Reforming the Egyptian Security Services

A Review of the Press, Conventional Wisdom and Rumours

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Since President Mubarak was forced to step down, the reform of the security sector has become a major challenge and a matter of debate in Egypt.

Tewfick Aclimandos offers an in-depth analysis based on his exclusive expertise of the Egyptian security sector and knowledge of its intricacies. Using public sources, press reports and rumors to document his analysis, he takes an unconventional perspective on the sector and suggests directions for engaging in a process of reform. Among those:

- that while the involvement of citizens in the discussion on reforming the sector is necessary, the reform process will only succeed if it is conducted by one or a few key players in the field with the expertise and legitimacy in the eyes of members of the targeted bodies – namely by highly respected professionals of the sector;

- that financial oversight and control over the security institutions will require the institutionalization of the assessment process, and that an interim measure could be to entrust special commissions of former senior leaders from the security agencies with the task;

- that given that most security officers have only worked under the emergency law, it is most urgent to establish the rule of law into the sector. However, given the nature of the new security challenges and the legal problems they raise, it may be necessary to enact repressive legislation, at least as a first step;

- that even though less urgent, the problem of the social fabric of the security services is a key dimension to tackle. A policy of positive discrimination of some sort is imperative so that at least some young people from disadvantaged classes are admitted to the Military Academy or the Academy of Police, allowing for a gradual change in practices and prejudices;

- that NCOs in the army and *amîn shurta* in the police are vital echelons whose training should be carefully revised and that their superiors should be made aware of the arduous and crucial nature of their work; hence new systems for internal promotion need to be considered;

- that the suppression of corruption should not be entrusted to the army, the *mukhâbarât*, the new State Security or the special courts answerable to them. These have too many tasks already, and fighting corruption requires specific training.

To the crucial question about how to loosen the stranglehold of these institutions over the Egyptian society, Aclimandos replies that it is not possible to reform a regime or institutions

by asking them to commit suicide or even giving that impression. As he argues, it is not (only) through reforming these apparatuses that the relations between them, society and other State institutions will be modified. SSR will also require developing other institutions capable of carrying out the same duties, rationalising the performance of the entire State apparatus, putting in place an effective education system, etc, all tasks that will require a great deal of determination and energy.

It has become routine to point out that the various Egyptian security and monitoring services had a hegemonic place in Mubarak's political system[1].

In this system, the army was the ultimate guarantor of the regime's safety. Its mission, as defined by article 180 of the 1971 Constitution, was to defend the integrity of the nation's territory in accordance with the instructions of the President of the Republic, who is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

> "The State alone has the right to create armed forces, which belong to the people."[2]

It is noteworthy that the phrase "which belong to the people" is not purely rhetorical. It gave the armed forces the legal resources enabling the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (CSFA) to set itself apart from the President during the crisis which swept away the latter's reign[3]. The crisis seems to have been viewed by army commanders as the logical consequence of the "plan for hereditary transfer" of power to Gamal Mubarak, and of the policies the latter had implemented[4].

The fact of the matter is that the armed forces protected the borders, but they were also the "last recourse" in maintaining public order, a strong arm that was rarely called upon. It had happened only once in the 30 years preceding 28 January 2011, in 1986, following the mutiny and riots of army conscripts serving in the *amn markazî* (the central security forces, which report to the Interior Ministry). The efficient way in which the army took charge of a situation that had badly deteriorated was commented on at the time, and suggests that this type of mission (taking control of one or several zones) had been conceived, prepared and planned very seriously. On the other hand, recent developments prove (if proof was needed) that the armed forces are not trained for routine tasks in maintaining order or managing demonstrations, and that they are unable to make up for police deficiencies in these areas.

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[1] According to *Rûz al-Yûsuf* of 13 April 2007, the army's budget is 17.6 billion Egyptian pounds, compared to 9.1 billion for the security services. These figures need to be updated considerably, given economic growth in Egypt, but they give an idea of size.

[2] Revision of 26 March 2007.

[3] See for example the interview given by General Mazhar Shâhîn, a member of the CSFA responsible for legal issues, to *Al-Misrî al-Yawm*, 17 March 2011.

[4] The 2007 constitutional amendments were apparently perceived by army chiefs – and rightly so – as the result of a deliberate desire to exclude them definitively from deliberations regarding Mubarak's succession, or worse. This was suggested by the former commander of the Presidential Guard, Sabrî al-'Adwî, in an interview published in *Al-Misrî al-Yawm*, 25 April 2011.

The Interior Ministry is the biggest employer in the country. State Security (*mabaheth amn al-dawla*, the political police, now dissolved), which was answerable to the Ministry, was not only responsible for fighting terrorism but also for surveillance and, if necessary, for cracking down on (or "teaching a lesson" to) various players involved in the political or religious arenas, be it the Muslim Brotherhood, the so-called legal political parties, the press, men of religion (ulemas, lay preachers, Coptic priests), or various protest movements.

A third important institution is the *mukhâbarât 'âma*, or intelligence service. It is directly answerable to the President of the Republic. Its director has always been a military man, and the majority of the known intelligence professionals have come from the armed forces – though there are exceptions. In theory, the service is in charge of external security (which includes terrorism[5]), but there is reason to believe that it sometimes has domestic security missions, and not only in counter-espionage[6].

Functions and prerogatives of the various security bodies

State Security has often been a mediator between strikers and bosses (see below). The army has in the past been entrusted with intervening to solve a bread shortage – it is known to have its own agribusiness sector. It is public knowledge that the *mukhâbarât* manage several delicate foreign-policy dossiers, particularly relations with neighbouring states and territories such as Sudan, Israel and Gaza, and perhaps also relations with countries along the Nile, given the strategic importance of this area. Under Nasser, one administration of the Foreign Ministry was in charge of liaising between diplomats and the intelligence services; it is possible that this is still the case.

These three institutions are the ones that are most frequently targeted by the vague but inclusive term of *amn* (Security). But they are not the only ones: the police in the strict sense, the head of Military Intelligence, the military police[7], the body for administrative oversight, the Presidential Guard[8], and the security forces

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[5] Other institutions are also associated with combating terrorism: State Security, of course, but also the Foreign and Justice Ministries, the leaders of Military Intelligence and probably al-Azhar.

[6] The President of the Republic has the right to assign new missions to various bodies. Under Nasser and Amer, the *mukhâbarât* managed many domestic-policy dossiers. Under Sadat (at least before his trip to Jerusalem), they were less involved in managing those dossiers. It is impossible to know exactly what the situation was under Mubarak.

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[7] The military police has played an important role in the post-Mubarak era. Human-rights NGOs are inventorying the human-rights violations and acts of violence it carried out. It is clear that because of the collapse of the regular police, it is being assigned missions that are not within its sphere.

[8] In professional terms, its mission is to protect the President and regime of the Republic, providing security for State visitors, and monitoring the institution of the Presidency and its "premises". See the interview given by General Sabrî al-'Adwî, former Commander of the Guard, in *Al-*

of the Presidency should also be mentioned. The officer who heads the latter (normally a military man) was empowered to give instructions to the Defence and Interior Ministers.

One or more bodies (or mixed commissions) were empowered to give their views on appointments within the highest echelons of the state apparatus. Their opinions were not binding for the President, but were often followed nevertheless. For departmental staff posts, a lack of response was the equivalent of a rejection. It is also said that these bodies played an important part in appointing the electoral candidates of the party in power. The role of the forces of law and order during elections was decisive. To be clear: all the candidates caused electoral violence, each according to his "means". But the forces of law and order were able to choose when to be neutral or not (this varied from one constituency to the next and from one election to the next, but within each election there was an overall tendency).

It is well-known that "the security services" could oppose university appointments, or demand that an *'alim* (religious figure) be transferred to duties without access to the public.

Security services could ask a newspaper group not to publish certain pieces of information. Such cases were exceptional. On the other hand, the executives of the services would remind journalists that they

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Misrî al-Yawm, 25 April 2011. He also indicated that, usually, the Commander of the Guard is appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Defence Minister.

were under surveillance by asking informal questions and making comments. One could "sense", and at times know for sure, that certain ambitious academics or journalists who hoped to become ministers or chairmen of newspaper groups, believed that they needed to be on good terms with the "services" and therefore edited studies, reports, or analyses without pay. This strategy could cut both ways: security agents could show respect or contempt for their "interlocutors" and decide either to give their career a helping hand, or not.

The security services or their former executives often had input on "sensitive" public tenders: for instance, any investor wanting land for a tourism project in the Sinai or elsewhere would have his request and dossier examined by several bodies, including one called the "national centre for the planning of land use", run by a general. The security services could also plead for privatisation processes to be slowed down if they were concerned about the social consequences.

It was also known that most of these services offered their members various advantages: apart from generous end-of-career payments, interesting career conversion prospects, the possibility of drawing one's pension and a new salary concurrently, as well as contacts that were a boon for any subsequent career, one might mention inexpensive access to quality medical services, upper-class clubs, and transport (including flights), payment facilities for certain goods, subsidised accommodation, etc. Likewise, the pay scale of the armed forces or police, as with all other public servants, has certain features that reinforce the control exercised by the upper echelons. On the one hand,

bonuses can double the basic salary, or even increase it tenfold[9]. On the other hand, posts are not paid in the same way: depending on place of posting, salaries can easily be multiplied by a factor of 10, or even much more. What is not known, though, is whether the security authorities (*mukhâbarât*, *amn dawla*) are in the same situation, with an equally arbitrary pay scale.

The executives of various institutions also supply qualified staff and can themselves leave their civil-service posts to work in the private sector. Although there are fewer members of parliament who were once generals in State Security or the military than businessmen, their number is nonetheless considerable[10]. Several chiefs of staff or high-ranking civil servants are former military men. There are numerous CEOs or executives of public-sector companies who are former soldiers or military engineers. They are particularly well-represented in the communications, transport, media and energy sectors. But they can also be found elsewhere, for example at the heart of the central statistics agency, the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS). Military men and police officers can also be found in local authorities. In addition to their over-representation among governors, they also supply an impressive contingent of regional or town council leaders. They are also very well-represented within sports federations. Former police or army officers can start a second career in private companies with varied administrative duties, or else as security managers, whether or not these companies have a security service as their client.

It is known that in the 1970s and 80s (and up to the early 1990s), some officers joined the most radical movements. Furthermore, following the assassination of President Sadat, dozens of officers that were considered suspect were discharged from the army. The current Defence Minister, who has held the post for two decades, is very knowledgeable about security dossiers. His priority has been to "secure the army", and there is no reason to think he failed. Observers agree that the officers' corps is under constant surveillance and that any officer who frequents Islamist mosques or circles, or who has a family member doing so, will immediately be sidelined. The regime believes the army to be a "red line" that must not be crossed, and the Muslim Brotherhood is apparently well aware of this. But no "net" is ever perfect, and with the increase in the Brotherhood's recruitment since 2005 and the security measures adopted by the Islamist party, it is not entirely certain that such overtures are not starting up again, though at a much reduced level. The

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[9] I obtained this information from officers and journalists. Since then, the press has claimed that the *monthly* bonuses of the former Interior Minister came to 3 million Egyptian pounds, or 350,000 to 400,000 euros depending on exchange rates, when his salary was probably around 200,000 Egyptian pounds. See for instance *Al-Quds al-'Arabî* of 21 April 2011, which quotes a public prosecutor of the final Court of Appeal.

[10] In the last Assembly, "elected" in October 2010, more than one member in 10, perhaps as many as 1 in 8, was a police general.

situation is more or less similar where other bodies are concerned[11].

Likewise, it is not known whether, internally, these institutions are experiencing developments comparable to those seen in other sectors of Egyptian society or other countries of the region, such as Israel. Specifically, the pressure that is applied by executives and agents to make divine law concur with praxis and to demand that every action be "halâl". At some point, this can resurrect the issue of

whether the security mindset is compatible with the religious mindset, and whether the State has the right to exercise its sovereignty and give instructions that do not conform to divine law.

Image of the security services

Significantly, these institutions do not have the same image among the public. **The armed forces have always been one of the institutions most respected by Egyptians, if not *the* most respected, as rare opinion polls unanimously show.** The armed forces succeed in giving the impression that they are both a legal-rational administration and a family, with the virtues of both. The army is seen, rightly or wrongly, as the most efficient, most modernising and least corrupt institution in the country, the one which contains the largest number of intelligent, dedicated and honest people. One thing is certain: it is the least unjust towards the poor, making the most effort on their behalf, and it is seen by many as a "rampart" and bastion of Egyptian identity. The army's economic activities (agribusiness, consumer durables, building and public works) are also popular.

This institution was (and remains) discreet. It was careful to avoid being talked about, in terms of its political role and its officers. Before 10 February, the identities of the members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces were unknown, as were the Council's duties, prerogatives and competences. All that was known was that the President of the Republic headed the Council and that it consisted of 20 to 30 generals.

The fortunes of the *mukhâbarât 'âma* have changed over time, but currently it

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[11] However, it is possible that the police (State Security excepted) are more "infiltrated" than other security authorities. Numbers are so great that surveillance is inevitably more difficult to arrange. On 20 February 2007 the newspaper *Al-Karâma* discussed the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood within the police and the judiciary. According to the journalist, the Brotherhood has several "secret dossiers" that it manages carefully, such as those on the judges and police officers who are members. The Brotherhood has created a secret and little-known "special body" to manage the dossiers of individuals who hold sensitive posts in the State apparatus. This body is answerable to the Brotherhood's strongman, Khayrat al-Shâtir. Each profession is managed by someone. The police was managed by Salâh Shâdî, then by Muhammad Tûsûn (who, having been a police officer in Minîa, has become a lawyer and also manages the "lawyers" dossier in the Brotherhood). The journalist also suggested that most of the police officers who had joined the Brothers came from Upper Egypt or from families of that region. He claimed there were currently 112 police officers affiliated with the Brotherhood. According to police sources, the Brotherhood micro-manages the activities of these members in sensitive professions: they are allowed to meet only the members of their own Brotherhood *usra* (cell); they must not attend any *katîba* or camp; they must not show themselves during the Brotherhood's public events, and they only meet once a month to minimise the risks. The Guidance Bureau has recently asked these *usra* of people holding sensitive posts not to meet again until further notice. It is impossible to verify this information, but it does seem plausible. However, the judges mentioned in the article as supposedly belonging to the Brotherhood have vigorously denied this – but a confirmation would, of course, have been unlikely and surprising.

enjoys the respect of the people. Its image suffered during the 1970s as a result of the fallout of de-Nasserisation. Nasser's adversaries had argued (rather accurately) that his reign was one of arbitrary conduct by the services and of generalised torture, and more specifically (and more debatably) an era of "systematic abuses" by the *mukhâbarât 'âma*.

But in the 1980s this trend was reversed. Several books, films and TV soap operas recalled the *mukhâbarât 'âma*'s role in fighting Israel, showing a much more favourable image of men leading dangerous lives, being watchful at all hours, and giving their lives for their country[12]. The disclosure of the director's name (which was unprecedented) also did it much good, since he is a man of integrity, discretion, and competence, with an impressive calm and dignity (for instance during Arafat's funeral). The biographies and autobiographies of a few of its officers have helped to humanise but also to mythologise the "firm" and its agents, whilst paying homage to their achievements[13]. The work of this

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[12] See for example the interview of 'Umar Sulaymân, in *Al-Âlam al-Yawm*, 28 March 2007. He claims to work from 6 a.m. ("one hour before Mubarak gets up, to be ready") to 11 p.m. That leaves one hour with his family before he goes to bed at midnight, after a quick dinner. He does one hour of sports a day and grants his colleagues the same amount for the same purpose. He loves cinema, but no longer has the time to go. The last film he saw was "Khalî bâlak min zûzû", which came out in the early 1970s...

[13] Salâh Nasr, Kamâl Rif'at, Amîn Huwaydî, Ahmad Kâmil, Fathî al Dîb, 'Abd al Fattâh Abû-l Fadl, Muhammad Shukrî Hâfiz, Sâmî Sharaf, and more recently Muhammad Ghânim have published their memoirs. Muhammad

institution is hardly ever the subject of public debate.

The various police services were and are unpopular, usually (but not always) with good reason. Despite the numerous lives the police have sacrificed during the fight against armed Islamist groups, people are not grateful. This will not change anytime soon, since large numbers of police opened fire on demonstrators and operated a policy of savage repression during the January-February 2011 events. Even before the final outcome, which was the terrible but virtually inevitable consequence of a repressive system not controlled by the law, public opinion particularly focused on police brutality; its systematic use of torture against Jihadist militants; its savage repression of demonstrations (or at least disproportionate repression, though that is too weak a term); the (temporary) kidnapping of opposition members; and the custom in parts of the country of applying collective sanctions against segments of the population. The various police services were the bodies responsible for keeping order and control that the public most frequently had dealings with. Their members were overworked and irritable. They were the ones who carried out arrests. These arrests could be politically motivated; could result from considerations other than applying the law, just or unjust; and could have causes other than the pursuit and control of delinquents and criminals. Examples are extortion; harassing irritating activists; trying to break the lines of communication within a political force that was categorised as

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Nisîm has been the subject of a book written by the journalist Nabîl 'Umar. This is not an exhaustive list.

being hostile to the regime or else hinder its activities; and collecting information about opposition movements.

a) Managing the protest movement, and the political and religious opposition

In *Al-Shurûq* of 17 September 2010, an activist recounted being arrested and detained for some 30 hours. He was asked questions about al-Baradei's activities, the sources of funding for the latter's campaign, his intentions, etc. Two officers told the activist that he had been arrested because they did not have much on al-Baradei. At the end of the questioning, the two officers declared that they would let al-Baradei's supporters continue as long as the country's stability and national security were not compromised. They added that they were arresting al-Baradei supporters, as they did Muslim Brothers, because they did not yet have sufficient experience of the most appropriate way of managing them. At the end, one of the two officers apologised, saying, "We have orders".

In this context, it is important to note that at least *one* recurrent accusation against State Security is "generally unjust". It has become commonplace (and as frequent as it is stupid) to assert that State Security "invented" ("talfîq") unfounded and erroneous accusations against the regime's political adversaries. This is wrong: State Security might have made mistakes, might not have been in a position to prove "above board" the facts that it imputed to opponents, might have chosen (whether wilfully or on the orders of the political authorities) to arrest elements by giving their actions a legal definition they did not

merit, and so on. *As a general rule, it did not invent facts*[14].

There may be many articles denouncing State Security as an institution with long tentacles that meddles in everything, is incapable of "political vision", and imposes (illegitimate) security priorities; there may be many articles vilifying journalists, academics, rectors, and ulemas who are close to State Security. Nevertheless, there are articles and books that supply information likely to encourage reflection that goes beyond such ritual denunciations.

Some of these texts elucidate the problems encountered by the forces of law and order faced with the following challenges: there is no initial training for executives; there are difficulties in coordinating the forces and the services of the various governorates (Islamist militants have been known to move around or carry out their attacks far from their bases); and there are incompatibilities between the centre's interests and strategies and those of the provinces, etc.

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[14] There is one possible exception: the accusations incriminating Palestinian groups from Gaza in terrorist acts committed on Egyptian soil. An article recently published in the Egyptian press suggests that these accusations should be understood as part of the "war of services" that State Security and the *mukhâbarât* were waging against each other, Gaza being a dossier managed by the latter. Accusing the Palestinians was therefore a way for State Security to exonerate itself and condemn a rival service. See the article by 'Adil Hammûda in *Al-Fajr*, 9 May 2011. Hammûda's claim needs to be verified, but, on the face of it, it is not absurd.

Accounts by former members of the services are now available, such as Brigadier Husayn Hammûda's[15]. Hammûda recounted that Abû Bâsha, a former Interior Minister and one of State Security's figureheads, told him: "To think well of people and to be content with what one has [*qanâ'a*] are virtues in a human being, and grave sins [*razîla*] in a State Security officer". He believed this assessment was the services' guiding principle for action, meaning that everyone was guilty until proven innocent, and that basing one's judgment on the information one had collected was a serious error. The "circle of suspects" had to be continually enlarged. After a crime in a given part of town, half of the area's inhabitants had to be sealed off and arrested. Then they were beaten until the guilty person emerged.

During this interview, Hammûda defined the mission of State Security. It was an intelligence service, made up of several sections, each of which had a task or objective: for instance, analysis, forecasts, crisis management, or counterterrorism. There were also sections for every kind of citizen, every kind of activity, every kind of institution. The service collected data and presented them to the decision-makers and to the bodies responsible for investigations. And yes, of course, the service listened to all phone calls.

But Hammûda claimed that it was not correct to say that State Security officers were the worst ("aswa'"). On the contrary, they were the best ("anzaf", literally "the cleanest"), owing to their social origins, training and fitness levels. Admission to the service depended on a "kashf hay'a", a sort of exam of one's social origins and cultural capital, which made it possible to weed out those of modest origins. Secret evaluation reports obviously played a crucial role in recruitment. It was desirable for an officer approached about joining the service to have served in the "General" Security department, meaning the crime squad, so as to learn about beatings and even torture; master interrogation techniques; have sources and contacts, and know "the street" well. IQ tests were also given, and string-pulling played its part, of course. Yes, those who came from "crime" were somewhat prioritised. Unfortunately, that very background had hardened them, and they were no longer able to distinguish between a delinquent and a criminal, or in other words between "clients" of the crime squad and "clients" of State Security. The former could be beaten up, but one had to understand that with the latter an intellectual sparring match might be more fruitful. One had to know political doctrines and their subtleties. Hammûda indicated that being a State Security officer was not as "lucrative" or "well-paid" as often presumed, except for the highest echelons. But it was prestigious, and it offered immunity and some satisfactions, such as seeing ministers tremble with fear when they received you. Officers had great power over appointments, be it for an *umda* (village mayor) or minister.

Hammûda deplored the fact that beatings had become routine for the whole police force. He also said that people had interiorised this habit as "a fact of life", until the 'Imâd al-Kabir affair (of a citizen given a beating without reason) and some videos of the excesses brought down the wall of fear. But we have gone from one

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[15] Published in *Al-Shurûq*, 8 April 2011.

extreme to the other: citizens could "dare", and they dared everything in their interactions with the police, except with State Security. But it is true that the case of State Security was different, since it was subject to no oversight, and since it was supervised by Gamal Mubarak. When Gamal returned to Cairo to launch himself into political life and assist his father, Hammûda claimed he in fact took charge of managing security. In police circles, Minister al-'Adlî, who had held the post since 1997, was called the "CEO of the hereditary transmission project". The chief of State Security was merely his "personal secretary". Hammûda suggested all sorts of reforms: displaying an officer's name on his uniform so as to facilitate complaints, increasing the female contingent to oversee the female population, developing judicial, parliamentary and popular oversight, etc. Parliamentary oversight only existed in theory since the "Security" Commission of the People's Assembly was populated by watchful State Security generals.

The "great outpouring" that followed the fall of the regime also made it possible to discuss the violence used against civilian demonstrators by groups affiliated with the Interior Ministry, whose members do not wear uniform and do not feature on the organisation chart, and therefore cannot be identified.

On 12 April, the international version of *Al-Ahrâm* reprinted an important article published a few days earlier in the weekly *Al-Usbû'*. The title referred to "the privatisation of security" (an inappropriate formulation) led by Minister al-'Adlî. The author claimed that the regime had invested millions of dollars in training its executives in charge of repression. In 2002

the restructuring process of the National Democratic Party (NDP) began. Or, put another way, the "Gamal ascension plan" began. Gamal and his friends went to London to study the Labour Party experience. Of course, Labour's political and economic ideas were of no interest to them. What did interest them, however, were their communication and propaganda techniques, such as how to condemn and disqualify adversaries. On returning from London, they discovered a "security plan" elaborated by al-'Adlî, which pursued similar ideas. It also turned out that al-'Adlî knew more or less what had been said in London (author's note: this might surprise journalists, but it is known that al-'Adlî was close to Gamal). In a nutshell, the project was to "privatise" part of the security activities and create "irregular troops", which would have organisational links with the Interior Ministry, and be under the command of police officers, but which would not officially be a part of any body. Somewhat like the relationship between the FBI, Pentagon and private security firms, which are informally entrusted with training and protection tasks, but also certain kinds of dirty work. Al-'Adlî, a great security expert, saw *very* early on that there would be claims relating to human rights (author's note: and that the new media and other means of communication, such as new TV channels, mobile-phone cameras, and the Internet, would be resources for opponents). He also understood that the US was becoming conscious of the political costs of repression in Arab countries and would be less indulgent. He therefore prepared a plan that would make it possible to limit the involvement of the police force in

repressive operations and in operations that violated the oppositions' rights[16].

For al-'Adlî, the benefit of creating irregular security troops was that it would attenuate political and media pressure on the State apparatus whenever the latter cracked down on demonstrations. That would make it possible to present the violence as quarrels between NDP supporters and adversaries, which would be particularly useful during elections. He talked of the "lessons of the Algerian experience". His report had great appeal. NDP leaders gave him a blank cheque, in both the figurative and literal sense. Al-'Adlî entrusted some of his aides with the task of preparing a "complete plan" and studying "the registers" of private security firms, which would educate and train these "special" troops.

Al-'Adlî went on to sign a secret agreement with Blackwater (which was to become Xe Services) to train executives specialised in "anti-terrorist" activities, executives who would become the leaders of veritable death squads. The article gives details about this training, and wonders whether these squads did not organise certain mysterious attacks in Egypt so as to blame Islamists. They are even accused of having played a part in the train fires. People are often condemned by their reputation, but this nonetheless seems implausible.

b) The role of State Security in social conflicts

This role is more subtle than straightforward repression. Of course, repression did not disappear, but State Security often made up for the deficiencies of State bureaucracy, playing the role of intermediary and mediator.

An article published in February 2009 by the daily *Al-Badîl*[17] indicated that during the pharmacists' strike a few months earlier, State Security intervened to calm things down and to propose its mediation between the trade union and Finance Ministry. Its representatives in fact organised and led the negotiations between trade unionists and delegates of the Health and Finance Ministries.

The same article revealed that the board of directors of the national railways and the trade union committees officially thanked State Security for its role in getting the claims of the trade unions met and in ending the conflict opposing leadership and employees. In this conflict, State Security even helped passengers find alternative means of transport! Of course, according to *Al-Badîl*, they can resort to strong-arm tactics or threats as well. During the last strike, they also found other train drivers to "partially break the strike". And their presence during negotiations was of course an implicit threat in itself.

c) Structural problems and by-products

It must be stressed that the majority of serving police officers have throughout their whole career only known a state of emergency. To imagine that they will adapt

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[16] Accounts by radical Islamists liberated after the fall of the regime show that the conditions in which they were being held improved considerably around this time.

[17] *Al-Badîl*, 19 February 2009.

to the "Rule of Law" is therefore unrealistic[18].

Some articles published in the press before Mubarak's fall already referred to corruption in the police and certain intelligence services.

Some talked of what they called the "privatisation of police stations"[19] and described the extortion seen in the capital's police stations, where ordinary people were arrested without reason and their release haggled over with their families[20]. This procedure, described as a daily practice with thousands of victims, was a truly perverse consequence of the state of emergency.

Others referred to the corruption of "monitoring bodies", including bodies not

answerable to the Interior Ministry[21]. Executives of monitoring (i.e. security) bodies supposedly received donations of land from the State, at symbolic prices and low interest rates, which they (immediately) sold on to become millionaires. Each ministry is allegedly under the surveillance of monitoring bodies. A few years ago, being in the team responsible for the surveillance of the Housing Ministry was literally a golden opportunity for the executives of these bodies. The Housing Minister and his chief of staff were solicited daily to grant land to the "big wigs" of these organisations. Any land thus obtained was then quickly sold off to speculators.

In February 2007 an article in *Al-Misrî al-Yawm* raised the "problem" of the *amîn shurta* (non-commissioned police officer)[22]. The place of the non-commissioned police officer (NCO) within the security apparatus is similar to that of the maintenance worker in companies: he is not very high up in the hierarchy, but he has a crucial role and is thus quite capable of blocking everything. The journalist claimed that most "transgressions" or violations of human rights were committed by these NCOs, but that given the NCOs' importance, the ministry was inclined to turn a blind eye. NCOs are important because they lead interrogations, carry out door-to-door enquiries, and report their conclusions to the officer in charge. They

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[18] This is the argument put forward especially by Karîma Kamâl in *Al-Badîl*, 29 May 2008.

[19] Taken from an article by Khâlid al-Sirjânî published in *Al-Dustur*, November 2008.

[20] This is how he describes the process, which he himself was nearly subjected to: You are accosted. You are asked for your identity card. If you cannot provide it, that makes the job of the informer, who is a member of the police force, easier: he arrests you. If you are in possession of an illegal substance, he arrests you. If everything is in order, he tells you that you have been sentenced to prison in absentia and that he has to take you to the police station. At this point, you either choose to give a bribe, or else you follow him, convinced that it is all a misunderstanding. And you will be kept until your family has haggled for your release...

[21] In particular articles published by Jamâl al-Shinnâwî in *Al-Dustûr*.

[22] An article by Khayrî Ramadân, a journalist close to the former regime, published in *Al-Misrî al-Yawm*, 6 February 2007.

can work up to 14 hours a day, and even spend entire days without sleep, on a mediocre salary...

The issue of police brutality was also raised, with a journalist in *Al-Misrî al-Yawm*[23] claiming that this violence was not methodical or systematic, and mostly occurred in poor areas. The guilty parties were always young officers drunk with what little power they had, he said, or else *amîn shurta* who belonged to the underprivileged social classes, just like the victims. There was a problem with police training, but above all the police were pressed for time – and in their minds, beatings settled investigations more quickly.

The social backgrounds of members of the police officers' corps were also addressed, through questions about admission to the Police Academy[24]. Apparently there are four "routine" though unspoken conditions; two "social" and two political. The "social" conditions exclude applicants from "inappropriate" backgrounds, or who might have external loyalties. For political reasons, candidates are rejected if their parents or cousins are affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood or Islamist groups, if they have taken a religious degree (from al-Azhar) or if they are potential "traitors". In the Police Academy's 92 years, no *azhari* has ever been admitted as a cadet. Copts are the victims of an unspoken quota: no more than 2% per year. This is not the result of Muslim identity politics,

but, on the contrary, a rejection of all religious allegiance. Copts could not have access to sensitive security duties. Candidates are also eliminated if their parents have "marginalised" professions, meaning particularly professions that cannot be identified by the State and/or workplaces that cannot be readily identified.

General considerations

The growth and centrality of the security authorities were a response to a situation that was, objectively, exceptionally serious. To remember that is not to deny that the situation was unhealthy, or that it has had damaging perverse effects. Nor does it forget that institutions can impose the discourse and requirements that will legitimise and perpetuate them. It is interesting to note that the political language used by both the regime and the opposition has incorporated security terminology. The future of teaching is a national-security issue; the privatisation of the public sector is viewed as either strengthening or weakening national security; not to mention identity politics, or the situation in the Sinai. The perennial "epistemological domination" of the security services is real, allowing it to supply the interpretative framework, practical and factual knowledge, and language that structure debates in the higher reaches of government and the decision-making processes.

To remember the "objective" nature of the situation is not to deny that the pre-eminence of the security services has created vicious circles. The fact that the security authorities make up for deficiencies in other State institutions can perpetuate these same deficiencies.

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[23] In another article by Khayrî Ramadân, *Al-Misrî al-Yawm*, 15 April 2007.

[24] See an important article in *Sawt al-Umma*, 8 August 2009.

Effective institutions that accomplish their missions can more easily obtain loans than other, supposedly inefficient ones. Some civil servants and other officials tended to "cover their backs" by asking State Security for advice, even when it was not a legal requirement. The importance of these services was also buoyed by other players' perceptions of them. Civilians often look to these services for protection and support and, thereby, help to perpetuate their dominance.

Before Mubarak's fall, proposing reforms of organisations was a delicate matter because their organisation charts, formal and informal modus operandi, and networks were unknown, as was the way in which their internal interactions and their interactions with the environment were structured[25].

These institutions have always been far too crucial in constructing and protecting the Nation-State and the national sense of community, in maintaining civil peace, and in organising the relationships and interactions between the centre and periphery, for anyone rashly to take risks by weakening them on the pretext of reform. Achieving a transition to democracy might indeed require these institutions to be strengthened, not dismantled.

On the one hand, elections in Egypt always include violence produced by *all* those involved. Organising free elections implies

having a neutral and powerful police force. On the other hand, it is possible that several of the political parties do not believe in the rule of law. Finally, it seems naive to think that decrees can modify a situation that is profoundly anchored in Egypt's political and social life.

This is a valid diagnosis, confirmed by developments following Mubarak's fall, in particular the increasing insecurity and the proliferation of Salafist groups criticising non-Muslims and Muslims of whose practices they disapprove. But then the situation is no longer what it was. The Interior Ministry's forces have collapsed: over 3,000 cars and lorries (both armoured and not) were destroyed during the confrontations, 99 police stations were set on fire and destroyed by the people, archives have disappeared, etc. The police have been stigmatised in the main accounts of events and, at best, now only work to rule.

Reforming the police and State Security is now part of the public debate in Egypt, and numerous proposals have been made. Some working hypotheses and remarks follow.

Paradoxically, the President being a military man facilitates and consolidates the pre-eminence of the civil authorities over the army and security services. It was, in a way, one of the colluding transactions between the regime and army. Their relationship is difficult to define succinctly, but the outline and examples that follow are instructive. The army accepted a subordinate role and would not interfere in running the State and policy-making, so long as power was held by a military man and certain limits were not exceeded. For instance, it is certain that

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[25] Or else, when the public is uninformed about the restructuring of these institutions, there is a danger of advocating measures already agreed upon ten years ago...

Sadat did not consult the military hierarchy before appointing his successor. The issue is more complex when a civilian becomes President.

Here, two considerations pull in opposite directions. On the one hand, in order to succeed, a reform must be agreed upon and led by one (or more) of those involved, whose legitimacy and knowledge are incontestable and accepted by members of the organisations and bodies to be reformed[26]. In other words, by one (or more) of the high-ranking professionals (or

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[26] A friend and colleague pointed out that in European countries (Portugal and Spain), reform of the security apparatus was led by civilians, and was successful. I stand by my idea (which, incidentally, is close to that developed by Haroun Jamous in his classic book on teaching-hospital reform in France). I can only sketch out the broad outlines of my argument here. An insider will have more legitimacy in the eyes of the profession than an outsider. This is especially so in a profession which is at once opaque (even more so than the army), wounded (Egyptian police officers have been stigmatised and hated for a long time), and has for a long time acted within a corrupt and corrupting institutional framework. An insider has a better chance of having the moral authority necessary for conducting the reforms, as well as the practical knowledge to identify concrete problems and their solutions, and to separate the wheat from the chaff. I would add one further observation: I think it would be preferable for this reform to start before legislative elections are organised, despite the problems involved. To assert this is not to exclude lawyers or NGOs from the deliberations, nor to refuse consulting them.

ex-professionals) of the security services. Alongside this, it is necessary to avoid giving the impression that the reform is a systematic indictment of staff and executives. On the other hand, the stakes are so high that it is reasonable to argue that there must be a societal debate to define the terms and challenges of these reforms.

The latter is connected with the issue of legislative assemblies, specialised bodies or the Finance Ministry monitoring the expenditure of these institutions. Quite apart from what is desirable or not, it is obvious that under the former regime it was impossible to submit these institutions to scrutiny by the legislature or the Finance Minister (particularly because they are partly self-financed). Various solutions have been proposed. Perhaps the task could be entrusted to commissions made up of "veterans" from the security services. Proceeding in this manner would make it possible to progressively institutionalise evaluation practices.

Rationalising and optimising expenditure and work does pose some complex problems. There is in fact a contradiction between the imperative of the "division of labour" and the imperatives of fighting monopolies and diversifying sources of information. Dividing labour means being careful that each task is not carried out by several agents doing the same work, guarding information and not cooperating with each other. The fight against monopolies, security imperatives and the need to diversify sources of information all pull in the opposite direction.

By contrast, the issue of the primacy of law is crucial, at least as far as the relationship between the police and the population and

political forces is concerned. The fact that most officers have only known their country in a state of emergency, lasting for over 30 years, has to be considered. And it must be appreciated that the new security challenges are of a kind that poses serious legal problems even in advanced democracies.

A dispassionate analytical mind is required to distinguish individual responsibilities from those of the "corrupt consequences of a corrupted system". The way in which the Interior Ministry services have conducted themselves over the past few years means that people no longer remember that State Security used to be prudent; that efforts were made to improve the Police Academy degree, by giving much weight to legal disciplines and introducing teaching (though in homeopathic doses) of human rights and the need to protect them; or the fact that many officers attended final-year courses in various law faculties. Or even the fact that the former Interior Minister al-'Adlî clamped down on the worst excesses, even though those were then explained away as the "exceptional" deeds of black sheep – a specious argument which avoided the corrupting nature of a situation where State violence was no longer ruled by law and ceased to be legitimate.

The permanent state of emergency has generated an unhealthy and dangerous situation. *It is urgent that the Rule of Law be re-established, and that the necessity to act in accordance with it be re-emphasised*, even if it means passing very repressive laws to begin with. One must also make sure that only certain bodies have the right to order and/or carry out arrests without warrant, or at least combat to the utmost the extortion stemming from this "right to carry out arrests".

The problem of the social composition of these bodies, although less urgent, is crucial. Under the Monarchy and Nasser, the army, civil service and academia were (more or less satisfactory) "social elevators", enabling people from relatively modest backgrounds to climb the social ladder. They were therefore a safety valve for the regime, since the prospects of the sons of many social classes were not necessarily blocked. These elevators no longer work. It has become almost impossible for an underprivileged man or the son of a petit-bourgeois family to be admitted to the Military or Police Academies. Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak would probably not be admitted today. The causes of this development are numerous. The main one seems to be the complete failure of the education system.

At the very least, a micro-policy of positive discrimination will have to be envisaged allowing at least some underprivileged youth to enter these institutions. The experiment may have to be gradual, reversible, and prudent. It will not make it possible, in the short term, to change practices and prejudices. Nonetheless, it seems necessary.

Likewise, the importance of NCOs in the army and of *amîn shurta* in the police cannot be under-estimated. One might well wonder whether the training procedures for these crucial ranks need to be reviewed and whether their superiors, especially the young officers, need to be made aware of how important and how tough their work is. The issue of opening up access to the higher echelons for some (by allowing them to become officers) poses a few

significant problems – such as whether their training would allow them to master the technology involved, which is increasingly essential – but should be studied without prejudices. We have no information on pay scales within the security services. If they are similar to the pay scales in other parts of the State apparatus, it would seem logical to recommend raising basic salaries and shrinking bonuses, as well as reducing pay discrepancies for personnel with the same rank. That should encourage internal discussions while loosening the grip of the top ranks. It is known that officers with certain decorations are freer to speak than their peers (they can only be prosecuted before one court). It is also known that during internal discussions, the lowest-ranking officers speak first, so as to avoid as much as possible their superiors' opinions influencing them[27]. In short, ways of promoting internal debate need to be carefully considered.

The army, the *mukhâbarât* and the now defunct State Security were, and are, the least corrupt institutions in Egypt by a long margin. Despite that, the temptation to give them, or the special courts answerable to them, the task of cracking down on corruption must be resisted. They already have too many tasks, and fighting corruption requires specific training.

Conclusion

Drafting proposals for concrete reforms of the security services requires access to information that researchers simply do not have. It must also draw on several kinds of knowledge, particularly in organisational studies, public policy, the evaluation of public policy, the relationship between national government and local authorities, and more generally political science, anthropology, and practical experience.

Today the central issue is how to loosen the stranglehold of these institutions over the Egyptian society and the elaboration of foreign policy. I do not think it is possible to reform a regime or institutions by asking them to commit suicide, or even giving that impression. Loosening the stranglehold of these institutions involves developing other institutions capable of carrying out the same duties, rationalising the performance of the entire State apparatus, putting in place an effective education system, patiently working to change the prevalent systems of representation, etc. In other words, it is not (only) through reforming these apparatuses that the relationship of power between them, society and other State institutions will be modified; the latter have to be reconsidered at as well. It will take a great, great deal of stamina.

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[27] This solution is not entirely effective. Indeed, lower-ranking officers may well know or believe they know what their superiors are thinking, and adapt their words as a result. That being said, it is a necessary policy.