



Executive Summary



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EGYPT'S NEW REGIME AND THE FUTURE OF THE U.S.-EGYPTIAN STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP

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This monograph, completed in August 2012, analyzes the developments in Egypt from January 2011 to August 2012 and addresses the following questions that are pertinent to U.S. policymakers: How does the United States maintain good relations and preserve its strategic partnership with Egypt under Cairo's new political leadership and the changing political environment in the country? How does it do so while adhering to American values such as supporting democracy even when those coming to power do not share U.S. strategic goals?

The monograph first examines Egypt's strategic importance for the United States by exploring Egypt's role in the Arab-Israeli peace process, its geographical role (providing air and naval access) for U.S. military assets heading to the Persian Gulf, and joint training programs. With so much at stake in the Middle East, the idea of "losing" Egypt as a strategic ally would be a significant setback for the United States.

The Egyptian revolution of early 2011 was welcomed by U.S. officials because the protesters wanted democratic government, which conformed to U.S. ideals, and the institution that would shepherd the transition, the Egyptian military, had close ties to the United States. However, the transition was marked by many difficulties, including violence by military authorities against protestors, a crackdown on American nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the military's reluctance to cede real power to civilian authorities. Nonetheless,

U.S. officials continued to court the military because they believed it had equities they needed to protect, and they developed relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization that was critical of many U.S. foreign policy goals, because the Brotherhood had emerged as the strongest political organization in the country. In the process, many Egyptian liberals felt slighted by this "two-stop shopping" by high-ranking U.S. officials.

The first round of Egypt's presidential elections divided the polity, and the top two vote-getters were a former Mubarak prime minister and a Brotherhood official, both of whom alarmed many Egyptians. When it appeared that the Brotherhood candidate, Mohammed Morsi, won the election in the second round, the Egyptian military hesitated to announce the winner, prompting criticism from the United States. The military relented, but not before issuing declarations that gave itself vast powers and restricted the president's powers. Less than 2 months later, Morsi felt confident enough to change the military's leadership, and claimed vast powers for himself.

Morsi appears to have won this power play, but many in Egypt fear that he could become an authoritarian figure and use the Brotherhood organization to monopolize power. The monograph argues that an ideal outcome for Egypt, and one that would preserve the U.S. Egyptian strategic relationship, would be for Morsi not to interfere in the drafting of the new

Constitution, nor in the parliamentary elections, and allow all political factions to compete fairly. A political system with parliament not dominated by the Brotherhood, with checks and balances put in place, plus the military retaining its autonomy, would help to foster democracy in Egypt and maintain the U.S.-Egyptian strategic relationship, even though public opinion might make Egypt less likely to cooperate with some U.S. initiatives.

The monograph then examines scenarios where Morsi acts in an authoritarian manner, pursues a narrow Islamist agenda, and moves to purge the military of elements not supportive of the Brotherhood. In such scenarios, the U.S.-Egyptian strategic relationship would suffer not only because anti-U.S. elements would come to dominate Egypt but because the U.S. Congress would likely reduce or cut off U.S. assistance in reaction to such moves.

The monograph notes that Morsi, so far, has not taken any dramatic steps against traditional Egyptian foreign and security policies, perhaps not wishing to alienate the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the Egyptian military because he needs their support. For example, although Morsi traveled to Iran in late August 2012 to attend the Non-Aligned Movement summit, he delivered a hard-hitting speech against the Syrian regime, Iran's principal ally in the Arab world, much to the Iranian leadership's chagrin.

To bolster the U.S.-Egyptian relationship and help keep Egypt on the democratic path, the monograph argues that U.S. military aid should not be cut, and economic aid should be increased. At the same time, U.S. administration officials should not oppose congressional conditions tying aid to democratic norms because it signals U.S. support for democracy. The United States should continue to speak out for free and fair elections and other international norms, but should avoid

commentating on the role of religion and Islamic law in the Egyptian Constitution. Helping the Egyptian military deal with the extremist threat in the Sinai, which the United States has already offered, should also be continued.

As for the U.S. Army, the monograph argues that its leaders should continue to advocate for military-to-military contacts, encourage their Egyptian counterparts to continue to attend U.S. professional military educational institutions, engage with Egyptian counterparts on regional threat assessments, and advocate for a reactivation of the Bright Star exercises. U.S. Army officials and officers should avoid getting into discussions with Egyptian military officers about Egyptian domestic politics, and they should drop any interest they may have in convincing Egypt to opt for a "more nimble" force because Egyptian defense officials would see it as an effort to weaken the Egyptian military.

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