. But things are starting to look up in Egypt. There was a period of stagnation in the mid-90s because of the slowness of the reform program. Now, a lot of courageous measures—in fact, some people think too-forward-looking measures have been taken, too fast for some people and there are some social sacrifices being made.

But at the end of the day, economic recovery and economic growth in Egypt is going well, at least in the past, I'd say, I'd say 18 to 24 months.

Mr. ABAZA. Concerning the issue of the 5 percent of the People's Assembly to be able to have a candidate, this is a matter that is of a lot of concern for the opposition.

Prior to the constitutional amendment that allowed for a multi-presidential candidate election, the Egyptian parliament used to choose the sole candidate for the presidential election with a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority.

And from an opposition standpoint, that was one of the main reasons for a lot of irregularities in parliamentary elections. And to secure a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority for the ruling party

so that the ruling party could choose the candidate that would go into a referendum so that guaranteed President Mubarak.

Now, with the constitutional amendment, parties are allowed to have candidates only if they have 5 percent of the parliament, which means that, again, there are fears that the regime would interfere in the elections and we would have the irregularities, and only the parties who don't have any credible candidates that could challenge the incumbent president would be allowed to have the 5 percent.

And we would enter again into the same vicious circle of rigging parliamentary elections so that we can secure presidential elections that would endorse the NDP candidate and would have the same thing. And any serious contender would not get the required 5 percent. So there is a fear.

That's why some people in the opposition think that there is a change in the rules but the essence could be the same. That's why the debate is open and we hope that there will be more reform and part of the fear of the opposition would—

Mr. HAMZAWY. And let me answer just one point on the issue.

I find it difficult to regard these two barriers as protective measures out of one major reason, which is what's really needed in the Egyptian political scene is to get more diversity, to get the political space better populated.

So in a country which is undergoing a transitional state, protective measures do not make as much sense as in stable democracies like Germany, for example, where you have similar stipulations just to minimize the potential of right-wingers, of radicals, neo-Nazis to be represented in the national parliament or in local parliament.

In Egypt, you have a different issue. It's not an issue of protecting political parties. You have to open up, to get better representation of political parties, and you have to allow independents to participate. You cannot make it nearly impossible for them to run by saying 250. Reflecting on political realities, current political realities, this needs to be ruled out.

My second issue, on economic reforms—and I agree with Wael that there are serious economic reforms and the government is performing far better when compared to the 1980s, 1990s in the last couple of years.

However, in terms of frustration and hope, we know that economic reform takes time to realize in better life conditions for the population.

So to me, as a source of hope or of minimizing frustration, apathy is purely political, because economic reforms will take time to materialize out there in improvements, in terms of life conditions.

So the government has to send, as a leading, the NDP has to send signals to the Egyptian electorate by empowering other opposition parties, by minimizing irregularities, by allowing domestic monitors and discussing the issue of international monitors.

Because we are not abnormal: Egypt participates, Egypt monitors elections outside Egypt. So how come we are very restrictive when it comes to this issue?

And I disagree slightly with Wael on opposition parties, because they shifted their positions as well. I mean, now they are less fearful or less—they are moving.

So the scene is moving and I guess should be addressed. We have to address all matters which might lead to a normalization of the Egyptian environment as a gradually transforming political scene, which is opening up to integrate relevant forces.

So I guess this is the basic potential source of hope for Egyptians in the coming years.

QUESTIONER. Tom Lewis from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

This has been addressed, kind of, tangentially, but I'd like to ask about the issue of middle class and their low turnout in the election.

We've had a number of factors discussed, from political apathy toward political cultural, through the state reform, or perhaps the political parties not getting out a message that would draw the middle class in.

The traditional narrative has been that the middle class is where the push for democracy would start. Whether that's correct or not is another matter.

But from the perspective of someone who might want increased democratization in Egypt, should this be a matter of concern? Or perhaps a better question, of those factors, what do you think was more determinative, without generalization, in why the middle class didn't get involved?

Mr. GARRETT. As someone, I don't remember who it was, mentioned earlier, voter registration was only provided for in the last few months of the year. And so in the last few months of last year, people expected in 2005 to vote in a referendum on the president: yes, no; that's all. And so when President Mubarak announced the change and announced the opening of multi-candidate elections, it was too late.

And as people did become excited about voting, or did begin to discuss these things, it was a moot point for them, because voter registration was closed down for these people who were traditionally not engaged in the political process of referendum.

So that was one of the issues. I think very clearly more people might have participated if they had know this was what was coming ahead for them the first time to get to something like this.

So I think there was that structural issue that it was very unfortunate that that occurred.

Mr. HAMZAWY. I agree with Tom.

And maybe one more issue which was relevant in terms of analyzing why Egypt's middle class did not participate or participated less as compared to Egyptians in rural areas is, first of all, to see how the government, how the NDP managed to mobilize support for President Mubarak in rural areas, which was very much based on tactics which we have known throughout the last decade of using a, sort of, patronage system, patrimonial system to mobilize support in rural areas.

So the indication that rural areas voted better was due to these NDP government tactics. However, the middle class did not participate and, to me, they are two crucial explanations from Tom said.

The first one's the NDP—and let us, for a second, leave the NDP and the government aside. Other opposition contenders did not appeal to anyone. And this is why when I get back to the issue of articulating a platform to get out your message.

Egypt's middle class has a clear Coptic component—Coptic families in urban centers and in rural areas—and these were not addressed by anyone of the contenders because even al-Wafd, which traditionally is a liberal—al-Wafd, which traditionally has the legacy of being the party of secular Egyptian nationalists, the party which stood up for universal



principles of separation between religion and politics, describing and perceiving religion as a private matter, which should not be relevant to the public good.

This party did not rediscover its legacy and did not reach out to Coptic families who are in Egypt's middle class to mobilize their support.

The same applies to other segments of the Egyptian middle class, be it mid-career professionals or university professors or government employees.

All of them were not addressed by this party, because opposition parties of contenders were preoccupied—Ayman Nour and Numan Gumaa with criticizing Mubarak's platform—and it wasted all this time describing potential political reform measures, which are less accessible to the electorate when compared to socioeconomic issues.

What really matters is to get parties to develop platforms which tackle socioeconomic issues, as well, to reach out to the Egyptian middle class.

Otherwise voters always act and vote or not vote in the same way, favoring state security and stability over political change, chaos, social disorder and deteriorating conditions.

Mr. ABOULMAGD. Quick comment. I will concede—I accept all of the explanations given. I just want to challenge the question itself about the figure.

The United States of America, after 40-plus presidential elections over two centuries, and you have somewhere close to 50-something percent—hovering around the figure—where there's trust in the process, where you know that your vote does make a difference, where you know that your taxes may go up or down, depending on it, where so many things are influenced and affected by it, you still have around 50 percent.

Mr. GORE. There are parts of the country, in fact, if you go across the river where you have a 90-percent turnout in Falls Church.

Mr. ABOULMAGD. But that's not, I think—

Mr. GORE. Well, I'm just pointing out. It's just, we have areas where it's pretty high—

Mr. ABOULMAGD. Yes. My point is that, where everything is going for it, still, some people, do not go out to vote. That's why, when I listed the three issues of voter apathy, lack of competition—there was a sense that things are not going to change. You know, President Mubarak is going to win.

And there was a boycott by some of the parties. So, I think when you reverse those, we might get a little bit closer to better percentages, a little bit closer.

And, again, that's why I started my comments by indicating these were our very, very first open elections. You need to really get into the details to understand what a first presidential election means, that everything is new, everything is being experimented with and nothing is for certain yet.

So it will take us a couple of cycles, hopefully, to reach somewhere close to your 70 or 90 percent.

Mr. GORE. By the way, I'm a strong advocate of having the right not to vote, just so you understand that. [Laughter.]

Mr. ABAZA. Just a small comment: I would say, let's wait and see what the middle class will do in Egypt if there is a genuine reform process. In only a very few months, the political scene in Egypt completely changed—not completely changed, but it evolved in a very positive way.

There is less apathy than before. And so we have to wait and see if there is a genuine reform and we will see with the middle class. And I also agree that political participation in rural areas is more important. But also interest in politics is more important.

I mean, from our party's point of view, the Wafd Party, we think also that political participation in rural areas is much more important than urban area and there is a misconception concerning that. Some people say illiterate people are not ready for democracy. That's not true; they have common sense and they have very excellent debates and political rallies and I think there is a lot of hope.

Mr. GORE. Well, we're about to run out of time, so I'm going to exercise my prerogative to ask one more question—actually, two more questions.

When is the registration period for this year? We're in October. So is it the month of December?

Mr. ABOULMAGD. I'm not 100 percent sure. I know that, in the past, it's been November, December. The dates, actually, for the election are 9, 20 and 1 December. Three days.

Mr. GORE. Well, 9, 14—

Mr. ABAZA. It takes 5 months to process once you're registered.

Mr. GORE. It takes 5 months to process?

Mr. ABAZA. Yes.

Mr. GORE. OK, but you register in November, December? So what plans do the political parties have to get people registered in the next two months so that they're available for the next election? It seems to me that that's really key.

It's the old get-out-the-vote routine. You've got to get them down and get them registered so that you can turn them out to vote.

Mr. ABAZA. I think now it's much more important than before, and sometimes the party membership does not reflect the amount of votes that they get. Sometimes party members don't even go and bother to vote.

But now things have changed and I think that they are much more practical steps so that party supporters would get actual numbers.

Mr. GORE. Well, I'm sure Tom can give you a lot of advice on how to get people registered to vote, because it's a key component.

I want to thank all of you for being here and for your participation, and I hope that we all realize that there's a real opportunity in Egypt, so stay tuned.

[Whereupon the briefing ended at 12:10 p.m.]





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