

CLAIMING CONSENSUS, OMAR SULEIMAN PROMISES TO HOLD PROTESTERS ACCOUNTABLE

The key to understanding Omar Suleiman's statement claiming there is "consensus" in how to move forward in Egypt is to see how he redefines the crisis from being caused by legitimate grievances voiced by the "youth" involved in protests into a lack of security caused by the protests.

All participants of the dialogue arrived at a consensus to express their appreciation and respect for the 25 January movement and on the need to deal seriously, expeditiously and honestly with the current crisis that the nation is facing, the legitimate demands of the youth of 25 January and society's political forces, with full consideration and a commitment to constitutional legitimacy in confronting **the challenges and dangers faced by Egypt as result of this crisis,** including: The lack of security for the populace; disturbances to daily life; the paralysis of by public services; the suspension of education at universities and schools; the logistical delays in the delivery of essential goods to the population; the damages to and losses of the Egyptian economy; the attempts at foreign intervention into purely Egyptian affairs and breaches of security by foreign elements working to undermine stability in implementation of their plots, while recognizing that the 25 January movement is a honorable and patriotic movement. [my emphasis]

This paragraph starts out by hailing the January 25 movement, but then says there is consensus that Egypt must **both** deal with the “legitimate” demands of the movement **and** “confront[] the challenges and dangers faced by Egypt as result of this crisis.” Fully half the paragraph lists the perceived threats to security “caused” by the uprising. Predictably, Suleiman doesn’t include police attacks on unarmed citizens among those threats to security.

In other words, Suleiman is saying, “The January 25 movement is honorable, but they have hurt the security of the nation, so the solution largely consists of responding to the threat to security they represent.”

This allows Suleiman to promise that no one will be persecuted for **political** activities—indeed, “prisoners of conscience” will be released.

2. The Government announces the establishment of a bureau to receive complaints regarding, and commits to immediately release, prisoners of conscience of all persuasions. The Government commits itself to not pursuing them or limiting their ability to engage in political activity.

Which would seem to be an attempt to convince protesters they won’t be prosecuted if they demobilize.

Except that Suleiman makes four different promises to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the alleged breakdown of national security (as defined by Suleiman, not by the protesters):

6. Pursuit of corruption, and an investigation into those behind the breakdown of security in line with the law

7. Restoring the security and stability of the nation, and tasking the police forces to resume their role in serving

and protecting the people.

[snip]

4. Supervisory and judiciary agencies will be tasked with continuing to pursue persons implicated in corruption, as well as pursuing and holding accountable persons responsible for the recent breakdown in security.

5. The state of emergency will be lifted based on the security situation and an end to the threats to the security of society

Along with an implicit promise to use the military to crack down on those who threaten national security.

In addition, all participants in the dialogue saluted the patriotic and loyal role played by our Armed Forces at this sensitive time, and affirmed their aspirations for a continuation of that role to restore of calm, security and stability, and to guarantee the implementation and of the consensus and understandings that result from the meetings of the national dialogue.

The key in all of this is bullet 5 quoted above: the “state of emergency” (and with it the emergency law that limits freedom of assembly and provides alternative legal processes) will only be lifted after “threats to the security of society” have ended. This is contrary to some of the reports that Suleiman had agreed to lift the emergency law that have come out of these meetings. Suleiman has described the protests as being part of the problem, and agreed to lift the emergency only after that problem has been investigated and held accountable. The one exception—his promise to liberalize the media—is limited by his depiction of foreign interference in Egyptian affairs, seeing to suggest foreign media will still be targeted.

In other words, having redefined the protests as the direct cause of the breakdown in security (even quoting Hosni Mubarak's February 1 speech that did the same), Suleiman has all but promised to use the emergency law to prosecute those who caused that breakdown in security.

I guess that's just about what we should expect from our torturer.

Update: Mohamed el Baradei has released a statement in response. He is not impressed.

Egyptian opposition figure Mohamed ElBaradei slammed fledgling negotiations on Egypt's future on Sunday and said he was not invited to the talks.

The Nobel Peace laureate said weekend talks with Egyptian Vice President Omar Suleiman were managed by the same people who had ruled the country for 30 years and lack credibility. He said the negotiations were not a step toward the change protesters have demanded in 12 days of demonstrations calling for the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak.

"The process is opaque. Nobody knows who is talking to whom at this stage," ElBaradei, the former head of the UN nuclear watchdog, said on NBC's "Meet the Press."