

# MEMMO

March 9, 2011

## Egyptian Democracy Must Resist Extremism, Maintain Peace with Israel

**As Egyptians continue to seek democratic change and political freedom, they should ensure that extremist forces do not hijack the process. Egyptians should create pluralistic and democratic institutions that reject violence. America should help Egypt in this effort, while also continuing to urge Egypt to maintain its commitments to peace with Israel and nonproliferation as well as its opposition to Islamic radicalism and Iran.**

Extremist forces in Egypt must not be allowed to use this time of transition and uncertainty to grab power.

- While it is important that Egypt transition peacefully to a full-fledged democracy that will continue Cairo's close relations with the United States and maintain its peace treaty with Israel, no one can be certain of such an outcome.
- A committee appointed by the Supreme Military Council presented constitutional amendments on Feb. 26, which could lead to new parliamentary and presidential elections within a few months. The desire for speedy elections should not undermine the need to build democratic institutions and parties committed to pluralism and non-violence.
- Rushing to elections could help the election prospects of the Muslim Brotherhood, a radical Islamist movement, which is by far the best-organized and most effective opposition group.
- The Brotherhood has consistently advocated the cancellation of the peace treaty with Israel, expressed hostility to the United States and promoted the establishment of an Islamic state in Egypt and beyond.
- Kamal El Helbawy—a London-based Islamic scholar and Brotherhood representative widely known as the movement's face in the West—recently visited Iran and praised its leaders. “Every night when I go to bed, I pray to wake up the next day to see Israel is wiped off the map,” he said.
- The United States has made clear that the amended Egyptian constitution must ensure safeguards against undemocratic forces. “They must make absolutely clear that no political party can be committed to the overthrow of the government, can be unwilling to support an inclusive society, including Christians, women, and others,” Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said recently.



**Mohamed Badie, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, has called for a holy war against the United States and Israel.**

The Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty continues to be the key stabilizing factor in the Middle East.

- In 1979, Egypt became the first Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel.
- Although the peace has been cold, Cairo has adhered to its main treaty commitments: full diplomatic relations; keeping the Sinai as a demilitarized buffer zone; permitting the presence in the Sinai of the U.S.-led Multinational Force and Observers; and maintaining freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal even for Israeli warships.
- The Israeli-Egyptian border has remained quiet and has helped prevent other wars. With Egypt at peace with Israel, no Arab army has attacked Israel since the treaty was signed in 1979.
- Although Egypt's performance in preventing the smuggling of weapons to Hamas in Gaza has been uneven, Cairo has quietly cooperated with Israel in isolating and blockading Hamas.

Egypt has been America's foremost strategic Arab ally.

- Since the signing of the peace treaty with Israel, Egypt—the most populous and powerful Arab nation—has been the key U.S. strategic ally in the Arab world.
- Egypt has worked with the United States in opposing Islamic radicalism in its many forms (Hamas in Gaza, al-Qaeda in the entire region, Hizballah in Lebanon) and has been a strong opponent of Iran's nuclear program and efforts to attain regional hegemony.
- Egyptian troops also participated alongside U.S. forces in the liberation of Kuwait during the first Gulf War in 1991.
- In return, Egypt has benefited from massive annual U.S. military and economic assistance, currently standing at roughly \$1.3 billion in military aid and \$200 million in economic assistance.

While only the Egyptians can form their own government, the United States should insist on several goals for the next Egyptian government to meet.

- Egypt should maintain the peace treaty with Israel, including the demilitarization of the Sinai Peninsula and permission for the continued presence of the U.S.-led Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai.
- Egypt should adhere to other contractual obligations to Israel, particularly continuing the supply of natural gas.
- Egypt must maintain its policy of isolating Hamas in Gaza.
- Egypt should continue to oppose Iran's efforts to expand its regional influence—both directly and through Hizballah and Hamas.
- Egypt must continue to oppose the global jihad of al-Qaeda and its affiliates.
- Egypt must keep the Suez Canal open to all shipping, including the passage of Israeli civilian and military vessels.