

Engagement without Illusions

Building an Interest-Based Relationship with the New Egypt

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Gregory B. Craig served as White House counsel in the Obama administration and director of State Department policy planning in the Clinton administration.



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Today's Egypt -- with its first-ever civilian president, Islamist leader Muhammad Morsi -- is a very different country from the one with which successive U.S. administrations built a strategic partnership for more than thirty years. The fundamental changes seen there since 2011 mandate an equally fundamental reassessment of the bilateral relationship.

To inform this process, The Washington Institute established the bipartisan Task Force on the Future of U.S.-Egypt Relations, dispatching veteran foreign policy practitioners Vin Weber and Gregory B. Craig to the region to assess the situation firsthand. The resulting report offers specific advice to the Obama administration on how to secure U.S. interests with the "new Egypt."

The authors recommend

- that U.S. policy should be based on presenting Egyptian leaders with a set of clear choices that would give them a pathway to act as responsible national leaders rather than as religiously inspired ideologues. While Washington cannot convince or compel the Islamists governing Egypt to give up their deeply held ideology, the United States can use its leverage to affect Egyptian behavior.
- that the president should agree to certify to Congress that Egypt is fulfilling two baskets of commitments -- on "regional peace" and "strategic cooperation" -- as a condition of continued provision of U.S. aid and backing for international loans.
- that the president and congressional leaders should together inform the Egyptians about an additional "informal conditionality" on issues of "constitutional democracy and political pluralism," i.e., that backward movement on

constitutionalism or substantial violations of human rights or measures against women and religious minorities would make it politically difficult to maintain a close and mutually beneficial relationship.

- that the administration should use a portion of Egypt's military aid -- at least \$100 million to start, and increasing over time -- to incentivize more aggressive efforts by the Egyptian government to combat terrorism in Sinai.
- that the administration should actively engage with the broadest possible spectrum of political actors in Egypt, even if the non-Islamist opposition is currently weak and divided.

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Read their related op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times*. (<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-weber-egypt-policy-20121128,0,6737612.story>) ❖

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