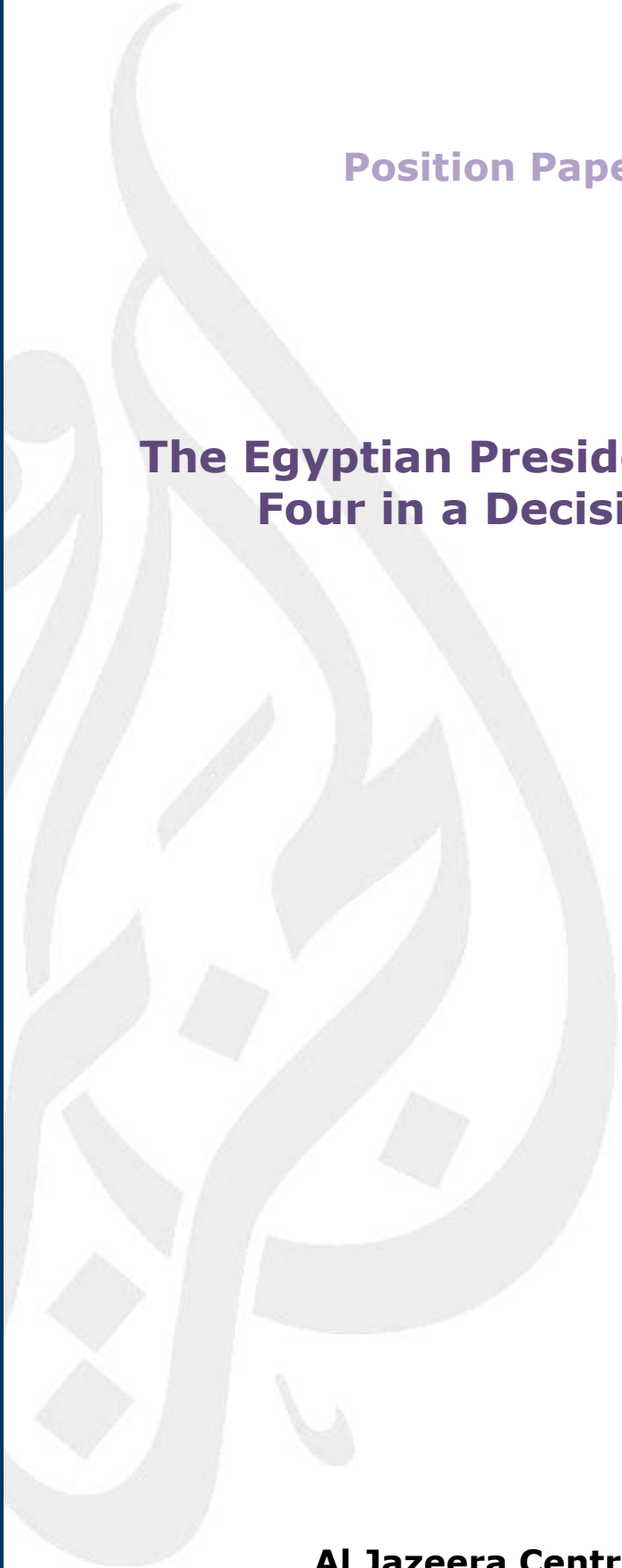




مركز الجزيرة للدراسات  
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## Position Paper

# The Egyptian Presidential Elections: Four in a Decisive Battle



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The presidential election process in Egypt has been bounded with tension, suspense and abrupt fluctuations since the end of March 2012. The declaration of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and their political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party, on Sunday, March 31 of the nomination of the prominent Muslim Brotherhood leader, Mohammed Khairat el-Shater, took many people inside and outside the group by surprise because the Brotherhood announced, upon founding their party in 2011, that its members would not compete for the presidency and that it would not support any Islamist candidates in the organisational sense. The announcement of Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, a senior leader in the group and member of their guidance office for twenty-two unremitting years, of his intention to run for president led to the Brotherhood's Shura Council's decision to dismiss him from the group last year.

Egyptians were soon shocked by another surprise: Major General Omar Suleiman, the former intelligence chief and the first and only vice president, announced that he would run for president. A third surprise arose when the Higher Presidential Election Commission (HPEC) announced on 14th April its preliminary decision to exclude ten of the twenty-three candidates including key figures like Mohammed Khairat el-Shater, Hazem Abu Ismail, and Omar Suleiman. After three days, the HPEC declared its refusal of the appeals and grievances submitted by all the excluded candidates, confirming their exit from the race, and reducing the number of candidates to 13.

This is a reading of the seventeen days, during which Egypt faced a state of tension with regards to the fates of the leading candidates and the prospects of the presidential race.

### **El-Shater: The Way out of Crisis**

Until the end of February 2012, the Brotherhood had no serious plans to compete in the presidential elections. After its big victory in the parliamentary elections, it wanted a national figure for the presidency that would respect Islam, have good relations with it, and avoid any substantial disputes between the president and the prime minister, as it assumed it would lead the government after the transition period through a parliamentary majority. However, assiduous attempts to persuade Tariq El-Beshri, an advisor and historian, and other less important figures to run for president failed. Since the end of February 2012, the Brotherhood found itself in a crisis, being unimpressed with all the candidates, and refusing to change its opinion about Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, who happens to be closest to it and the most likely to win the support of the Brotherhood's bases. Meanwhile, relations between the Brotherhood and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) have become increasingly tense due to the stringent conditions set by the latter in order to accept the dismissal of Ganzouri's government and ask the parliamentary majority to form an alternative one.

Consequently, el-Shater's nomination was the most feasible way out of a critical presidential election crisis, which the Muslim Brotherhood and certain conditions would have contributed to. What encouraged the Brotherhood to take this step, perhaps, was its reception of positive feedback on its political role from American and European delegates, in contrast to the SCAF's impression that the West had fears about its political ascent.

The belief that el-Shater's nomination may have been announced after the negotiation of a deal with the SCAF is inaccurate, but the latter knew that the nomination became likely during the week or ten days prior to the announcement, as the majority of the Brotherhood's Shura Council had begun to work almost explicitly to push el-Shater to run for president. The military council did not give any indications whether direct or indirect of its position on the issue the day after el-Shater's nomination was announced. There was a belief amidst members of the Brotherhood that the military council has become in a weaker position since the November 2011 events, that Egyptians would fight against any attempts to impose a new military regime, and that the military council understood this fact completely.

### **Suleiman: The Brotherhood Scarecrow**

As in the case of el-Shater, the SCAF remained silent about the nomination of Omar Suleiman but some analyses reported that it was not displeased. Reports mentioned the decline of relations between Suleiman and Field Marshal Tantawi during the last years of Mubarak's rule, and that SCAF was frustrated with Mubarak for leaving his place to Suleiman towards the end of the revolution. Perhaps the SCAF's silence about Suleiman's nomination can be partially attributed to the desire for non-intervention in the elections as well as considerations dominated by interests as Suleiman was part of the deposed regime's arrangements in which the SCAF was granted extensive authority with regards to economic issues. SCAF silence may also be a result of concerns over the potential reaction of a major Arab country that stood behind Suleiman firmly.

Certainly, Suleiman was considered a serious candidate by both political forces and revolution youth groups. He portrayed himself as a supporter of the revolution that is keen on its success and a savior from the Brotherhood's pursuit of control of Egypt in hopes of gaining the support of Brotherhood opponents or those who fear the Brotherhood's potential political ascent, including Christians. Nonetheless, Suleiman's nomination faced a big problem after the parliament amended on 12 April 2012 the law that bans the political rights of all those who served as president, vice president, prime minister, or even senior leaders in the National Party in the last ten years of Mubarak's reign, including running for president, for the next ten years. There were also mass popular protests against Suleiman's nomination in most Egyptian cities.

### **Exclusions: The Outlet of Management**

The HPEC decided to exclude Suleiman due to irregularities in the collection of signatures in to support of his nomination in one of the fifteen necessary governorates. Accordingly, the SCAF was relieved from the embarrassment of ratifying the amendment to the law of political exercise, which was referred to the Constitutional Court, given the doubts raised about its constitutionality.

Powerful Hazem Abu Ismail headed to the administrative judiciary (the State Council) to confirm the Egyptian nationality of his mother who was believed to be a citizen of the United States. He won the case on 11th April 2012 because the attorney general representative failed to provide decisive and acceptable evidence proving that Abu Ismail's mother is in fact a U.S. citizen. However, the HPEC did not abide by the administrative court's ruling, and on the following day, it received sufficient documents from the U.S. government confirming that Abu Ismail's mother has held U.S. citizenship since October 2006, and thus, decided to exclude him.

El-Shater, on the other hand, faced doubts of another kind after the leftist Abul Ezz El Hariri submitted an objection to his candidacy before the administrative court and the HPEC regarding the SCAF amnesty granted to el-Shater (and 120 other individuals), whether or not this amnesty was comprehensive and qualified him to exercise political rights, or even whether it became effective before or after the closure of the voter list. The Brotherhood took precautions by nominating Mohammed Morsi, the leader of the Freedom and Justice party, as their second candidate.

Upon excluding el-Shater, the Brotherhood immediately turned to Morsi's campaign.

### **The Most Prominent Candidates and the Race for Presidency**

By excluding ten candidates, including three influential ones, it can be said that the presidential race will be led by four main candidates: Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, Mohamed Morsi, Amr Moussa, and Ahmed Shafik. A number of surveys in the past few weeks highlighted the significant decline of the chances of Mohammed Al-Awa, Hamdeen Sabbahi and Hisham Bastawisi in spite of their active and significant presence in the post-Mubarak political arena.

Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh is an Islamist physician and former leader in the Muslim Brotherhood who is dedicated to addressing the needs of the average Egyptian and the

national discourse. Still, it is hard to imagine Aboul Fotouh's victory without the support of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis. His potential ascent to the second round of elections and the identity of his opponent in the final confrontation will determine whether or not he will win the race. There is no doubt that the continuation of the Muslim Brotherhood candidate in the race is a threat to the Aboul Fotouh's chances of winning a significant number of Islamist votes.

Mohamed Morsi was probably preparing himself to head the government, and did not expect to become a Muslim Brotherhood candidate for presidency. He studied civil engineering at the University of California and worked as a university professor for years before becoming a member of the Egyptian parliament for two consecutive terms. He is now the head of the Freedom and Justice Party, the Brotherhood's political arm. However, the Brotherhood's success in rallying Islamist votes, including their own and a significant share of the Salafis', is the main challenge to Morsi's ability to make it to the second round of elections. His weakness stems from the fact that his image depicts him as a purely Islamist candidate, and that his continuation in the race makes the Brotherhood vulnerable to the accusation of seeking to dominate the reins of government. He needs support from public figures, intellectuals, academics and businessmen from outside the Islamist circle –and that does not seem likely given the present circumstances. In the long run, if he wins the presidency, he should exert great effort to re-establish himself as a president for all Egyptians with their various categories and segments.

The exclusion of Hazem Abu Ismail will initiate a fierce struggle over his large voting bloc, which consists of the Salafis and members of lower classes. There are strong doubts that this bloc would support Mohamed Morsi like it was expected to support el-Shater had he continued in the race.

Amr Moussa, the former Egyptian Foreign Minister and former Secretary General of the Arab League, has been a popular figure for a long time. However, his popularity makes high counting only when he is compared to other figures of the deposed regime. Although the facts that he was a member of the former regime and that he is in his seventies put him at a disadvantage, they can also prove to be advantages. His long years in the cabinet and his old age suggest advanced experience and confidence to large segments of Egyptians who are burdened by post-revolution security and economic problems. Despite the difficulties of having trustworthy estimates in the absence of reliable opinion poll traditions, it is believed that he is in a much stronger position than Ahmed Shafik, who once served as the aviation commander, Minister of Civil Aviation and the last Prime Minister in Mubarak's era. Shafik also seems less experienced and dexterous in managing his campaign. Whatever the case is, chances are that Moussa and Shafik will compete over the bloc that refuses or fears the arrival of an Islamist to the presidency, whether it is Mohammed Morsi or Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh.

The elections are not likely to be determined in the first round, and the second one between the top two candidates will include an Islamist candidate and a non-Islamist one. Nonetheless, a scenario that includes Morsi and Aboul Fotouh should not be ruled out completely, despite its weak possibility. To secure the presidency from members of the deposed regime, the Islamists and other revolution forces will have to provide their support for one of the Islamist candidates. Even if the non-Islamist votes go to Amr Moussa or Ahmed Shafik, there is a weak chance either of them will reach the presidency.

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