— Event Transcript —

Ten Years Since Tahrir Square: Egypt Then and Now

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PANEL 1 – LOOKING BACK AT 2011

Stephen McInerney [2:08]
Good morning for those of you in the United States, and good afternoon to those of you who might be joining us from Egypt or elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa. I'm Steve McInerney, I'm the executive director of POMED, the Project on Middle East Democracy. And we're very pleased today to be convening what we hope will be a really fascinating event, looking at Egypt 10 years after its 2011 revolution. I am the Executive Director of POMED, and this is a position that I've held for about 10 years and two months now, which means that about a month into my tenure as executive director, the Arab Spring uprisings began to sweep the region, which was a really overwhelming, exciting, and memorable time. Of course, today, the 25th of January is the tenth anniversary of the beginning of Egypt's revolution, which was able to really captivate the attention and imagination of the world for 18 days, until [Hosni] Mubarak was pushed from power on the 11th of February.

Today, we're going to have an event that we've divided into two panels. The first panel that I will have the pleasure of moderating is going to try to look back a decade later at Egypt's revolution, at this exciting and important historic period, and with the benefit of hindsight and the decade that has passed since, try to look back and analyze that period: what it means, what key lessons there might be to draw a decade later, and what that might mean for Egypt today. Our second panel is going to try to focus on Egypt today: Where is Egypt? What trajectory is it on? And also

look a little bit ahead about where Egypt may be headed. We have a really outstanding lineup of speakers today that I will go ahead and introduce now for the first panel.

Our first panel includes four excellent outstanding speakers, analysts, and experts, all of whom are Egyptians or Egyptian-Americans. Our first speaker is going to be Abdelrahman Ayyash. Abdelrahman is a freelance journalist and researcher, and he's someone I had the pleasure of knowing for a long time. I believe I first met Abdelrahman in Cairo in 2008, and we're excited to have him with us. Our next speaker will be Salma El Husseiny who is an outstanding human rights activist and advocate and Egyptian political activist. She's currently a program manager for the Human Rights Council for the International Service based in Geneva. Our next speaker will be Michael Hanna. Michael is a top notch Egyptian-American analyst of both Egyptian politics and as well as U.S. foreign policy. He's a senior fellow at the Century Foundation. And then our final speaker on this first panel will be Sahar Aziz. Sahar is Professor of Law and the Chancellor's Social Justice Scholar, as well as the Middle East and Legal Studies Scholar at Rutgers University Law School. And I'm also proud to say that Sahar is a member of POMED's board of directors as well.

So we're really excited to have this excellent panel with us here. We will spend the next hour focusing on the events in the Tahrir Square in Egypt's revolution a decade ago. I will pose a series of questions to all of the panelists. Also, I would like to thank the many of the viewers who submitted questions to us. I will be interspersing my own questions with questions that have been submitted to us by viewers from the audience today. So with that, I'd like to start with Abdelrahman Ayyash. Abdelrahman if I could begin by posing this question to you. Looking back now, I'd actually like to start not on January 25th, 10 years ago today, but in the period just before that, in the weeks and months that preceded January 25th in Egypt's revolution. Is there a sign, a moment, an occurrence, or event that stands out from that period, either something that you noticed at the time, or perhaps something you may have missed at the time, but that you now recognize in hindsight, that that may have suggested that the dramatic historic events and political changes that took place in early 2011 may have been on the horizon?

Abdelrahman Ayyash [7:24]
Thank you so much, Steve, and thanks everyone for being here. To answer your question, Steve, I think, and this may sound like a cliche or something, but I believe that Khaled Said's death, or murder, was a breaking point for me and for many others in Egypt. I remember writing or posting on Facebook, on the eve when Khaled Said was murdered, that if the Egyptians don't protest against this vicious crime, I will be leaving Egypt as soon as I can and I won't be looking back. But actually, the response was huge. If I want to talk about major, or cumulative, or on a macro level sign, I think that it would be the overall anger and maybe depression even in Egypt. Everyone I was talking to—I mean you could sense it in the air at the time—everyone was angry. Even the military itself was angry at some point. The Interior Ministry was getting bigger than it should, and even the new class of elites, or the new class of businessmen, was getting richer at the expense of the military. And of course the political opponents had the usual grudges with the regime. Also, on a social level or on a societal level, everyone was mad at the time being. No one could see a good future for themselves or for their kids. That's what

everyone was talking about. I mean, even the Copts, for example, whom Mubarak's regime was presenting as the patron of their interest. I remember talking to someone, a Christian friend, a colleague at my college actually, and he was mad, and he was talking that things should change as soon as possible after, of course, the bomb [at the] church in Alexandria, the two Saints Church, and the bomb that killed 23 people at the time. And actually, people after that, specifically this friend, he was talking to me very happily after the revolution, saying that Mubarak stepping down on February 11 was a sign because it marked the 40-day anniversary of this bombing and he saw this as a sign—and many others—so, some sort of divine intervention.

Stephen McInerney [10:18]
Okay, thank you. Salma, I'd like to pose the same question to you. Is there a moment that stands out from the pre-January 25th period?

Salma El Hosseiny [10:28]
Thank you very much, and thank you for organizing this meeting. So I share also what Abdelrahman was saying and would add that there were protests exactly leading up to 2011, from workers strikes to protest against corruption and torture. But I personally myself did not expect a revolution in 2011. But the root causes and the grievances that inflamed the revolution—from unemployment, corruption, to police brutality, and deep inequalities, and discrimination—they all remain, and [are] even worse now than before 2011. And at the moment, there are no more mechanisms or means to address these legitimate and long term grievances because the state has a zero-tolerance policy to any voice or criticism challenging its policies, or even just seeking to participate in the political process. And in addition to these long term grievances, the state is now punishing anyone related to 25 January. In 2018, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi himself said that he will never allow what happened in 2011 to ever happen again, and the state has become more brutal than its predecessors. So now there are thousands of people who are arbitrarily detained in inhumane prison conditions, forced disappearances is a state policy, and human rights work is criminalized under the pretext of counterterrorism. The photos that I'm sharing are emblematic examples of women who are languishing in prison because of their journalistic and human rights work, or simply because of their family names. And some of them are mothers who are separated from their children, unable to see them, nor hear from them. There are now mothers who have been forced into exile and children who witnessed their mothers getting arrested for no reason, and who are now growing up without them. And this trauma and state terrorism will have long-term impacts on Egyptian society and stability and I think [will] provide fertile soil for violence and terrorism. And then the final point is that, prior to 2011, domestic naming and shaming had an impact. But now the state seems not to be affected by it. And I think this can be attributed to the unconditional support Egypt's dictatorship gets from the U.S. and key European allies, and the lack of international accountability, and in particular at the United Nations Human Rights Council over the past years.

Stephen McInerney [13:15]
Okay. Thanks very much, Salma. Turning to Michael and Sahar, and correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe that both of you, like myself, were largely watching Egypt's revolution from the United States, not on the ground and the streets of Tahrir. I would be interested in your perspectives, starting with this pre-January 25 environment, if there are particular moments or things that stand out now, a decade later. Michael?

Michael Hanna [13:44]
Yeah. Well, I got there on maybe day six. I don't remember exactly. I got to Egypt in early February and was there for quite a while. So I watched things unfold on the ground. And, I think back to the safety valve approach of the Mubarak regime, and Mubarak had an idea of creating a semi-free press. He allowed some demonstrations—Second Intifada, Iraq War—And these mass mobilizations, I think, had a big impact in terms of expansion of the political imagination. People saw thousands of others on the streets protesting. And the Mubarak regime saw this as a way to vent, to allow frustrated citizens to express anger, anger not directed at the regime, [but] directed outward. But I think it had a big impact on the way in which people thought about the possible. And I think, interestingly, it informs the way that the al-Sisi regime has operated since. And that is, to think that these kinds of safety valves are dangerous—they allow green shoots, they allow new thinking, they allow new organization. So all of these connections that went into mobilization, of course, then, created things like the Kefaya movement, we saw labor demonstrations. Of course, all that being said, I didn't imagine until Tunisia that there was a possibility for something like a kind of politicized mass mobilization targeting the regime. But I think all these things are precursors, and they are the exact precursors that this regime is holy hell-bent on never allowing to grow again. And so they've taken the zero-tolerance approach because they don't want to allow the seeds to potentially grow into something much more. But in hindsight, looking back, I think these are the things, these are the building blocks, that eventually allowed people to think more broadly about public action and the possibilities of taking to the streets in a kind of political way.

Sahar Aziz [16:15]
So first, let me thank you, Stephen, and your entire team at POMED. And I want to just note that everyone on this panel is Egyptian or Egyptian-American and that's symbolically very important. So thank you for making that statement, just by virtue of who you invite.

So I'm going to speak from an Egyptian diasporic perspective, because I visited Egypt, but I did not live there, particularly for the many years before the revolution. So there's a couple of points. The first is these dictatorships, whether it's in Egypt or anywhere else, they go through different phases. And oftentimes phase one—the first five, arguably up to 10 years, because these are long-term dictators, especially in Egypt—oftentimes is in response to what happened right before them. So if you think of [Anwar] Sadat and his first five or six years in response to the [Gamal Abdel] Nasser era or the end of the Nasser era. Similarly with Mubarak, he was responding to those last few years of Sadat's era. And I won't go into the details of the history, but al-Sisi is doing the same thing as Michael has stated. Now, the years preceding 2011, Mubarak was now at the end, we didn't know it would be that imminent, the end, but we knew

the end was coming because he was aging and he was priming his sons, his son Gamal in particular, to become the next president. And as we all know who have studied the region or the country, that Gamal did not come from the security apparatus, and most certainly not the military apparatus, which had been ruling Egypt since 1952. So that is one convergence of interests between the youth revolutionaries and activists and the military and security apparatus was making sure that Gamal would not be the next president of Egypt. So that's going on.

At the same time, you've got international developments, which do have to be taken into account. In those 10 years before 2011, you had an occupation in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan, which mobilized the entire region and the young people to perceive it as Western imperialism, and that certainly affected Egypt. Also what was happening in Palestine vis-à-vis Israel, the repression was becoming even more extreme. And they were seeing the Orange Revolution; they were seeing people in Eastern Europe starting to demand more self government and more democracy in the post-Soviet Union era. So, all of this is happening internationally and at a time when social media is triggered around 2005-2006, right. And the Kefaya movement started in 2004. Now, I agree with Michael about the safety valves and the way that Mubarak was managing Egypt or his authoritarian strategy, and part of it, I think, is because he felt secure in his rule. But also, social media allowed Egyptians to connect outside and to see what was going on.

And then, finally, I don't think we should underestimate the impact of Bush's Freedom Agenda. Now, I certainly have criticized it and I am not in support of that approach as an American citizen, however, the Freedom Agenda did put quite a bit of pressure on Egypt and other Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes to at least play the game of pretending like they were offering more freedom. And we know that Bush was doing that, in some ways out of bad faith because of the occupation of Iraq, and a lot of anti-democratic counterterrorism practices that America was engaging in, in the region. But nevertheless, I think we have to note now that we're going into the Biden administration that the U.S. foreign policy does matter, even if it doesn't produce the ultimate result of freedom or democracy or social justice as we would want it from a Western lens, or even as the Egyptians would want it. But it certainly puts pressure on the regime in favor of having more of those safety valves, again, having that convergence of interest domestically and internationally.

Stephen McInerney [20:15]
Thanks very much, Sahar. You know, Michael just mentioned in passing, the impact of Tunisia, which, I think for all the reasons that Sahar and others were describing that there were lots of factors that contributed to Egypt being ready for this moment in January 2011. As it turns out, I happened to be on a trip to the region in January 2011 that was planned weeks ahead of time and I actually arrived in Cairo on the 14th of January in the afternoon, just as the news was breaking that Ben Ali had been forced from power and fled the country. And I was meeting up and texting with Egyptian friends and colleagues and partners, some of whom were going to celebrate in front of Tunisia's embassy in Cairo. And what I heard constantly from the day that I arrived—I was there only for about four days and I was back in Washington before the 25th—but everyone was saying we are going to do the same here. And whereas in many other

Arab countries, they were fascinated by what happened, I think there were lots of reasons that contributed to Egypt being the one where its citizens were ready immediately as soon as they saw the example of Tunisia, and they said, set the date for the 25th and moved forward.

Michael, I'd like to pose a question to you. You mentioned that you arrived at the beginning of February, during this kind of peak 18 days of the revolution. Are there moments—now that you have a decade of distance and hindsight and are not caught up in the day to day whirlwind of that overwhelming period—are there moments during those 18 days that stand out to you now as significant in ways that you may not have recognized at the time?

Michael Hanna [22:07]
Well, I think the tactical alliance that propelled the mobilization was tenuous. And that was clear at the time, and it's why people adopted slogans of the lowest common denominator, a civil state effectively, right. It meant little; it was something everybody could get behind; it stepped beyond the kind of identitarian issues involved in almost existential ways that was posed by this great rupture—the identity of the state, the role of religion—things that really divided Egyptians. And so we had this lowest common denominator bond that tried to cement this tactical alliance. And, of course, it mostly worked for the 18 days, but it was weak, and the first push away from that tactical alliance that included Islamists, non Islamists, seculars, liberals—the kind of broad array of groups that really did propel the mass mobilization—the first steps away from that tactical alliance happened during the 18 days when the Muslim Brotherhood begins discussions with what would then become the SCAF, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, that becomes Egypt's interim authority. And it's there that we see the kind of undoing of this mass uprising. The military was as surprised as everybody else was. The kinds of ideas about what was happening on the streets were as misinformed within the security establishment as elsewhere. And, of course, the military believed that by coming to some kind of understanding with the Muslim Brotherhood, they would disable mobilization. This was their idea—mass mobilization in the streets equals Islamists. You take the Islamists out of the equation, mass mobilization will stop. Of course, that didn't happen because the military didn't really understand what was happening around them. And there was real power in that tactical alliance and breaking it apart in the immediate gain of short-term political power was really the undoing of the possibility of real structural change. You have this transformational opening with revolutionary possibility, and it was cashed in for early parliamentary elections, and I think an Islamist power grab, an effort to maximize their political power in the short term that I think really did forsake the possibility of broad change. And the reason I say that is because even during the kind of fragmented period of transition from 2011 until 2013, there were brief moments when that tactical alliance sort of came together—on timelines for elections and other things later on—in which the military backed down. Whenever these forces got together again, uneasy as that process always was, the military would take a step back. There was real power in that alliance, and forsaking that, discarding that, in the kind of short-term pursuit of political power, I think was incredibly myopic, and set in motion the period of triangulation that put the military in charge of transition dynamics. And it didn't have to be that way. That was a choice that was made very early on, and I think to tragic effect.

Stephen McInerney [26:05]
So thanks, Michael. Abdelrahman, I'd like to pose the same question to you in terms of key moments during the peak of this 18 days of revolution that now you recognize as turning points or especially significant in ways that might not have been as clear at the time.

Abdelrahman Ayyash [26:26]
Yeah, I'd like actually to speak about some sort of a personal story here or something I witnessed, actually, during Tahrir Square. It happened one day after what we call the Battle of the Camel on February 2, when mobs and thugs entered Tahrir Square riding horses and camels in an attempt to terrorize the protesters. Ironically, a day after, someone from the regime tried to get in touch with whom they thought were the leaders of the movement or the protesters, and they got in touch with Mostafa al-Naggar. Mostafa is a friend and he was at the time the coordinator of Mohamed ElBaradei's political campaign and, by the way, he remains forcibly disappeared for more than two years now. Mostafa met with the regime, their representatives in Tahrir Square. At the time, there were about three of them and one of them was wearing a very fine suit. Once the protesters saw this guy, they started harassing him verbally and even physically. But after a while, Mostafa was able to calm them down, and especially that they knew him, or this group of people they knew him in person and we walked away at the time. Mostafa, of course, he looked like them. He was unshaved, he was very tired, and he was wearing an unclean sweater as well. But not all protesters knew Mostafa. When we walked away a little bit, and we tried to exit the square from a different exit, a couple of youth who were guarding the square at the time shouted at Mostafa and asked him to return back to the square and not leave now. And it was about to get violent. And that's when Mostafa told the regime people that what had just occurred at the moment was an indicator that no negotiation was going to happen at the odds of the people's demands, okay.

And as for me, it made me realize at the moment that this revolution had no leader. Actually, I was afraid that this could pose a problem later, that things could get ugly with no organization. And, I think I was right at the moment. People tend to get scared easily, and when in fear, especially of the unknown, they act violently. And this is what happened on different levels or in different ways after the 18 days. And that's why I believe, in any future political movement in Egypt, organization is as important as the mobilization.

Stephen McInerney [29:22]
Thanks Abdelrahman for the powerful anecdote. And I had the pleasure as well of getting to know Mostafa al-Nagar, and he's just one example among many of the tragic losses. As you mentioned, he's been forcibly disappeared now for more than two years. And Salma, I'd like to thank you for highlighting many of the Egyptian women that have paid an enormous price for trying to bring about the kind of positive political change that drove the spirit of the revolution a decade ago. It was powerful to see their images on the screen, and some of them are people that I've had the pleasure of knowing and working with as well.

I'd like to ask you, Salma, the same type of question, but maybe not not constraining yourself to 18 days of the revolution, also in the period that followed. While the sort of jubilant triumphant

celebration on February 11 of Mubarak stepping down was followed by a very uneven period and tragically, as we know that—and as we've mentioned and alluded to already—that the decade since has not satisfied the demands of the revolution and has not led to the political opening and freedom and dignity and economic prosperity that was hoped for at the time. Are there moments to you that stand out as key pivotal moments that affected Egypt's path, and that helped make the chance of a successful democratic transition less likely?

Salma El Hosseiny [31:07]
Thanks. So I just want to add the point about Tahrir and then go onto some key turning points. So for me, in terms of the dramatic 18 days of revolution, the particular event is women occupying public spaces. Because it was the first time to see so many women sleeping in the sit-in in Tahrir, and that was a revolution in itself for me. But however, women were attacked later, for example, you mentioned that the day Mubarak stepped down, a CNN reporter was sexually assaulted on that day. And on International Women's Day on 8 March 2011, women protesters were attacked by civilians, and they received no support from political parties nor youth coalitions who were predominantly men. I expected that women's rights would get their support, but it was never really a priority and women were sidelined in these spaces. And then of course, in March 2011, women protesters were forced to submit to virginity tests by the military, and Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the then head of the military intelligence defended to Amnesty International the use of the virginity tests to “protect the army against possible allegations of rape”. There were hundreds of documented cases of mass sexual assaults and rape between 2012 and 2014, including with objects, but there was a first sense of denial by political parties and youth coalitions. But women forced the issue on the public agenda, breaking taboos. There were also so many grassroots initiatives created and working on combating sexual harassment and assault. This mobilization helped build the pressure, changed narratives in public discourse, and forced the government to finally criminalize sexual harassment in 2014. And I would say all of this paved the way to what we are seeing now with younger generations of women breaking taboos, reclaiming autonomy over their bodies, and demanding accountability for the violence and discrimination against them.

And then in terms of the mistakes, so for me, the key mistake, and Michael touched upon it, is the short-sighted self interests by political actors and outside examples that I see as key turning points. So, the parliament and the presidency under the Muslim Brotherhood shielded the military from accountability for human rights violations commited under SCAF’s rule. And then the constitutional declaration in November 2012 that Mohamed Morsi issued, in which he granted himself the right to issue decrees and laws with immunity from judicial review even if they violate human rights, until mid-2013, which undermined the rule of law. And then this paved the way for the role that key political actors played in 2013-2014, justifying a dictator to come to power through supporting and giving legitimacy to the military to intervene in 2013 and opposing Morsi and then justified the massive violations that followed. I myself have participated in the massive protests against Morsi calling for early presidential elections. But the military claimed to speak for the majority and deposed Morsi without even the benefit of an election. And what followed then, was the worst repression that Egypt has known in decades, including mass killings of over a thousand protesters by the police and the military. I mean, the Rabaa

Massacre was a horrific turning point. And since then, human rights violations are on a scale never seen before.

And then also, the actors involved in the drafting of the 2014 constitution; they promised some greater protection for the rights of women and religious minorities, but they retained military trials for civilians and expanded the shield protecting the military from civilian oversight. And there was also this narrative then by those actors that, yes, the army was going to commit massive violations, but it's never going to touch us, it's going to be just against the Muslim Brotherhood and so it's okay. And this prioritization of self interests over human rights is key for me for how or where we ended up today. Now, everyone's a target and the military rule led to this militarization of society that we're seeing now, where anyone who doesn't fit mainstream societal norms can be targeted, for example, the detained women TikTokers, like Mawada al-Adham and Haneen Hossam. And then, finally, also the prioritization by Egypt's key allies—the U.S. and the EU—of short-sighted interests over human rights and long-term stability. And because the regime was still fragile back then in 2013-2014. For example, on January 25, 2014, the state opened fire [again] on peaceful protests, and there was no significant, sustained pressure on the government to see these violations. And this essentially gave the regime the green light to go ahead and increase its repression.

Stephen McInerney [36:11]
Thanks very much Salma. And Sahar, I pose the same question to you. In terms of key moments and turning points that stand out to you a decade later where Egypt's transition may have as a result had less chance of success.

Sahar Aziz [36:31]
Well, first, let me acknowledge that I wasn't there. And so I acknowledge that I had the privilege of being on the outside critiquing on the inside. And, I have so much respect for the Egyptians who were there who sacrificed their life and their liberty, their limbs. And so, I do acknowledge that positionality. I think that the first point, at least, during the 18 days, having me watching it from the United States, a key point was when mainstream media stopped framing what was happening in Egypt as chaos and riots [began] to [frame it as] uprising and revolution. And that's really important from our vantage point in the West, because we can't disconnect our U.S. foreign policy in Egypt, for example, from the negative stereotypes that are outright racist and Islamophobic against, or about, people in the Middle East. And so when we dehumanize them, and we frame their protests, their nonviolent protests, calling for the same things that we want for ourselves here, as chaos and security threats and riots, then that helps the dictators, right, that helps the authoritarians. I don't want to give credit to CNN, per se, but that was, they have such a large following, but when they started talking about it as revolution and uprising, I think that was really important on our end and the lens through which the coverage of the uprising, and what I think is a failed revolution, took place for the next at least 18 months.

Now, there were so many crossroads, so many points after February 11, that the first monumental mistake, which I don't know if it could have been avoided because it was a leaderless grassroots movement, was the transition to the SCAF. As soon as the SCAF took

power on February 11, they set the rules of the game. And here we are, where the military controlled Egypt after all those sacrifices that were made by Egyptians. And so as a result they issued on March 30, 2011, this constitutional declaration instead of heeding the demands of the activists and the advocates and the youth, who were very diverse in background, who had wanted to have a more referendum-based constitutional drafting before the parliament was elected. They wanted to have a more collective process.

The other thing that the SCAF did is they rejected, or obstructed at best, transitional justice, another demand by those who had been leading the revolution. And the lack of transitional justice then allowed, not only the Mubarak regime criminals to not be accounted for in a meaningful way—I think we all know what ended up happening where very few of them actually got convicted; if they did get convicted, it was time served—and they never got prosecuted for their most egregious crimes over decades. But more importantly, it didn't then allow the country to have the reckoning that needed to be had—the transparency, to be able to expose to the world, and to itself, and to its allies—including the United States—just how bad things were in terms of torture, in terms of corruption, in terms of repression, and gender injustice, and so on. And that is necessary if you really want to make that transition to something new.

And then finally, the SCAF also ensured that Morsi's hands would be tied. And that is, whoever was going to be president, was not going to succeed. So when they unilaterally dissolved the parliament right before Morsi took office, that was not accidental. Because it's very difficult to rule as a legitimate, democratically elected president when you don't have a parliament. You're then either put in a position where you either must rule by decree, which is dictatorial, or you can't rule at all, which then leads the people to rightfully be upset at you for not fixing the problems of the country. And these problems, while it's not glamorous to talk about this, there's certainly human rights issues that should be first and foremost, but in my opinion, what led the Egyptians to make such a significant monumental sacrifice—that frankly, Americans couldn't do and won't do—on those 18 days of June of 2011, were good governance problems, they were human dignity issues, they wanted good education. They *want* good education; they *want* good health care; they *want* good governance; they *don't want* corruption; they *don't want* political repression; they want jobs—the very basic things that we all want that are development based. Now, granted, you can't have that when you are under a dictatorship. And you certainly can't have it when your human rights are being violated left and right. But those are all of the things that Morsi simply could not deliver, nor would have any president been able to deliver who was democratically elected who is not simply a puppet of the military, because of the various decisions that the SCAF intentionally and purposefully made leading up to the 2012 presidential elections.

Stephen McInerney [42:00]
Thanks very much, Sahar. I'd like now to pose a question really to each of you, in terms of looking back now, a decade later, what would stand out to you as maybe the most important lesson of Tahrir Square, of the revolution, of everything that we've been discussing here. And to put a little more context on that, as well, each of you have mentioned key mistakes that were made, decisions that were made that now stand out as being very short sighted. What are the most important lessons to be learned from that period, so that in the event of another political opening in Egypt, perhaps the same mistakes would not be repeated? I would also add one more component to that question that's come in from the audience, which is about the opposition in Egypt, and to what extent has the landscape of non-regime actors learned key lessons from a decade ago? And Abdelrahman, I would like to start with you on this one.

Abdelrahman Ayyash [43:10]
Sure. Thanks, Steve. First, let me talk a little bit about the general mistake, or maybe one of the main mistakes that I think happened, and maybe it resulted in the absence of a meaningful change after 10 years of revolution. I call it underestimation. You know, we, or the revolutionaries, we underestimated the civilians' ability to change. So many of us started to build foolish coalitions, including with the military, for example, or with the police, that led, of course, to the doom of the revolution itself. And, of course, the Islamists underestimated the power of their political opponents. And this also, I actually can't put my finger on only a single mistake. I mean, I could say that every single decision, maybe, almost every single decision that the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, has made, became some sort of a step further from the revolution and closer to the movement's devastation. And, and the civilians, all of us, we underestimated the military's readiness, or even the willingness, to shed blood to keep itself on top of the power in Egypt. And foolish we are, many of us, that we put our trust in the army chief, who's Mubarak spy chief, and this is beyond the imagination, to be honest.

For me, out of all this, I think maybe the main lesson that we should be learning, or have learned already, that the unarmed should trust the unarmed. And I'd say this in Arabic, if I may, يجب أن يثق الأعزل في الأعزل.. There is relatively very little harm that we could do to each other, we could do upon each other. But as for the military, they can kill us easily. And this is what happened already, as Salma spoke of Rabaa—it was the worst massacre in the history, or the modern history of Egypt. I believe that it could be repeated again if the people revolted against this kind of regime. But I mean, things have never ended well for any political or civilian force that put trust in the army. And I mean by that, we have to keep checks and balances, we have to keep all citizens accountable—no matter how high or how senior they are in the military or in the state apparatus. And of course, we have to shift power to the civilians. We need to work on that. And after all, we also need to be aware, or wary maybe, of our autocratic neighbors and the other countries, I mean in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, who saw our successful experience as an existential threat. And of course, they are right. I mean, democracy is contagious and, yeah, we could have done many things better, or differently, at least.

Stephen McInerney [46:31]
Thanks Abdelrahman. Salma, what stands out to you as, a decade later, the most important lesson of this period?

Salma El Hosseiny [46:39]
For me, it is that there's no compromise on human rights, and I see good governance as human rights. Human rights are indivisible and interdependent, so, from the rights to not be subjected to torture and gender-based violence; to have an adequate standard of living; to live free from all forms of discrimination, including based on sexual orientation and gender identity; to participate in public affairs; to access justice and effective remedy, etc. All human rights are important and there should not be a prioritization of some rights over the others. And the other thing I want to say is that the revolution for me was not about bringing down the system in the abstract, but rather it is about the fights of everyone. So, from women, to Copts, to Nubians, to workers, to the LGBTIQ+ community—demanding respect for human rights. I mean, this is the collective dream and the collective vision. And I think also that civil society and political actors should support all human-rights based agendas. And the state, of course, must guarantee and respect all human rights without any distinction.

Stephen McInerney [47:55]
Thanks. And Michael, it's come to you: What stands out is the most important lesson from the revolution?

Michael Hanna [48:02]
Yeah, there's a bunch. So I'm going to go through them very quickly. But, the first thing I would say is that the kinds of transformational openings that we saw in the region and in Egypt, throughout the 18 days, and then after, on February 11, are incredibly rare. These kinds of things don't happen very often. Authoritarian regimes, despite huge challenges—whether they be economic or otherwise—can sustain themselves for a very, very long time. And so when such an opening comes, it should be treated as something quite rare, unique, and precious, not the sort of thing that lends itself to short-term political thinking. I think that's lesson number one.

Lesson number two, I would say, is that the real authoritarian trap that we see even more so now—the authoritarian leaders co-opt the institutions, they destroy civil society, they crush dissent, and then when an opening happens, the kind of building blocks that would naturally be the buttress to a transition, they don't exist. And of course, that is used as a kind of evidence for why transitions shouldn't happen when looking outward. But in real life terms, the building blocks or transition really don't exist in robust ways. And, of course, that was further exacerbated, and that's even more so now, by the irreconcilable divisions amongst civilian opposition. And now after what happened under the Brotherhood, after the Rabaa Massacre, those divisions are even more irreconcilable. Now there is no possibility for that kind of tactical alliance among that broad spectrum of actors right now—it was possible in 2011, it is impossible now. And of course that is a huge boon to an autocratic regime looking to sustain itself.

And then one last quick point, picking up on Ayyash's point about outside actors, if you allow partisan openings to neighbors, they will exploit them, and those divisions really were disastrous for Egypt. Allowing Qatar first and then Turkey to enter as partisan actors on the side of Islamists was a huge mistake on the part of the Brotherhood; and later doing so on the other side, kind of counterbalance, what happened with the Saudi-Emirati counterforce was a disaster. And that was an opening created by Egyptians, and I think just a huge huge mistake, but emblematic of the fact that there was no Egyptian consensus about the transition and no sufficient ability to bring about those ends without looking to whether it be the military or outside actors. And it's the thing that Tunisia did so much better than Egypt for a variety of reasons in very different contexts. But the prioritization of a civilian led political process and not wanting it to come to a screeching halt, not wanting to see that breakdown, even though that would require sacrificing the parts of various political actors, and that kind of foresight was lacking.

Stephen McInerney [51:44]
Thanks, Michael. And Sahar, the same question to you. What stands out as maybe one of the most important lessons from this period for Egypt today? Sorry, Sahar, I believe you're still on mute.

Sahar Aziz [51:59]
There are quite a few, but I will emphasize the way ones that are tied to my own professional identity and my own professional work, which is the legal profession and the judiciary. And I've written quite a bit on that. I have an article called "The Judicial Paradox of Egypt's Failed Transition to Democracy," that talks about the role of the judiciary. So, many of us already knew that the legal profession had been essentially decapitated and completely destroyed under Nasser, because it was the legal profession that was one of the leaders of the revolution, and it supported Nasser, and then eventually realized that he had been acting like a dictator, and so they challenged it. As what we saw in the United States under the Trump era, is the lawyers that are always on the front lines of opposing repression, if they are competent, and if they are relatively independent, and they have a strong Bar Association, which I think we do have in the United States. And so in Egypt, what we've learned is that the legal profession must be rehabilitated. And I say this with Americans in the audience, particularly those who are interested in U.S. foreign policy, is that the legal profession and the judiciary, these are two key institutions, among many other very important institutions, civil society, government bureaucracies, this is not a mutually exclusive zero-sum game analysis. But I think it's extremely important that all development aid and all political policy and foreign policy needs to ensure that the Egyptian legal profession is back to its high standards that it used to be in the 1950s and before.

And second, the judiciary is not as independent as even the Egyptians thought and as people that were on the outside thought. The post-2011 era was quite a disappointment, I think, for judicial independence in Egypt. I think there had been a perception that the Supreme Court of Egypt was much more independent than it was. And as I stated, with the dissolution of the Parliament, that was actually out of the Supreme Court's decision that then authorized, obviously, SCAF to dissolve the parliament. But what we thought they were much more

independent, and they're not. The National Security courts, the military trials of civilians. So I think one important lesson for rule of law and for U.S. foreign policy and EU policy is there must be an emphasis on an independent judiciary that is comprised of highly competent, highly qualified judges that are protected from the types of repression that the rest of society and many of the other institutions are facing. And, in fact, al-Sisi ensured that there is even less independence under his regime, because, for example, he put himself on the Supreme Judicial Council, which is responsible for appointments and promotions of judges, including of the Supreme Judicial Council. So this is not a coincidence.

I think the takeaway for me as a lawyer, as a law professor, is that judicial independence is a key component of the many other components of ensuring that Egyptians have the tools to be able to prepare for what is hopefully, as Michael Hanna said, the next opening, the next political opportunity, which we know will be rare, but I believe it's inevitable because of the circumstances and facts under which Egyptians are experiencing right now, which are frighteningly similar to what they were experiencing at the end of Mubarak. So al-Sisi can delay as much as he can the next uprising, but he cannot prevent it. And he is, in fact, doing exactly all of the wrong moves that will cause another grassroots explosion, which hopefully will then turn into a more meaningful and successful transition.

Stephen McInerney [56:09]
Thanks very much, Sahar. We're almost out of time for our panel, but I have a couple of questions I'd like to try to work in that have come in from our audience. Salma, I'd like to pose this question to you. It's a question about, we've heard a lot about just how brutally repressive the environment is in Egypt today, and our next panel is going to talk about that as well, the current environment under al-Sisi and his regime. But we have a question about, are there areas that, despite all of these restrictive measures, despite all the repression, are there areas in which human rights can currently be safely practiced in Egypt? And the questioner put it as a quote, “resistance in disguise,” mentioning examples of environmentalism or art or literacy programs. So I’d just be interested in any thoughts that you have on that very briefly.

Salma El-Hosseiny [57:00]
Oh, thanks. So I mentioned previously about how I see the current mobilization for gender equality and against violence against women. I see that as a continuation of the revolution process and the blocks [sic] that were made and that were paved by women's bodies, and so this is to respond to that.

But I also just want to use the last minute that I have to make one point: previous U.S. administrations, as Sahar mentioned, supported democracy activists for various reasons that we may disagree with, but the Trump administration's unconditional support to the dictatorship had severe impact. And I wonder how much the lives of thousands could have changed if there was no encouragement of al-Sisi’s ironfist ruling of Egypt, or if key European states stopped selling weapons and surveillance technology to Egypt, knowing that it would be used to commit human rights violations, or if they did not turn a blind eye to the worst crisis in Egypt’s modern history,

for cooperation on migration and counterterrorism, both of which are based on a fake sense of security and the same short-sighted interest that we were talking about.

And then finally, maybe it's a good segue for the next panel, is that the Biden-Harris administration prioritized championing America's values and human rights. And I look forward to seeing that translated into action with the Egyptian government, and in particular, a strong and sustained push for the immediate and unconditional release of all of those arbitrarily detained.

Stephen McInerney [58:39]
Thanks Salma. And I'd like to pose as the final question of our panel to Michael. This came in from the audience addressed to Michael specifically, and it follows up on comments from Sahar and Salma there. And the question is, what might we expect in terms of U.S. policy toward Egypt, and how is Egypt viewed now in Washington as a regional partner, and how is that changing? Of course, that's a very big question. But I ask you to just give a brief response before we transition to the next panel.

Michael Hanna [59:15]
Yeah, I mean, I think it's good to put it in perspective, because Egypt is not a priority, even within the region. I mean, we think of the kind of list of priority items, they begin with the JCPOA, we're thinking about troop deployments in Syria, we have the Yemen war and U.S. involvement. Egypt's not a priority for a variety of reasons, I think most importantly, it's a reflection of its diminished status. Egypt is not the key driver of regional politics. During realignment in the 1970s, after the '73 War, Egypt was not only the largest military player in the region, they were the most important state in terms of the Arab state system and regional dynamics, whether political and security. And that reality no longer pertains. So when you see the lists of action items for the incoming Biden—no longer incoming—the new Biden administration, oftentimes, Egypt's not even mentioned. And that's also a reflection of the fact that there is some kind of assumption that authoritarianism is both resurgent and consolidated, and Egypt is somewhat immune to outside pressure. And I think there's real legitimacy to those concerns.

What I would say is that with the recent wave of arrests, like with the EIPR [Egypt Initiative for Personal Rights] arrests a few months ago, Egypt will put itself on the map, again, in terms of U.S. attention because its repression is systematic and consistent. And so it might not be immediate, but this question of how to respond to this resurgent authoritarianism in Egypt is something that is, at some point in time, sooner rather than later, going to be on the U.S. agenda. And I think that for a variety of reasons Egypt should be a case, a test case, of how this new approach to democracy and human rights takes shape. I think the costs to making Egypt the priority, in that sense, are not as high as they would be with other partners. And so I'm hopeful that we will see pressure on political prisoners, like several I mentioned, discussions about foreign military financing and military assistance. There's no reason that these things have to continue as they have for decades. There's opportunity for change, and I hope that happens.

Stephen McInerney [1:02:09]
Okay, thanks very much. And, you know, of course, a lot of the topics that we're discussing today are quite difficult. And I'm happy to be able to end that panel on at least a bit of a hopeful note. I thank the four panelists for providing a really excellent discussion and providing their insights here. We're going to move now to the next panel. And before I do that, I would comment that January 25, for all of us at POMED, is an important and memorable date on the calendar for two reasons. Not only is it the anniversary of Egypt's revolution, but today also happens to be the birthday of my colleague, Amy Hawthorne. And I would like to transition to the next panel first by wishing Amy a very happy birthday, and thanking her for spending part of her birthday moderating our next panel, which is going to focus on the present of Egypt, where Egypt is today, and to some extent, continuing some of the points that came up in the in the previous panel, about where Egypt may be headed as well. So with that, I will turn to Amy.

PANEL 2 – LOOKING AT EGYPT TODAY

Amy Hawthorne [1:03:25]
Thank you, Steve. Thank you for the birthday wishes. Yes, in an irony of all ironies, January 25 is my birthday and 10 years ago on my birthday was certainly a birthday I'll never forget. For those of you just joining us, I'm Amy Hawthorne, Deputy Director for Research at POMED, and I will be moderating our second panel today of our special event marking the 10th anniversary of the January 25th uprising in Egypt. I'm really delighted and honored to be moderating a conversation among four truly outstanding experts. We have in alphabetical order: Michele Dunne from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Ezzedine Choukri Fishere from Dartmouth College; Nancy Okail, scholar and democracy and human rights advocate; and the inestimable Robert Springborg, retired professor at the Naval Postgraduate School and author of more books on Egypt and the Middle East than I can count. Welcome to you all. And for our audience their full biographies are available on our POMED website.

So we have a lot of ground to cover with these four brilliant people in the next hour, so let's jump right in. I've asked everyone to try to keep their answers somewhat brief, which I know is a big challenge, given the size and the complexity of the questions that I'm going to pose to them, but let's go ahead and jump in.

My first question is for Michele and Ezzedine, and it is: was Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's rise to power inevitable or was there a main fork in the road sometime in the past years when things could have turned out differently? And Michele, let me turn it over to you to start, to answer that question, then we'll go to Ezzedine.

Michele Dunne [1:05:31]
Thank you, Amy, and great to be with you on your birthday. So, I think as we heard from the panelists in the first panel, al-Sisi ended up in power because of a lack of unity among the forces within the country who wanted change. So there was a lack of unity and a lack of coming together around a program. People came together to unseat Mubarak, but not so much around what would happen after that. And the military, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces [SCAF], of which al-Sisi was a key member, were able to divide and rule. And one of the things that I think we all forget is how quickly this happened—extremely quickly. Egypt's transition, or failed transition, was like a runaway train.

So, the uprising starts 10 years ago today on January 25, and then after 18 days in mid-February, Mubarak is deposed. Basically, the protesters forced the hand of the military, who then deposed Mubarak. But then the military very quickly regrouped, and by the middle of March they forced through and got popular support for a set of constitutional amendments that—I think the die was cast right there for the failure of the transition. I mean, that referendum took place on March 19, so very, very quickly. And what happened already by then, as some of the panelists noted in the last panel, the Brotherhood was working with the SCAF against the other forces, the secular forces of the revolution. And a lot of things happened after that, so that Egyptians had very little time. And then even, in part, they didn't get to design the transition, the forces of the revolution did not get to design the transition. And the SCAF, with the agreement of the Brotherhood, put into place certain things, like, for example, not electing transitional bodies, but electing a Parliament and then a president that were supposed to serve full terms, before the constitution had been rewritten. I mean, this was crazy. It didn't make any sense. But it did make sense, I think, for those in the military who wanted to minimize the changes that would take place as a result of the revolution.

So things happened very, very quickly, and then, of course, also, not only did the different forces within the revolution work with the military—notably, the Brotherhood at first worked with the military in 2011, and then later, at the time of the military coup in 2013, parts of the secular opposition worked with the military, supporting the coup and so forth. So as I think Abdelrahman Ayyash said, instead of those who were the unarmed, political forces trusting each other, at different times they instead worked with the military against each other, which was absolutely disastrous. And then of course, the role of outside players, [they] also worked with outside players against those in their own country, whether we're talking Qatar and Turkey for the Brotherhood, or Saudi Arabia and the UAE with the military, against the Brotherhood later in 2013.

And just the last thing to say is about the role of outsiders as well, including the United States and Europe. Those major outside powers involved with Egypt, who are democracies and who say they support the growth of democracy and human rights abroad—they did not build any kind of a meaningful, enabling environment for the success of the Arab Spring. And we can go through why: there are a lot of justifications, whether it was the financial crisis, or the Obama administration policies towards the Middle East reacting to the Bush freedom agenda, etc., there were many reasons for it. But these outside actors that could have and should have

maybe—they couldn't have controlled things—but to construct meaningful incentives for democratic transitions and disincentives for a return to authoritarianism. We did not do so.

Amy Hawthorne [1:10:20]
Thank you Michele. Turning to you, Ezzedine. How would you answer that question? Was al-Sisi's rise to power inevitable?

Ezzedine C. Fishere [1:10:30]
Thank you, and happy birthday again, to you and to Egypt in fact. To answer your question, I think what happened in Egypt since 2011 was the most likely outcome given the country's condition. I am not saying it was inevitable, I don't think much is inevitable—there's always a chance that actions taken by the players would change the course of events, of course, but at the same time, there are constraints and not everything is possible. So I prefer to see these things in terms of likelihood. And I think what happened, everything that happened, the rise of the Muslim Brothers and the fall, the way they fell, the military's intervention, all of this I think was the most likely outcome. Now, things could have turned out differently only if the players, or at least some of them, had acted out of character. If they did something that they wouldn't automatically do in response to the stimulus or to the challenges they faced. And they didn't. Almost every single player among the main ones in Egypt have acted exactly in the way their conditions suggested that they would follow.

To be specific, I think there are two main things that should have happened for this revolution to turn into a stable democratization process, and one is, maybe not as much, as Michele said, not necessarily unity, but at least cooperation among the players, boundaries to their conflict. So that they accept that they're going to stay in the game for the long run instead of trying to throw each other completely outside the game. That's one.

And the second is, as Sahar Aziz said in the previous panel, some kind of a genuine attention to the governance challenges. So, let's remember, the majority of people who took to the streets took to the streets because of the failing governance in Egypt. 65% below or above, sorry, below or around the poverty line, education and so on. So that's the other thing that is kind of neglect[ed]. However, had the players found a way to live with each other and accepted to cooperate, they would probably be still around today. It wouldn't be a very functioning democracy, but it would be some kind of fledgling, muddling through, a little bit like Tunisia. But they couldn't even achieve that.

And I think there are three or four things that come directly from this. Now, the attitudes and the backgrounds of the main players, all three of the Islamists, the liberals or secularists, and the military, they all act out of monopoly over truth, or acting in the best interest of the country, and see the others as complete outsiders, if not traitors. There is this emphasis in Egyptian political culture, or has been for a long time, over the unity and mobilization to face the outside enemies and so on. And that, between 2011, immediately after the removal of Mubarak, came back and conditioned the actions of the players.

So the Muslim Brothers were sincere, and I think the military were sincere, and the liberals were sincere. The problem is with the vision that they are sincere about, that is closed and exclusionary. The weakness of the liberals made them a permanent candidate for the support role, and denied them the ability to kind of push the others or balance the others out. So they had to side either with this or with that. They sided with one side, with one player, and when they felt betrayed, they shifted to the other. They didn't have, certainly not the power, but not even the attempt at power. So it was mentioned also in the first panel, why did they accept almost unconditionally that SCAF takes over as Mubarak was leaving. There was no attempt made by the liberals to be a partner, either in drafting the way forward as the Muslim Brothers did, or in insisting on a transition of power that is at least civilian in part. That was kind of dismissed by the liberals because they felt that they're too weak to do it, and that continued to condition their behavior forward.

There's obviously the history of mistrust and animosity between old players. But also, and I echo what Michele said, the lack of foreign support that could have served as a constraint, that would have compelled—even if the players themselves didn't have it in them to make space for each other, that outside constraint, specifically from the United States, could have served as a way to compel them to make room, and that didn't happen. I'm sure you know this better than I do, but American officials often mentioned inclusivity, but that was it. And they thought just by mentioning it in meetings that this would do, and obviously, it didn’t.

The last point about the lack of attention to governance challenges. Now, those governance challenges facing Egypt are really difficult, they're not easy. Egypt is an underdeveloped country with a failing economy and so on. Now, both liberals and Islamists, because they have been outside power for such a long time, overestimated the capacity of the state. They saw the failed governance only as a matter of corruption, and a lack of political will. A lot of people among them thought that these things actually function; all they needed is to be in power so that they can steer policy in the right direction and things will follow. Things don't follow because the structure is rotten, the system is rotten, and nobody knew how to run this rotten system except the ones who were running it. So it was only a matter of time before, if you put all these things together, before the military and their proxies in the state would use this in order to organize their comeback and their exclusionary politics. And that's precisely what happened. It's not that it was not foreshadowed; a lot of people realized this is a risk. But realizing something and being able to control it are two different things.

Amy Hawthorne [1:17:35]
Thank you Ezzedine and Michele, and now I'd like to turn to Bob and Nancy, and ask, in your view, what are the main continuities and the main differences with Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s regime and earlier authoritarian regimes in Egypt? Bob, I'll turn to you first.

Robert Springborg [1:17:56]
Well, Amy, thank you very much for having me. I hope in these days of virtual interaction, you can figure out a good thing to do on your birthday, in addition to this. Well, the glib answer, Amy, is that nothing's changed, that we have another pharaoh president, there's slight, quantitative differences in where the weight is placed on the security service, the military, the glorification of the president, slightly different ways, and so on. But I don't think that's a sufficiently acute analysis of what the changes really are, and I think they're quite profound. In fact, I might even go so far as to say al-Sisi is more of a revolutionary than the folks in the street those 10 years ago were, in the sense that—and Ezzedine was just talking about the issue of governance and understanding how the state works—what al-Sisi seems to have understood, and has acted upon, is that the state didn't work.

So he's trying to dismantle or at least sideline the existing state and replace it with altogether a different one. And so the signs of the displacement of this rotten old state are with regard to the institutions which are being systematically devalued across the board. With regard to the social class that has tied itself since 1952 to that state, chief of which were those in public employment and those in turn dependent upon them, of the reduction of subsidies and all the things that have gone together to undermine the traditionally state-centric middle class. So, and then you could argue that he's in the process of creating—alongside this degenerating, this withering state, to use the Marxist term—a much more impressive enterprise, which is an example of the sort of authoritarian development state, especially in its Gulf version. And that state is something that we are all familiar with, in terms of its sort of glitzy representations, whether it's the new administrative capital, whether it's now the fast trains that Siemens is going to build, whether it's the nuclear reactor at El Dabaa, and so on and so forth. So those are all the sort of external signs of this new state.

But underpinning that, and more importantly, are reconfigurations of the economy so that it's based on the principal rents that Egypt generates, foreign policy and foreign direct investment in the energy sector, hydrocarbons and the use of land, and everything that flows from the use of that land. Who's running the state? Well, they're really—at the present, it’s the military running the state, in a way that it has never done before: far more extensive engagement in the actual management, say nothing of the ownership of the economy. But an interesting and less observed partner, although much junior at this stage (but one might anticipate that they would become more important over time) are new administrative elites that the al-Sisi regime is creating through its reconfigured educational system. And so the model of the French administrative école is being literally copied, as is the model of the old Hitlerjugend educational system, the Napoli, as they were called, which is run by the military, and these and other educational institutions are being used to create a politically loyal, technocratic administrative elite, loyal to the regime, and so very much part of an authoritarian sort of top down development model. And one can go on about this new state. But just to go to the nub of the issue here, this is essentially a high risk strategy on his part, and that's why I characterize it in some senses, then, as a revolutionary movement: that how can he be sure that this old state and the social class dependant upon it, it's just simply going to wither away without a howl of

protest? And as the conditions deteriorate, for after all, there's the vast majority of people in the country, then that potential is much greater.

And then secondly, there's the question of the capacities of this new developmental state that he's trying to create, because it's pretty much modeled on Gulf countries, in which the rent flow is more obvious and more substantial and more sustained. How do you create a rentier economy without rents? And so the rents he's trying to generate are both internal, extracting surplus value, if you will, from the rest of the Egyptian population, combined with external borrowings, which are of the magnitude that was only reached in the early Mubarak era, and which caused a fundamental crisis in the regime at that time. And with the indulgence of some of our panelists that referred to Egypt's "friends" from beyond, who have been more than willing to prop up the regime, and it's not just those in the Gulf, it's those in Europe, and it's indeed those in the United States. So this is a pretty high risk "revolutionary strategy" on the part of al-Sisi. So I would say, just to contradict my opening statement, it's not business as usual. This is not just another feral president. This is Akhenaten, in other words, someone rejecting the old religion and going in a new direction.

Amy Hawthorne [1:23:44]
Thank you, Bob. Nancy, how do you see the situation?

Nancy Okail [1:23:53]
First of all, happy birthday again, Amy, there's one more. Going to your question about what are the continuities and what are the differences between different regimes, I would say I agree with what Robert said and would like to just deconstruct it in a way to show where is the legitimacy and power that al-Sisi is getting and gaining under this regime. So compared to past regimes, there may be some resemblance of the [Gamal Abdel] Nasser regime, but there are stark differences between the regime under [Anwar] Sadat and under [Hosni] Mubarak. If we could say that the coup de grâce of Sadat and Mubarak were the miscalculation of politics or flawed politics, I would say that the vulnerability of the al-Sisi regime is the lack thereof, the absence of politics. Not the absence of politics in the general sense, there is always power relations, but the lack of politics in terms of practice. And not just that [al-Sisi] closed the public space and put all the politicians and civil society actors in jail, but also to his own interest, this kind of lack of politics puts him in a very vulnerable position.

First of all, both Sadat and Mubarak had the NDP [National Democratic Party], which was a very influential party. [It] had different roles under Sadat and Mubarak but, still, [the NDP] were very effective in reinstating his power, expanding his reach, and more importantly, also, in 2011 the local councils were dissolved and until today were not reconvened. There were no local council elections anymore. That is very dangerous because this is not just important for sharing power and decentralization but also for the ruler in order to have some influence when needed. When you cut that line, you become irrelevant and you have no agents of influence. Also, a lack of accurate information, as well, if you are thinking from a very self-interested perspective. Then, what you are only left with is force and security. So [al-Sisi] gave away some of the tools that were very effective under Sadat and under Mubarak and relied heavily on security.

Now concerning security as well, there is a huge departure from how things worked in terms of the shape and structure and resources of the security apparatus and their authority vis-à-vis the military and the people, and also the role of the General Intelligence [Service, GIS]. So if we come and look at the state security apparatus under Sadat and Mubarak, in both cases, they were very influential and highly resourced, and they had high authority. So for example, under Sadat, we had the well-known Minister of Interior, Nabawi Ismail, who was so influential to the extent that he would select the members of the Cabinet, he determines who sits in the meetings with the president, he attends military meetings sometimes. And in the time of Mubarak, we also had Habib el-Adly, he was like the most notorious Minister of Interior. But it wasn't just that, under his time the expansion of the resources and the might and clout of the state security was very high. Also, in numbers, they reached the point that they were in total, including the center security forces, it's 2 million officers. And that's huge by international standards. Yet, he saw that this did not really save him, or did not really carry that. In both cases, this has resulted in a position of dismay of the military because they were marginalized in both cases. And I love Hazem Kandil's illustration of all this.

But the main difference is that it's not like the military were not privileged. They had their privilege, their perks, they had their positions that they were guaranteed after retirement as a head of a project or some sort of acquisition, but they were not in a management role. And that's a major difference between the time of Mubarak. And this is a huge departure where, under al-Sisi, the military came to center stage and came to management. And I believe he is a good student of history, [and] that seeing that even though someone like [Mohamed] Tantawi who was like the most loyal to Mubarak after 20 years, he threw him under the bus when things came to the risk of the privileges and the safety of the whole military institution. So he wanted to avoid this kind of risk. He wanted to just have them close to him and give them more privileges and more management, as Robert said. Partly he does not trust, also, the efficiency of the cabinet or the government implementation. He has more trust in the ability of the military in order to do that.

But the involvement of the military in management and in control over the economy is unprecedented. And you can see this in terms of the positions they are having, and in terms of the different laws that al-Sisi has issued in order to be able to give them financial benefits directly. For example, he changed the public tender law, where it allowed the state to award contracts without a competitive process. And in that case, this is the ability of the decision of the state: who to give the contracts to. And the private sector became in a position that he is like a subcontractor whose revenue is defined, and at the same time, is competing with the military. So, and again, the level is not sort of equal there. In terms of positions also, in addition, for example, having about 17 of the governors in the 27 governorates are from the military, he recently also introduced a decree so that there's a military representative in every governorate overseeing the governance. So you see it, the expansion of the role of the military, both in terms of resources, in terms of authority, and in terms of interference. Again, just like the doing without politics is a source of vulnerability, this could also be a source of vulnerability, because in order to win the loyalties of all those members, you need to have financial resources, where most of

the financial resources in Egypt and all the investments and foreign investments and loans are mostly invested in construction, which means like it's not a productive kind of investment where there's a return for that.

Finally, what's really critical is the role of General Intelligence. And, again, General Intelligence in Egypt, or Mukhabarat, has always had a very central role, both internally and externally. However, there's a difference here between the Mukhabarat under Omar Suleiman and the Mukhabarat under Abbas Kamil and his deputy Mahmoud al-Sisi, who is the son of al-Sisi. So, under Omar Suleiman, yes, there was a role in the internal affairs, in terms of monitoring and spying over the officers in the security apparatus itself. But also, at that time, Egypt played a central role in the region, and by default, also, the General Intelligence had a more central role as a mediator. So Omar Suleiman was known for his ability to mediate between Libya and Saudi Arabia at the time of the rift, he played a role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and also with the Gaza war. So he proved himself as a very important player. And so most of his focus, his main thing, was about regional focus.

With al-Sisi, and with Abbas Kamil, there is a departure from that. That is, the GIS is more inward looking. Yes, there [is] some focus on the regional, but also, we need to account for that. Egypt's role regionally and the dynamics in the region has changed from the time of Omar Suleiman and the time of Abbas Kamil. And that role is not just in terms of monitoring and tapping and interfering, but also they have taken a management role, where they actually acquired through acquisition the media channels and became responsible in interfering in that role, which is also another source of vulnerability, because the way you manage a business like the media business in the same way you manage construction does not work, because you end up not generating revenues from advertisements and other issues or other sources. And then you find yourself in a place, which actually happened, that you're not able to pay for all those people who are part of these media firms and projects. So it puts them in a position again, where there is this third level of vulnerability of the al-Sisi regime, which is a bit different from the type of vulnerabilities that Sadat and Mubarak had before him.

Amy Hawthorne [1:35:30]
Thank you, Nancy, and staying on this topic, this crucial topic of the military for a moment, Bob, I'd like to ask you, what do we know and what do we not know about al-Sisi's relationship with the military and the relationship of dependence between them?

Robert Springborg [1:35:50]
Well, Nancy has just given us a fair bit of background on that, about what we do know about it. And we know that al-Sisi was the very product of Minister of Defense Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, who, as she graphically put it, threw Mubarak under the bus. She didn't add that he also threw Gamal Mubarak under the bus, which he did. And he had a suitable candidate, who was none other than General al-Sisi, who had been cultivated by Tantawi for several years; his course's honorarium was completely consistent with preparing him for the world he ultimately now occupies as President of the Republic. So we know that he was the golden haired boy of the military. We know that he has used the military as the primary prop for his regime. He has,

as Nancy just explained, subordinated General Intelligence from the role that it had played under, for example, under Mubarak. And we also know that he's extremely jealous of his sole role at the top of the Egyptian state and at the top of the Egyptian military. And so any general or lower ranking officer who has raised his head above the parapet has had it cut off immediately. So he's a product of the military, he used the military to rule, and he is extremely wary of anyone else assuming a role of significance within the military.

Now, what we don't know are the most important things. We don't know the personal relationships at the highest levels of the Egyptian military. We don't know exactly the relationships between the security services on the one hand and the military on the other. It was a bolt from the blue, for example, when his son Mahmoud was dispatched off to Moscow. And so the speculation was, well, what is this due to? Was it because he was implicated in the brutal killing of the Italian graduate student of Cambridge, Giulio Regeni? What was it exactly, and what does this tell us about the competitive roles not just between General Intelligence and the military, but between General Intelligence and now-renamed Homeland Security. So these vital, the relationships between the vital course of agencies are a bit ambiguous.

We also don't know if there are disgruntled elements in the military. We know that al-Sisi and his military intelligence, which was the key department through which he rose, had played a very important role in filtering out disgruntled elements, key of which were Islamists under Mubarak. Since that time, it's not in any way clear to what extent there might be at least pockets of Islamists, as well as other disgruntled elements, that somehow the intelligence department has missed.

But then lastly, and in my mind, most importantly, is we don't know about the capacities of the military. This is a country that for the last five years has been one of the top five arms importing countries in the world. It has spent a huge amount, not just of Egyptian taxpayers' money, but at least as importantly of German, French, American, and British taxpayers' money because the terms and conditions of procurement have been extremely favorable to Egypt, such that the French, for example, really are paying for the $5.5 billion price tag on the squadron of Rafale fighters that have been delivered to Egypt. What is the net result of all of that? Has Egypt actually increased its military capacities [to] a significant degree, or is the plethora of procurement burying it under its own inadequacies, which were manifest well before this procurement splurge began? The lack of sustainment, the lack of training, the lack of the F-16s, which were first delivered in the 1980s and which were to be independent in terms of sustainment by the Egyptian Air Force within a few years [and] are still being sustained by American contractors. So the ability to project power, which Nancy also referred to and how it was rather more notable in the earlier period, is questionable. And so we not only don't know about the internal workings of the Egyptian military at a political level, we don't know about its real military capacities, and in the end, that could be the most dangerous vulnerability al-Sisi has.

Amy Hawthorne [1:40:44]
Thank you Bob, and thank you Nancy, for all of those fascinating insights. Let's shift gears and look outside the regime for a moment. And Michele, I'd like to ask you, is the Muslim Brotherhood finished in Egypt as an opposition movement, or can you imagine any circumstances under which it might re-emerge as a political force?

Michele Dunne [1:41:08]
Thank you, Amy. And with your permission, I just want to engage with one of Bob's points about what we know about whether there is any dissatisfaction with al-Sisi within the military. I mean, I agree with him that the military is a black box and it's very hard to know. But, I would point out a couple of things. In 2018, when it was time for al-Sisi to run again for the presidency, we saw three military candidates try to run against him: the former chief of staff, the former head of the Air Force who had become Prime Minister, as well as a colonel in the army. And you know, a lot of people believe that those people would not have done so, put themselves forward publicly—and they all paid a heavy price for it—without some backing within the military. And I would also point out there have been repeated purges within the military and announced assassination plots and so forth. Now, whether any of this will amount to, you know, a movement within the military at some point to remove al-Sisi, I don't know. But I do think there are plenty of indications, and there have been, on and off, of dissatisfaction with al-Sisi within the military.

On the Brotherhood. You know, I was speaking on a panel a year or so ago with somebody else who's an excellent expert on Egypt, and he said the Brotherhood is dead. And I said, I don't think it's dead. I think it's heavily damaged. But I don't think the Muslim Brotherhood is dead. And you know, damaged by several things—by its own performance in the transition and then in the very brief time when they were in power. But then, of course, by the very, very heavy repression. I mean, the Rabaa massacre, the massive, thousands of Brotherhood members and leadership in prison and others in exile. And, we have seen, of course, that this very much has damaged the Brotherhood, has led to some rifts within the Brotherhood that are sort of visible abroad and so forth. But I doubt that it's dead. You know, it's always been hard to know what the support of the Brotherhood in Egyptian society is. At its high watermark, in the post revolutionary parliamentary elections, let's remember that the Brotherhood party was able to elect about half of the Parliament and then Salafi Islamists another quarter so that they have three quarters of the Parliament. That was probably the high watermark. And that doesn't mean I think that three quarters of Egyptians are Islamists but that people were willing to give the Brotherhood a chance. You know, this was the opposition movement that had been out for a long time, well, let's give them a chance, and so forth.

So, of course, a lot of Egyptians were very disillusioned with what happened while the Brotherhood was in power. But I suspect a base is still there. We get little indications, there's very little, of course, free polling, independent polling of what happens in Egypt, but from little indications that we've seen, probably, that's that maybe 25 or 30 percent of Egyptians who support the Brotherhood in some basic way, may still do so. Right? And, you know, we've seen some indication, probably the Salafis I think, are a huge question mark—to what extent have

support for the Salafis shrunk or grown or whatever, during the post-revolutionary and the al-Sisi era. My guess is, you know, if there were a political opening, that we would see the Brotherhood reemerge in Egypt in some form. Would it be as strong as potentially kind of dominant it was in the immediate post-revolutionary period? I don't know. But let me just say, as I said, I think there's some base that's still there. And, you know, we don't really know, what's the effect of the terrible repression that the Brotherhood has suffered during the al-Sisi years. Has that somehow increased sympathy for it? We saw some signs of that, for example, when Mohamed Morsi died, some sense that well, yes, the Brotherhood betrayed the revolution in some ways and did a poor job when they were in power, but they paid a heavy price for it. And then we also don't know what the effect is of the fact that Egyptians have been watching Brotherhood media, like Mekameleen, and al-Watan TV and so forth as an alternative to the very heavily state-controlled media that Nancy was describing. So, I guess the short answer is: Brotherhood—damaged, not dead. Probably still still exists in some way and probably would reemerge in some form in a more open political environment in Egypt and maybe more than one form because as I said, there have always been splits in the Brotherhood and people peeling off and forming other political currents. And that has happened during the period of exile as well.

Amy Hawthorne [1:46:45]
Thank you, Michele. I'd like to ask Ezzedine and Nancy about other potential or extant but submerged opposition forces in Egypt—sources of opposition, potential opposition movements that could emerge, might emerge, in al-Sisi's Egypt. And [I'd] like to split this question into two and ask Ezzedine, what are those opposition forces that do exist or that could exist? And then I'd like to shift to Nancy and ask her, you know, what lessons, if any, opposition forces, particularly non-Islamist opposition forces, have learned from the experience of 10 years ago, from the January 25 revolution, uprising. And in the interest of time, I'd like to like to ask you both to keep your answers relatively brief. I know that's a challenge, but over to you Ezzedine.

Ezzedine C. Fishere [1:47:39]
Thank you. And I think, other than the Islamists, there are a bunch of liberals and leftists who were around in 2010, and continue to be around almost in the same way, which means unorganized, not forming, unable to turn themselves into a grassroot movement or anything close to that, but also lacking a vision for governance and for the future for their relationship with Islamists, for example, for the relationship with the military in a post-Sisi scenario. So all of the things that the liberals and leftists—let's call this the secularists—were lacking in 2011, unfortunately continue to be lacking today. I don't know if that qualifies this camp as a political force or opposition, but more likely something like a political opposition cloud, more than anything. Now, in addition to those, and to the Islamists, there is a bigger unknown in Egypt, which are millions of people who are not organized, who are not—not just organized, who are not connected to any system, to any political organization, or to any form of organization. There is a huge black hole in Egypt, and what Nancy said earlier about the lack of politics accentuates that. Now, what is happening with those people about whom we know very little, is a big question. Is it just, you know, kind of resentment? Is it support? Is it apathy? Nobody knows. And it's, I think, out of this dark kind of segment of society, is where the biggest danger lies for the future.

Amy Hawthorne [1:49:35]
Thank you very much. And Nancy, what lessons, if any, do you think extant or emerging or future opposition forces in Egypt have or should learn from the experience of 10 years ago?

Nancy Okail [1:49:52]
Well, I think it's very difficult to talk about lessons right now, other than what was mentioned at the beginning by Michele and is about them generally, what could have happened if the members or the people in the revolution acted differently. But I would say under the current conditions, speaking of organized opposition, it's just unimaginable. Just the idea of organizing could put you in prison. So most of the people who were taking a traditional political approach or role have been sidelined or exiled. But something really interesting is happening right now, where we're seeing the form of opposition that, akin to the time of the late 80s, where there is a form of opposition that is focusing on everyone's own battle. For example, the workers' union. We're seeing, two weeks ago, there was a decision to liquidate the Iran and Steel Company, which is one of the most significant production and industrial companies in Egypt that was formed at the time of Nasser, just like sort of a flagship of that. So the decision came for liquidations, worker unions tried to provide some proposal to change the decision. It didn't work. And last week, there were 4,000 workers having a strike in the city. And that's huge. Given the overall size of the company is about 7,500 workers, they are having a sit-in. And it's not just that, there's also during the same period we've seen sit-ins in Kafr el-Dawwar, this textile company; in Talkha, fertilizer company; and Nagaa Hammadi. Also another set of sit-ins and protests asking for, because they found out that they won't get their bonuses. So these are really significant. And when you hear 4,000 workers having a strike and a sit-in under these conditions, this is really clear, and actually during this month. I would hope that security forces would be really careful and wise when dealing with that, because that can explode. But there's a resemblance here [to] what we were seeing under Mubarak, which actually started the movement and the building blocks that took us to the moment of 2011.

And again, other battles, for example, in the area of women rights and sexual harassment and rape, were really important battles that were fought. And we've seen two very significant cases where the perpetrators or the people accused for the rapist are from the upper high class, and for them to be even charged, that comes on the shoulders of the feminist lawyers, like Aza Suleiman, and all the other people in civil society who've been pushing for that. And that's an important factor. These blocks [are] what creates the opposition. And it's actually a better scenario that it's not starting by traditional politics. Like in the first panel, Salma mentioned, when in Tahrir Square women went to ask for their demands, and they were pushed aside, [told] this is not your time, and they were even violent. So these are very important and significant movements. I don't know how long or how far it will last but I think it's a very healthy sign. But it also, I mean, it's just like one of the vulnerabilities of the regime at the moment—more than anything, more than any diaspora opposition that is out there, and any form of advocacy that has been made.

Amy Hawthorne [1:54:16]
Thank you for calling our attention to those developments, Nancy, that are not so noticed necessarily here in the United States or far outside of Egypt. In the time that we have left, I'd like to ask you each, to share a sentence or two on what you each think is the single biggest threat to Egyptian stability today, 10 years later after January 25. If you had to boil it down to one issue, or one problem, or one challenge, that you are the most concerned about, or watching the most closely in terms of threats to Egypt stability, what would that one thing be? And let me turn first to you, Ezzedine.

Ezzedine C. Fishere [1:55:08]
I love Robert's Akhenaten reference. I think the Akhenatenian project itself is the biggest danger. As I said, Egypt is an underdeveloped country with lots of problems that are not easy to fix. And to have an Akhenaten who's trying to deal with all these problems, while at the same time, antagonizing all political forces and large segments of society, including the youth, alienating them, even if it's not a political confrontation, but just losing that potential. You're trying to do something extremely ambitious, which is transform a country whose tools of governance aren't working using an auxiliary, a military, who's not even created or designed to be able to do governance. You're trying to do this impossible mission while at the same time losing a lot of the potential that this country offers. With doubtful finances, you know, who's gonna pay for this, not today but in 10 years. And using a model, a business model, that has been tried over and over again and failed, that's state-led. So it looks like this is an impossible mission that is doomed, and yet it is consuming all aspects of public life in Egypt. Now, if this comes crashing down, that is going to be, that will have huge repercussions, and not in a positive sense.

Amy Hawthorne [1:56:47]
Nancy, let me turn to you to share your biggest concern, biggest threat that you see to Egypt's stability today.

Nancy Okail [1:56:57]
So, I say everything is so connected in Egypt and they all lead to each other but if I would name just the most significant and critical threat at the moment is the water crisis. Yesterday, the Minister of Irrigation announced that all negotiations have failed and we've seen [that] the Washington mediation did not work or the African Union. He announced that yesterday. Now with—

Amy Hawthorne [1:57:24]
You're talking about negotiations—for our viewers—negotiations with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam that is operating in Ethiopia.

Nancy Okail [1:57:33]
Yeah. Thank you. It's so on my mind that I think everyone is thinking about it. So, he [Minister of Irrigation] also mentioned the fact that Egypt needs 114 billion cubic meters of water per year, just for the population and development. Ninety-seven percent of the water that Egypt gets is coming from outside of the country. This is a huge vulnerability. And we know that even just theoretically, in political science, scarcity is at the heart of every conflict. And when you have that situation, it also brings up again that you would resort to the security forces to deal with any form of uprising or conflict, even between the farmers or when it starts to emerge. These are the people who are going to be the first affected until it trickles up to the rest of the country. And the problem is that given a knowing [of] the gravity of this situation, yet still he, for example, said that they would allocate 250 million Egyptian pounds over the next five years for water management project. So 250 million Egyptian pounds, that's $15 million over five years. And compare that, for example, to the Cairo Eye, that has about $31.6 million allocated to be finished in 2022. And compare dealing with such a crisis with this figure over five years and that figure over two years. Now, it's not just about priorities, but also people don't see, or there's no transparency of the allocation of the budgets. On what basis are decisions made in a situation that we have a critical position, almost could be at war with Ethiopia, or could be having a crisis, like the crisis of the water here. And then again, you would face the problem of if you're relying only on securities to contain all this, you also have to pay the security and please them to maintain their loyalty.

Amy Hawthorne [2:00:01]
Thank you. Michele, what do you see as the biggest threat to Egypt's stability today?

Michele Dunne [2:00:07]
Okay, I'll say two things, but really quickly. One of them is population growth, and the fact that there is no serious program to get population growth under control. And at the same time, as everyone has said, in the economy, there's no serious job generation, either manufacturing or service center, and the Gulf has diminishing ability to absorb Egypt's excess labor. So I think that's a huge problem. The other thing I'll say quickly, many people have pointed to it, but the narrowness of this regime, the fact that there are many fewer civilian stakeholders, as Bob rightly pointed out, I think al-Sisi's trying to develop civilian employees of the regime, but not real stakeholders in the business community, even in institutions of the government and so forth. You know, as Michael Hanna said, that al-Sisi didn't want to broaden and balance things the way Mubarak did, because Mubarak eventually fell. Yes, but Mubarak also held control for 30 years. And that was partly because of that flexibility and balancing that al-Sisi does not have and I think shows no sign of being able to do.

Amy Hawthorne [2:01:27]
Bob Springborg, the last word goes to you. What do you see as the single greatest threat to Egypt's stability today?

Robert Springborg [2:01:34]
Well, the last word will be money. Where does it come from? And where does it go? I think those are the two questions that are vital to understanding this regime and its future. Where it comes from, the al-Sisi regime is based on the proposition that Egypt is too big to fail and the world will therefore continue to support it. If for whatever reason the world would decide that Egypt is a bad bet, then it's immediately in crisis. The foreign debt position is extremely vulnerable, the foreign direct investment is limited to hydrocarbons and real estate investment. So there's a serious question here of the sustainability of this regime in the faces of any sort of a global crisis. Khedive Ismail came down because of the end of the Civil War in the United States and the fall of cotton prices. So there are externalities in our world that can have devastating effects when you're as vulnerable as the Khedive was and as the al-Sisi regime is.

As for where the money goes, our previous speakers have given indication that it's not being distributed fairly. It's not being invested in public services, education, health care, which was supposed to receive minimum percentages of the GDP, according to the Constitution, do not. The pandemic has illustrated the shortcomings despite the regime censorship of the real data about it. And so there's a sense of, it's unfair, 70 percent of Egyptians are living on less than five and a half dollars a day now. So where the money goes is a pretty important question. So to me, it comes down to money.

Amy Hawthorne [2:03:12]
Well, thank all four of you brilliant panelists for giving us so many different insights into Egypt today, and where it might be going and giving us so many things to think about as we consider Egypt, on this bittersweet—or, in my view, just bitter—anniversary. As we close I'd like to give a special greeting to our friends in Egypt who were in the square 10 years ago and there for the next 17 days, we will never forget what you did. It was—it remains, actually—astonishing and inspiring. Thank you to all of our viewers for joining us today. And we look forward to seeing you all soon at our next event. Thank you.