



INSS Insight No. 448, July 21, 2013

**The ElBaradei and Fahmy Appointments:
Continuity in Egypt's Interim Government**
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As part of the difficult task of establishing an interim government in Egypt, Prime Minister Hazem el-Beblawi appointed Nabil Fahmy as Foreign Minister. The previous week Mohamed ElBaradei was appointed Vice President for Foreign Affairs (a new position tailored specifically for ElBaradei, following ElBaradei's attempt to become prime minister of the interim government, which failed because of Salafist opposition). Do these appointments signal the major importance the Prime Minister (and the military) attribute to foreign affairs? Or are these appointments the least problematic among the appointments? Either way there is no doubt that in light of Egypt's critical situation, the result of the military's intervention, the deposing of an elected president, and the consequent legitimacy issue Egypt faces vis-à-vis the West, the two foreign spokesmen are charged with a crucial task. A nation in need of urgent economic aid, Egypt must restore an atmosphere of stability in the hopes of attracting investments that can create employment, restoring the trust of tourists who have fled Egypt, and realizing a host of other public relations tasks. These will occupy the two appointees, known for their ties with the West, on a virtually full-time basis. In whatever time is left (the mandated duration of the interim government is until elections, which are supposed to be held before the end of the year) the two, especially Foreign Minister Fahmy, will likely attempt to leave their imprint on their nation's foreign relations. What do these appointments suggest about Egypt's relations with Israel?

Even if the efforts by the Prime Minister (and the military) focus on the drive to change the situation after the failed Muslim Brotherhood regime, the ElBaradei and Fahmy appointments are not expected to change Egypt's foreign policy. At most, there could be changes in nuance reflecting new circumstances and constraints. The two men are hardly revolutionaries who rose up against the Mubarak regime, nor are they ideologues. The two, despite their different career paths, were part and parcel of the Egyptian establishment. Specifically, both (like current Arab League secretary-general al-Araby) were protégés of Amr Moussa, the former Egyptian Foreign Minister and former Arab League secretary-general, who mentored an entire cadre of Egyptian Foreign Ministry

officials on the basis of the concept that Israel must be "restored to its natural size." The idea is that after Israel withdraws from all occupied territories and is stripped of its deterrent assets it will be possible to confront it with greater ease. This is the same school of thought that viewed Egypt's mission, as the leader of the Arab world, to conduct an uncompromising struggle against Israel in every United Nations forum, especially over the nuclear issue. Indeed, the nuclear issue was one of the central fields in which the two new appointees – each in the context of his own career – played a role.

Although we do not know how the two will divide the work, Foreign Minister Fahmy will likely devote efforts to realize what was envisioned as the 2012 Conference (an initiative resulting from the NPT Review Conference of 2010 as part of the attempt to implement a 1995 decision on a Middle East weapons of mass destruction-free zone). Egypt's decision in Geneva in April 2013 to walk out of the preparatory conference, held in advance of the 2015 NPT Review Conference, to protest the fact that the 2012 Conference wasn't held (a step that the head of the US delegation called "melodramatic") can be seen as evidence that Egypt is again willing to act provocatively and force the United States to compensate Egypt yet once more in order to avert a crisis. Does Egypt currently possess sufficient leverage? The incoming Foreign Minister has used every opportunity to restate the essential importance of establishing a demilitarized zone as a means to strip Israel of its deterrent capabilities, which, he contends, endanger the security of Egypt and the entire Middle East.

Many who participated in the discussions of the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group established in the framework of the Madrid process had an opportunity to become familiar with the weltanschauung of Fahmy (whose intellectual and rhetorical skills are uncontested). Fahmy led the Arab position with brilliant clarity of speech and uncompromising verve, making it clear that an ideological gulf separates the Israeli and Egyptian viewpoints. Notwithstanding the time that has elapsed since the multilateral process ended in failure, the gulf remains. Not only have the ideological differences of opinion not changed; rather, it seems that the two sides have only become more entrenched in their stances. Therefore, Egypt under Foreign Minister Fahmy may well spare no effort and work on the international arena to bring Israel to the negotiating table. As is usual in such cases, the United States, which feels that current conditions are not ripe for holding the 2012 Conference, will be put to the test. Another stage the new minister can exploit will be the annual IAEA gathering in September; it too will provide a glimpse of where Egypt is headed under Fahmy.

Fahmy's expected emphasis on the arms control front will likely not contradict the worldview of Vice President ElBaradei. His critical stance on Israel and its nuclear policy was the cause of both overt and behind the scenes tension during his tenure as director-general of the IAEA. In addition, his term will be remembered as the one during which

the nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran made enormous headway. His attempts to downplay the seriousness of the development of the Iranian program, his shows of appeasement toward Iran, and his attempts to downplay the seriousness of the reports left behind a strong – and likely permanent – bad taste. Given the development of the Iranian nuclear program, will the two men continue to view the Israeli program as more dangerous to Egypt's interests than the Iranian one? In light of the regional struggle now manifested in the crisis in Syria between Iran and its allies on the one hand, and the Sunni camp led by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states on the other, and the drive to normalize relations with the West, it is unlikely that the Fahmy era will be one of greater Egyptian-Iranian closeness.

Is Egyptian involvement in the Palestinian issue likely, with an emphasis on the attempt to achieve internal Palestinian reconciliation? Or, as part of its attempts to woo the United States, will Egypt (as it has done in the past) come down squarely on the side of Palestinian Authority leader Abbas? The second would seem the more probable scenario.

Since Egypt is currently facing one of its most severe crises, the Vice President and Foreign Minister will be forced to confront the most urgent issue: Egypt's catastrophic economy. The two will clearly use their connections and extensive diplomatic experience to tackle this critical task. Beyond that, and considering the short duration of this government, the new Foreign Minister will presumably not miss any opportunity to leave his stamp on issues that have occupied him for decades and served as the backdrop for longstanding disagreements between Israel and Egypt, both bilateral and multilateral. In other words, continuity at its finest is the most likely scenario.

