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EGYPT'S NEW PRESIDENT: "I WILL NOT SLEEP AND NEITHER WILL YOU. WE MUST WORK, NIGHT AND DAY, WITHOUT REST."¹

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Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, anointed president by 97 percent of the voters in May 2014, addresses Egyptians as their elder brother, insisting on correcting their wayward behavior. He'll make sure that they get up at 5 a.m. so they can work hard and he'll ensure that they adhere to 'correct' Islamic practices so they stop harassing women. He will rein in consumption by installing energy-efficient light bulbs in every home, and he insists that Egyptians walk or bicycle to work. (He has even calculated exactly how much they will save by not buying fuel for their cars.) Above all, he prioritizes security – the war against terror – which requires national unity and state power. Security trumps the right to protest and the need for higher wages.

With executive and legislative power concentrated in the presidency until the House of Representatives is elected next autumn, his compliant cabinet rushes to meet his demands. Indeed, he compelled the ministers to take the oath of office at 7 a.m. on June 17 and then chaired the first cabinet meeting, which lasted for seven hours. As El-Sisi rises by 5 a.m. for dawn prayers, he expects government officials to be at work by 7 a.m. and for the ministries to function 24/7.

El-Sisi's expansive love-for-the-people is tempered by his insistence on discipline, efficiency and productivity, as befits a man who was highly self-disciplined as a child and entered the military academy at age fifteen. To the president, "all Egypt should be like the army,"² his model institution. Impatient with the poorly performing civilian bureaucracy, he places military officers in the ministries to supervise the disbursement of funds from Gulf states and ensure quick action. And he won't hesitate to use the armed forces to implement projects, if the responsible ministry is too slow. He has bolstered Egypt's highly centralized governing systems, not only continuing to appoint all the governors but also decreeing that he will appoint the presidents and deans of all the public universities.

Given the upheavals in Egypt in the past three-and-a-half years, many yearn for a strong leader, hoping that he will put the country back on course. However, El-Sisi is careful to not raise expectations. He did not offer the miraculous 100-day plan that former President Mohamed Morsi foolishly declared. Rather, El-Sisi makes clear that the next two years will be difficult for everyone and even says that, given the dire socio-economic conditions, a whole generation will suffer. It will be their children and grandchildren who will prosper. This long-term perspective sometimes slides into Mubarak-like warnings that it will take years to build democracy, as the people are not yet ready. Thus, in the short-run, public demonstrations must be prohibited, in line with the November 2013 Protest Law. Egypt's serious security problems in Sinai and the uncertainties in the Nile Valley, where improvised bombs

¹ David D. Kirkpatrick, "Egypt's New Strongman, Sisi Knows Best," *The New York Times*, May 25, 2014.

² *Egyptian Chronicles*, May 9, 2014, <http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/>

target policemen and sometimes harm civilians, justify limiting access to public space and reinforcing governmental power.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL IMPERATIVE

El-Sisi stresses that large scale state-led projects will modernize the economy, increase employment, and provide vital infrastructure and services. This spring, the engineering department of the armed forces drafted a 300-page program, heavily focused on increasing access to electricity, fuel and safe transportation. El-Sisi also dusted off the 1985 plan authored by veteran arid-lands expert Farouk al-Baz to build cities in the desert, which El-Sisi expanded into a \$140 billion project to build 48 cities, largely powered by solar energy. And he consulted the head of the World Economic Forum as well as Saudi hotel and media magnate Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, whom Mubarak had involved in the failed agricultural project in Toshka, west of Aswan. Most importantly, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – seeking to shift from cash payments and petrol bailouts to project-based assistance – hired Strategy& (formerly Booz Allen) and Lazard financial services firm to work with officials in the Egyptian central bank and government ministries to craft a coherent development program. This will prepare for a Saudi-hosted donors' conference in December, after which aid can be solicited on a bilateral and multilateral basis, including from the International Monetary Fund. El-Sisi hopes that this systematic approach will enable Egypt to stand on its feet, in the long run, and not rely on handouts from the Gulf states: “We don't see this [reliance] as a good thing, frankly, and hope it ends as soon as possible.”³

The cabinet contains seasoned technocrats, who seek to develop solar energy projects, promote small-and-medium-enterprise (SME) investment, and complete Mubarak-era master plans, such as “Cairo 2050” and “Egypt 2052,” even though those plans created luxury gated communities and high-end business complexes that exacerbated social divisions. Although the ministries will be heavily involved in planning, El-Sisi may steer most contracts to the armed forces. Already, nearly all the Gulf-funded projects are being carried out by the military (often using conscript labor), including \$1 billion from the UAE to repair and build bridges, tunnels, train level crossings, and housing throughout Egypt as well as projects along the Suez Canal. The military will implement the \$40 billion agreement with UAE's Arabtec Holding Company to construct a million housing units and will handle UAE-funded projects for drinking water, sanitation and electricity for a hundred schools and almost as many health units.

El-Sisi also focused on the immediate fiscal crisis. A week before the start of the fiscal year on July 1, he rejected the cabinet's draft budget for FY 2014-2015 – a budget that would have been the largest in Egypt's history. He compelled the cabinet to cut expenditures by \$4 billion so as to reduce the enormous deficit, increase gas and electricity prices, and reform the tax system. These were politically risky moves, which the Interior Ministry wanted to delay in order to avoid protests. But El-Sisi recognized that he must act quickly, capitalizing on his popularity. Pointing out that subsidy reforms were decades overdue, El-Sisi framed the changes as essential to the effort by the “war cabinet” to set Egypt on the “correct” path, prevent Egypt from “drowning” in its \$420 billion debt, and fulfill the public's trust that he would save the country. He called on the public to “work with me” in this effort to fix the economy. To underline the dire situation, the president stated bluntly: “the only constant source of foreign currency we have now is the Suez Canal.”⁴ This means, for example, that without setting prices at a level that covers the cost of oil and gas extraction and refining, no one will invest in the petroleum sector and the Oil Ministry cannot repay the \$6 billion it owes international companies.

In addition, sales tax on cigarettes was increased by 50 per cent, on beer by 200 per cent and on wine and spirits by 150 per cent. Announced to the public as changes that would impact the wealthy more than the poor, the government also hoped that the inflationary impact would be brief. Nonetheless, the up-to-78 per cent increase in gasoline, diesel, benzene, and natural gas prices for individuals and industries immediately hit the poor and the lower middle class, who rely on cheap mini-vans for transportation. People braced for sharp increases in the prices of food and industrial goods.

³ Stephen Adler and Richard Mabry, “Egypt's Sisi asks for U.S. help in fighting terrorism,” Reuters, May 15, 2014, www.reuters.com/article.2014/05/15/us-egypt-sisi.

⁴ Quoted in “Egypt's El-Sisi asks Egyptians to ‘work with him’ as energy prices increase,” *Ahram Online*, July 6, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News105699.aspx>.

El-Sisi conceded that he could not protect citizens from price increases in the private sector, but the military spokesman pledged to sell food at low prices in army-owned outlets and provide military buses to augment civilian routes. Other ministers promised to expand the range of food items offered cheaply through the new ration card system as well as increase the number of public buses and metro cars. El-Sisi also alerted the public that subsidies would end entirely within five years. Within hours, El-Sisi's supporters mobilized in support – proof that the president has the political muscle to transform the subsidy structure and start to rein in debt, actions that none of his predecessors dared to attempt.

The cabinet simultaneously announced a capital gains tax on profits and dividends as well as plans to reform the property tax and promulgate a new valued added tax (VAT) on consumer items. The capital gains tax, which should add \$1.4 billion to government coffers, was long anticipated and did not cause serious pressure on the stock market. However, investors remain uncertain about the consistency of the rule of law and fear politicized actions against businesses. For example, there was shock when the government seized the Seoudi supermarket chain based on claims (that had been dismissed by the courts in 2007) that it was affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, and anxiety about the on-again-off-again tax evasion case against Nassif Sawiris, whose company is the largest employer in Egypt. Indeed, the millionaire Sawiris brothers – who had welcomed the ouster of Morsi last July – now express concern about “the oppression of innocents”⁵ and the willingness of El-Sisi to be “subject to the supervision of the people” rather than “bring us back to the much dreaded past and dictatorship.”⁶

CONSTRUCTING PUBLIC SPACE

The president's decision to appoint presidents and deans of universities himself, mentioned above, seems to be “part of a much larger effort to systematically close down the public sphere” in the words of scholar Khaled Fahmy.⁷ The abrupt change in university governance undermines the self-governing system that was established after the 2011 revolution. Presidents and deans will now be beholden to El-Sisi, not to their academic colleagues. Given the non-stop protests by Students Against the Coup during the past academic year and the presence of dissident professors, this measure risks restoring the security controls and limitations on free speech that were pervasive under Mubarak.

El-Sisi seeks discipline in the work place. He calls on workers to restrain their demands and tells teachers and doctors to “sacrifice for Egypt's sake,”⁸ as though it is unpatriotic to object to the miserable conditions in the educational and health sectors. Although the budget does not fund in-service training of teachers and doctors or enhance specialized medical services, the government penalizes poor-performing professionals and accuses hospital directors of negligence if their specialized medical units are not functioning.

The emphasis on punishment and centralized control also stifles scientific inquiry, which could exacerbate the already alarming brain drain. Contrast the teenage scientist who chose exile over being terrorized by the security forces with the armed forces' announcement of a miraculous Complete Cure Device (CCD), hailed as proof that the military can solve all problems:

Seventeen-year-old Abdullah Assem, a high school student from Assiut, won an award to attend the world's premier Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) in Los Angeles this May, where he would present his research on quadriplegics' use of eye glasses and motion sensors to interact with computers. But the Interior Ministry sought to stop him, based on his blogs that criticized the killing of civilians during the past year. He was arrested and charged with creating a terrorist cell, burning police vehicles, and attacking a government building. A public outcry led to his release on bail, but Assem feared that he would be rearrested when he returned home. He reluctantly sought political asylum in the United States, writing on his Facebook page: “I am not happy... I wish to live in Assiut among my people. I wanted to serve my country.”⁹ A senior scholar who fled Egypt in January

⁵ Sameh Sawiris, “Repression, poor laws deter investment in Egypt – tycoon Sawiris,” *Ahram Online*, July 1, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org/News/105191.aspx>.

⁶ Naguib Sawiris, “Sawiris backs El-Sisi for Egypt's Presidency,” *Ahram Online*, February 12, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org/News/94099.aspx>.

⁷ Chair of the history department, The American University in Cairo, quoted in *al-Fanar Media*, June 27, 2014, <http://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2014/06/egyptian-president-appoint-key-university-administrators>.

⁸ Quoted in *Al-Fanar Media*, June 8, 2014, <http://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2014/06/egypt-failure-privatizing-education>.

⁹ “Abdullah Assem: He is an Human After All,” *Egyptian Chronicles*, May 29, 2014, <http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/>.

lamented that Assem's case was not unique: "This regime is stifling and killing [scholars'] skills and talents... Many young Egyptians are being targeted."¹⁰

Meanwhile, El-Sisi applauded the announcement by a fraudulent doctor that pointing a metal rod – dubbed the Complete Cure Device (CCD) – at a patient could detect and cure HIV/AIDs, Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), cancer, and other viruses. Scientists who debunked this claim were called traitors by the uber-nationalist media. CCD raised huge expectations among the nearly ten million HCV sufferers in Egypt; 70,000 quickly applied for treatment. But the military research team that took over the project scaled back expectations. At a press conference on June 28 they not only stated that they needed more time for tests but conceded that the CCD could not cure liver fibrosis and late stage HCV, and did not mention HIV/AIDS and other diseases.¹¹ Their statement that patients must also take a pill raised suspicions that the pill would provide the cure, not the CCD. Indeed, the Ministry of Health had just announced the purchase of Sovaldi (an FDA-approved treatment for HCV) at a 99 percent discount.¹² This bizarre sequence of events fits the pattern of rulers who announce grand initiatives that either have disastrous results or must be retracted. It contrasts starkly with the stifling of the creativity of a young scientist, who could have contributed to the knowledge-based economy that El-Sisi seeks.

Abdullah Assem was not the only blogger to run afoul of the security establishment.¹³ Security forces arrest many people after targeting their phone calls, Facebook pages and tweets, and have closed 250 websites that they claim incited violence against the police and military. Moreover, even though the new constitution guarantees the right to privacy, the Interior Ministry has issued a request for proposal (RFP) for a Social Networks Security Hazard Monitoring System that will access social media written in multiple forms of written Arabic. Although the ministry claims to target only security threats and criminal activity, the RFP casts a much wider net: the spreading of "destructive ideas" such as "sarcasm; using inappropriate words; calling for the departure of societal pillars; insulting religion, public morality and political stability;"¹⁴ pornography; and calling for anti-state tactics such as illegal demonstrations, strikes and sit-ins. The ministry wants to profile any and all users, including their connections with other people, thereby eliminating all space for self-expression and dissent.

"Insulting religion" is already grounds for arrest. Although the constitution proclaims that "freedom of religion is absolute," security forces seek to root out 'deviant' practices like atheism. Alber Saber, creator of the "Egyptian Atheists" Facebook page, was charged with defaming both Islam and Christianity – and soon after fled abroad. When some young people appeared on TV to proclaim themselves atheist, the Youth Ministry and Al-Azhar announced a campaign to "confront and abolish" atheism¹⁵ because it threatens Egypt's national unity, and the Interior Ministry set up a crime unit to troll Facebook accounts in order to find atheists to arrest. This conforms to the pattern of attacking anyone who differs from state-defined Sunni beliefs. The government is enforcing regulations that place mosques under the control of the Ministry of Endowments, and ban any other mosques and non-certified preachers. Al-Azhar limits Friday sermons to themes that unify people and promote morality, such as love of the homeland, rationalization of consumption, good manners, and condemning sexual harassment. The current focus on preventing preachers from using their sermons for political purposes wins widespread public

¹⁰ Emad Shahin, professor at The American University in Cairo, quoted in Jennifer Medina and Ian Lovett, "Egyptian, 17, Seeks Asylum After Traveling to Science Fair," *The New York Times*, May 22, 2014; also Medina, "'Path to an Asylum Request, from Egypt Jail to California Fair," *The New York Times*, May 23.

¹¹ Wael Nawara, "Egypt's 'kofta' scandal sign of missing checks, balances" *al-Monitor*, June 30, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/egypt-cure-aids-device>; "Time is Running Out," <http://mofasa.net/mode/2836>, July 1, 2014.

¹² "Egyptian Army unlikely to survive the moment of truth," *Egypt Independent*, June 24, 2014, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/2014/06/egypt-parliament-elections-kofta-hiv-army-treatment.html>.

¹³ See Amr Khalifa, "Prisoner 41,138," *Daily News Egypt*, July 2, 2014, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/07/02/prisoner-41138/> for details on the arrest of a female blogger from her home at 3 a.m. She was beaten severely during multiple interrogations over four weeks, and then dumped on a desert road.

¹⁴ The government specifies targeting Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, local and international online forums, news websites, and such mobile phone applications as Viber, Whatsapp, and Instagram. Colin Dailed, "Wanted: Egyptian Police on the Hunt for Sophisticated Surveillance Tool," <http://mashable.com/2014/06/21/egyptian-social-media-monitoring-first/>; "Egypt's interior minister says social media surveillance no threat to liberty," *Ahram Online*, June 2, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/102771.aspx>; Amnesty International, "Egypt's plan for surveillance of social media an attack on privacy and freedom," June 5, 2014: <http://www.amnesty.org/au/news/comments/34737/>. Seven foreign companies have submitted proposals.

¹⁵ "Govt announces campaign to save youth from atheism," *Mada Masr*, June 19, 2014, <http://www.madamasr.com//content/govt-announces-campaign-save-youth-atheism>.

support; in the long run, it prevents a diversity of religious expression from flourishing.

El-Sisi is the first president to have denounced sexual harassment and assault, in the wake of attacks on women while they celebrated his electoral victory in Tahrir Square. He even visited a victim in the hospital and directed interim president Adly Mansour to pass a strongly worded law on his last day in office. El-Sisi also ordered the new government to develop a multi-dimensional plan to counter this widespread phenomenon. But he cloaked his concern in a combination of paternalistic language – stating that these acts go “against gallantry, magnanimity and manhood” – and nationalist language, as these attacks violate Egypt’s honor.¹⁶ And yet El-Sisi criticized the man who had video’d the attack on the grounds that the video defames Egypt. And he did not address sexual violence by the armed forces and the police: the virginity tests on detainees on March 9, 2011, which he had justified when he headed military intelligence and which are now performed against Brotherhood detainees; the attacks by paratroopers on female demonstrators in December 2011; the ripping of women’s clothes during demonstrations by police-funded thugs (*beltaguis*); the assaults on female detainees by Central Security forces;¹⁷ and the sodomizing of male detainees in police stations. Security sector reform – rather than moralizing about peoples’ behavior – is essential in order to contain and delegitimize such attacks.

The constricting of public space is evident not only in the security controls over the social media and the paternalistic approach to religion and behavior in the streets. The press and television have also been tamed and utilized to promote state interests. Editors and broadcasters eagerly support state policies, rather than hold the state to account, in line with El-Sisi’s plea: “We need to form, in the conscience of citizens, the idea that Egypt is the big family that everyone must protect. The nation...needs the media to work on this because, if Egypt falls, it will not come back.”¹⁸ In addition, Islamist media are closed, journalists are beaten or arrested when they cover protests, the Interior Ministry intervenes to block TV programs that criticize the police, outspoken TV hosts (such as Reem Maged) are silenced, and independent intellectuals (such as Belal Fadl and Alaa al-Aswany) have stopped writing op-eds in supposedly independent newspapers. Aswany’s final column in *al-Masry al-Youm* criticized both the president and the Protest Law. He then stated:

“Different views are no longer allowed: Only one view, one thought, and one talk.... It is no longer acceptable to say the truth but to praise only. President el-Sisi demands us to have manners. Is it manners to accuse an Egyptian citizen of treason because he has an opinion different from the president’s opinion?”¹⁹

By then, the government had silenced Egypt’s most famous satirist, Bassam Youssef. His biting criticism of Morsi had delighted viewers, but criticism of state institutions is no longer tolerated. And El-Sisi made it clear that he will not tolerate “offensive” criticism.²⁰ Apparently the prime minister even weighed in, threatening to cancel the broadcasting contract of the private channel if Youssef’s program continued.²¹

And then there were the notorious charges against al-Jazeera staff, which culminated in seven-year sentences against Australian Peter Greste and Egyptian-Canadian Fadel Fahmy for allegedly coordinating with the Brotherhood to defame Egypt, with an additional three years for cameraman Baher Mohamed because he possessed “unlicensed ammunition.”²² Angry at Qatar for supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and calling July 3 a coup, many Egyptians focused their fury on its outspoken television station. While all reporters were at risk when they reported

¹⁶ “El-Sisi calls for action on sexual assault,” *Ahram Online*, June 10, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/1034354.aspx> and “El-Sisi visits Tahrir sexual assault victim,” *Ahram Online*, June 11, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/103444.aspx>.

¹⁷ For example, the gang rape of a nineteen-year-old in a Central Security Camp reported by Ayah Aman, “Female prisoners in Egypt suffer rampant abuse,” *al-Monitor*, June 30, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/06/egypt-female-detainees-abuse-harassment-prison.html>. For a sophisticated analysis of harassment, see Vickie Langohr, “New President, Old Pattern of Sexual Violence in Egypt,” Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), July 7, 2014: <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero070714>

¹⁸ Asma Alsharif and Yasmine Saleh, “Journalists take care of the censorship as Sisi poised to rule,” Reuters, May 25, 2014.

¹⁹ Egyptian Chronicles, June 25, 2014, <http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/>.

²⁰ David D. Kirkpatrick and Mayy El Sheikh, “Citing Pressure and Threats, Egypt’s Answer to Joan Stewart Calls It Quits,” *The New York Times*, June 3, 2014; “Bassem Youssef program will not be returning to TV as planned,” *Ahram Online*, May 27, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/102357.aspx>.

²¹ Mahmoud Salem, “Egypt’s Kangaroo Courts,” *al-Monitor*, June 22, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/06/egypt-protest-sentence-law-sisi-mehleb-journalists-verdict.html>.

²² The ‘ammunition’ consisted of a spent bullet casing that he had picked up at a demonstration and kept as a souvenir.

on demonstrations, al-Jazeera cameramen and reporters were particularly targeted.²³ The prosecution did not provide any tangible evidence to support the charges, but evidence wasn't needed, as the judiciary's purpose was political – to punish Qatar, serve as an outlet for judges' deep hatred of the Brotherhood, and intimidate the press. As an astute observer commented, the case had nothing to do with justice or security; rather, the security forces and judiciary showed that they could uphold “absurd charges” throughout a “Kafkaesque legal process” that played to the “paranoid xenophobic nationalism the regime has been stoking.”²⁴ Indeed, the international outcry against the sentences as “chilling, draconian”²⁵ and the call for the journalists to be pardoned enhanced that xenophobia, as was evident in the foreign ministry's denunciation of foreign interference and its rejection of criticism of the fairness of the judicial ruling.²⁶

At first, El-Sisi adhered to the mantra that the judiciary was above reproach. He insisted that he would not issue pardons: He would not interfere in a judicial ruling “even if others do not understand the verdicts.”²⁷ He has also rejected interfering in rulings that condemned hundreds of Muslim Brothers to death and that condemned activists who challenged the Protest Law to multi-year sentences. This narrow approach ignored the roles of the press and the public in pursuing the much-vaunted-roadmap towards democracy. It also ignored the legal travesty of issuing death sentences after trials that lasted barely two hours, with no opportunity for lawyers to mount a defense.

However, in the Al Jazeera case, officials began to suggest that pardons might be considered, once the appeals process was exhausted. And suddenly El-Sisi stated to a gathering of Egyptian editor-in-chiefs that he wished the journalists had never been tried: “Sentencing of several journalists had a very negative effect, and we had nothing to do with it. I wish they were deported after their arrest, instead of being put on trial.”²⁸ This dangerously differentiated between the foreigners and Egyptians on trial, but also hinted that he questioned the validity of the charges against them and fairness of the judicial proceedings. However, if he were to pardon them before the appeals process is exhausted, that could set him on a collision course with the powerful judicial institution – a conflict that he may not want to promote at present, given his many other challenges, unless he is prepared for engineering serious judicial reform. And, to the public – fed a steady diet of xenophobia during the past year – it could make him appear weak before international pressure, tarnishing his super-hero image.

Just before the Aljazeera verdict was issued, El-Sisi formed a Supreme Committee for Legislative Reform, chaired by the prime minister and tasked with reviewing current laws to ensure that they comply with the 2014 constitution. While its primary intent is to create a legislative environment that stimulates economic growth, it is possible that the committee will review and modify the Protest Law, even if it does not address reform of the security sector. Political parties and NGOs clamor to amend or cancel that draconian law, arguing that it violates the new constitution, criminalizes speech, and damages Egypt's reputation. Even outgoing President Mansour had wanted El-Sisi to amnesty young people who were arrested under the protest law. Although, El-Sisi's discourse has focused on security rather reopening public avenues of expression, he recently moderated his language, calling for improving

²³ AlJazeera correspondents targeted also included Mohamed Badr, arrested while filming a protest in Ramses Square on July 15, 2013, and Abdallah al-Sham, arrested while covering the dispersal of the Raba'a al-Adawiya sit-in on August 14, 2013. Badr was found innocent and al-Shami is out on bail after a long hunger strike.

²⁴ Andrea Teti, “Egypt's Government by Baltaga,” MERIP, July 3, 2014; <http://www.merip.org/egypts-government-baltaga>

²⁵ See the full text of US Secretary of State John Kerry's statement in *The Washington Post*, June 23, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/06/23/john-kerry-egypts-conviction>; notable analyses include Patrick Kingsley, “Al-Jazeera journalists jailed for seven years in Egypt,” *The Guardian*, June 23, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/23/al-jazeera-journalists-jailed-seven-years-egypt>, and Waleed Aly, “Jailing of Peter Grete reveals principles are the first casualty in the war on terror,” *The Age* (Melbourne, Australia), June 27, 2014, <http://www.theage.com.au/comment/jailing-of-peter-greste-in-egypt-reveals-principles-are-the-first-casualty-in-the-war-on-terror-20140626-zsmly.html>.

²⁶ “Egyptian ambassadors prepare for backlash over AlJazeera verdict,” *Ahram Online*, June 23, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/104561.aspx>.

²⁷ Speech at a commencement at a military academy, “El-Sisi says will donate 50% of his salary and wealth to Egypt's economy,” *Ahram Online*, June 24, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/104625.aspx>.

²⁸ “Sisi regret over Egypt Jazeera jailings encourages family,” Agence France Presse (AFP)/*Egypt Independent*, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/2437368>, and “Sisi: Egypt should have deported journalists,” AlJazeera, July 7, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/sisi-should-deported-journalists>.

rights and freedoms and ameliorating conditions in prisons.²⁹

Meanwhile, the security forces continue to run amok. I detailed the trajectory of peaceful and violent protests through March 2014 in “Egypt: Resurgence of the Security State.”³⁰ Since then, there has been no reduction in the arrest of Islamist demonstrators and pro-democracy youth. Pro-Brotherhood protests are smaller, but risk becoming more violent. And security-coordinated thugs (*beltaguis*) join the police to violently attack the small anti-Protest Law gatherings, throwing rocks and glass bottles at the demonstrators, even though beltaguis are specifically banned in the Protest Law. Judges issue severe sentences against those protestors, sentences that are intended to scare them into submission.

There’s also no let-up to the brutal treatment meted out to detainees: the violent “welcome party” beatings as they enter prisons and are escorted (blindfolded, with their hands tied) to and from cells; the harsh prison conditions that provoke hunger strikes; and the sham trials in which judges issue sentences even before defense lawyers have had a chance to challenge the evidence. Most shocking has been the discovery of the secret Azouli prison inside the Galaa military camp in Ismailiyya, under the control of Military Intelligence (which El-Sisi headed until August 2012) and State Security (*amn al-dawla*).³¹ Operated along the lines of the late Omar Suleiman’s notorious rendition program and outside the regular police and prison system, Azouli can hold 300 detainees who are subjected to Suleiman’s array of torture – including electric shock on their genitals and painful stress positions – in addition to the usual beatings, in order to force confessions of involvement in terror in Sinai or elsewhere. Many, however, are simply arrested on the street. A mother sighed: “Our youth were supposed to get this country back on its feet; now they are in the ground or in jail”.³²

DEEPENING THE POLITICAL VACUUM

With the dirigist approach to the economy dominant and public space sharply constricted, Egypt is suspended in a strange political vacuum. The all-powerful president has no countervailing political forces. The Muslim Brotherhood is excluded from the political arena, the Salafi movement is hunkering down, and the liberal politicians remain disorganized, without a clear agenda.

El-Sisi states firmly that the Brotherhood has no future in Egyptian politics. Whereas he initially focused on the practical failures of Morsi’s government, he quickly shifted to denouncing the Brotherhood as an existential threat -- a terrorist movement that must be exterminated. The Brotherhood, too, has framed the context in zero sum terms: the elected president must be reinstated, unconditionally. The Brotherhood mounts street protests through the National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy (NASL), Youth Against the Coup, and Students Against the Coup. As nearly all the first- and second-tier leaders are in prison along with thousands of lower level members, the discourse has shifted to a longer-term perspective that hopes that the relatively low turnout for the presidential elections, the abuses in prisons, and the hardships that may be caused by El-Sisi’s economic policies will shift public opinion away from the regime and even cause the government to collapse within a few years.

Any such shift, however, is unlikely to benefit the Brotherhood, given the depth of public anger at its disastrous year in power. Even former allies such as Gamaa al-Islamiyya fault the Brotherhood for overreaching for power and being unprepared to rule, and urge the movement to engage in deep self-criticism. But self-criticism is difficult, and unlikely in the short-run: imprisoned leaders maintain a tough stance, a few exiled leaders offer (futile) proposals for reconciliation, and young members are increasingly angry and impatient. Despite efforts by the remaining leaders to calm them and stress the danger of resorting to violence, many want to exact revenge against police who tortured them and killed their colleagues. Efforts by jihadists in Sinai to persuade them to take up arms

²⁹ Aaron T. Rose, “Human rights are a chief concern: Al-Sisi,” *Daily News Egypt*, July 8, 2014, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/07/08/human-rights-chief-concern-al-sisi/>.

³⁰ March 2014, www.fpri.org/articles/2014/3/egypt-resurgence-security-state.

³¹ “Rights group urges authorities to stop torture in prison,” *Aswat Masriya*, May 23, 2014, <http://en.aswatmasriya.com/news/>; Jesse Rosenfeld, “Egypt’s Black Site Torture Camps,” *The Daily Beast*, June 19, 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/06/19/egypt-s-black-site-torture-camps.html>; Patrick Kingsley, “Egypt’s hidden prison,” *The Guardian*, June 22, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/22/disappeared-egyptians-torture-secret-military-jail>; Amnesty International, “Egypt: Dozens of disappeared civilians face ongoing torture at military prison,” May 22, 2014: <http://amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/egypt-dozens-disappeared-civilians-face-ongoing-torture-military-prisons>

³² *The Daily Beast*, *op. cit.*

undoubtedly appeal to some young men.

The Salafi Dawa (call/preaching) and its affiliated Nour Party are in a tight spot. When Nour controlled a quarter of the seats in parliament, its MPs enthusiastically promoted the Sharia-based constitution in 2012 in order to Islamize society according to their conservative image. Nour's falling out with the Muslim Brothers in January 2013 was not over this ideology but rather over the exclusivity of Morsi's rule and his tone-deaf alienation of much of the public. The Salafi political movement endorsed El-Sisi's takeover on July 3, but became concerned about the violent crackdown on the Brotherhood and called for repeal of the Protest Law and the release of non-violent detainees. Nour was marginalized in the rewriting of the constitution, as it had only one representative on the sixty member committee. It could not prevent the committee from stripping nearly all Sharia provisions from the text and including an article that prohibits political parties "formed on the basis of religion."

Now Nour struggles to ensure that that clause does not lead to its own demise. Many Salafi preachers have withdrawn from politics to focus on preaching and charity, and the politicians have reverted to their Mubarak-era stance of supporting the strong leader. Utilizing a "loss management" calculus, Nour supported El-Sisi for president: His "harmony" with the state institutions would enable him to deal with "current dangers."³³ Leaders of the Salafi Dawa also stress their desire to work closely with al-Azhar's statist Islam to counter destructive, *jihadi* ideas – a stance diametrically opposed to the Salafi's enthusiasm for jihad in Syria and their attacks on Shi'a just a year ago. Although Nour claims that it can win a quarter of the seats in the House of Representatives next autumn, that seems doubtful, given the repression of and public anger at Islamists, the likelihood that Brotherhood supporters will boycott rather than shift their support to Nour, and the party's limited credibility in religious circles as it loses its aura of piety by opportunistically clinging to Egypt's political and religious establishment.

The prospects for democracy will be strongly influenced by the composition of the House of Representatives, due to be elected in the autumn. Given el-Sisi's stature, the legislature will have difficulty balancing the executive, even in the best of circumstances. However, the proposed electoral law (due to be issued formally on July 17) makes a coherent, policy-oriented legislature virtually impossible. As decreed by the interim president on his last day in office, 74 per cent of the seats will be held by individuals, 21 per cent by party-lists, and five per cent selected by the president. Both individuals and party-lists will be elected by the winner-take-all system, under which the individual or party must obtain 51 per cent of the seats in that district. The long-standing system of guaranteeing half the seats for workers and farmers will be dropped in favor of quotas for women, Copts, youth, persons with special needs, expatriates – and only a few workers and farmers. And the disenfranchisement of leading politicians from the Mubarak-era National Democratic Party is likely to be dropped.

The head of the liberal Wafd party cried in dismay: "We will be back to the Mubarak days when crony tycoons mixing business with politics used the individual candidacy system" to dominate parliament.³⁴ Moreover, the already-weak liberal and socialist political parties could be fatally weakened, as the winner-take-all system will prevent a spectrum of political views from being represented. Amr Moussa, chair of the constitution-drafting committee, lent his weight to the protests against the electoral law by a coalition of political parties that argue that it would kill the hope for a vibrant political life and be "a disaster for [the hoped for] democratic transition."³⁵ With MPs focusing on their personal gains and little prospect of organizing strong and coherent blocs within the legislature, there is not likely to be serious debate on government proposals. In this sense, it suits El-Sisi, who indicates that he does not feel beholden to any specific groups for his election and says that does not need to form a political party in order to provide a base of support.

Where does this lead? Top-down, decisive actions to transform the subsidies, reduce debt, and launch development projects are essential given the fiscal crisis confronting the state, the untenability of the subsidy system, and the catastrophic size of the government debt. El-Sisi can implement those measures given the heightened nationalism and sense that the country is 'at war' and requires crisis management. The tight security control over public space

³³ Nour spokesman Nader Bakkar, "The Islamist stance on Egypt's presidential elections," *Ahram Online*, May 26, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/102228.aspx>; Bakkar argued that Hamdeen Sabbahi lacked executive experience and might replicate Morsi's clashes with state institutions.

³⁴ Gamal Essam El-Din, "Egypt's opposition threatens boycott of parliamentary elections over draft law," *Ahram Online*, June 2, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/102774.aspx>.

³⁵ Statement published in "Opposition parties criticize draft parliamentary law," *Ahram Online*, May 24, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/102103.aspx>.

limits the prospects for protests by workers and professionals, as it limits the options for protests on the street and at universities.

But el-Sisi will have to show tangible improvements in peoples' lives in order for them to accept incremental belt-tightening measures over several years. It will take more than infrastructure projects – and more than waking people up at 5 a.m. – to create those improvements. Rule of law, fostering scientific and intellectual inquiry, and ensuring that citizens have the space to make their own business decisions are essential. Deepening surveillance of social media, self-censorship of the press and televisions, direct presidential control over universities, restrictions on expressing views on the streets, and coerced homogenizing of religious discourse lead Egypt in a different direction.

Moreover, as the House of Representatives is likely to be stacked with parliamentarians who look out for their personal interests and are easily bought-off by the executive, the House will not be able to hold the executive to account, adequately assess its proposals, and guard against corruption. This is an immediate concern in relation to the cabinet and a long-term concern in relation to the armed forces. The prime minister himself supervised projects in the Mubarak family's homes for which they have been convicted of embezzlement, and the current general intelligence chief quashed investigations into that embezzlement, prior to the 2011 revolution.³⁶ Moreover, the secrecy shrouding the military budget and operations of its vast economic empire is even more problematic now that the armed forces are utilizing Gulf funds to provide goods and services for civilians. The lack of accountability before parliament – and potentially to the Gulf donors – could foster corruption in the institution that El-Sisi promotes as exemplary, corruption that would undermine its reputation and its standing as the premier national institution. And effective economic development will not be possible without reforming the corrupt judiciary and the cruel security structures. In contrast to El-Sisi proclamations that freedom of speech and action must be delayed until Egypt is strong and secure, it is those freedoms that will underpin sustained and sustainable growth. Supervision of the government by the people, rather than supervision of the people by the government, is essential in order for Egypt to progress.

³⁶ Hosni, Alaa, and Gamal Mubarak were convicted on May 21, 2014, of forging receipts to cover up the use of government funds to pay for utility bills, interior design, landscaping, and home furnishings for several vacation homes and the mausoleum for Alaa's son – funds that were channeled through the Arab Contractors, which current Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb headed. He personally supervised much of the work on the Mubarak's homes, and fled to Saudi Arabia shortly after the 2011 revolution. General Mohamed Farid Tohamy, a mentor to El-Sisi, headed the Administrative Oversight Authority when he squashed its investigations, just before the 2011 revolution. In July 2013 El-Sisi brought Mehleb back as Housing Minister and appointed Tohamy General Intelligence Director. David D. Kirkpatrick, "Mubarak Gets 3 Years for Embezzlement, and His Sons get 4," *The New York Times*, May 22, 2014, and Mohammad Mansour, "Mubarak convicted of embezzlement, embarrasses high-level officials in Sisi government," <http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/2436450>.