



THE CAIRO REVIEW INTERVIEW

“I DON’T HAVE A CRYSTAL BALL”

Arab League Secretary General Nabil Elaraby strikes a pessimistic note about the near-term outlook for the Arab Spring

The Arab League headquarters is a stately structure on the eastern bank of the Nile River. The corridor leading to the office of Secretary General **Nabil Elaraby** is neatly lined with framed photographs of Arab leaders at summit meetings. The situation outside the building, indeed across the Arab world, is anything but orderly. Practically outside Elaraby’s window, a group of Syrian activists is staging a sit-in decrying Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad as a killer and demanding that the League take action against his regime. Never has the Arab League faced so many challenges—leaders deposed in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, and strife continuing in Syria, Sudan, Lebanon, and elsewhere.

Elaraby, seventy-seven, stepped into the maelstrom as secretary general in July 2011, after a brief stint as Egyptian foreign minister in the first post-Mubarak government. It is not easy to serve as head of an Arab institution at a time when the Arab world is in flux, but Elaraby has won plaudits from Western capitals and Arab revolutionaries alike for his support for democratic movements and emphasis on the rule of law. He has had a long career in Egyptian as well as international diplomacy and law, including service as an advisor at the Camp David peace talks, Egyptian ambassador to the United Nations and judge on the International Court of Justice. *Cairo Review* Managing Editor **Scott MacLeod** interviewed Elaraby at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo on June 4, 2012.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How would you explain this period that the Middle East is going through since December 2010?*

NABIL ELARABY: No doubt what has been going on in the Middle East or some countries in the Middle East since last year or maybe a bit earlier is a genuine reaction by people who were governed by some form of dictatorship without legitimacy. If you look at the common denominator between Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen, it is that all have been governed for a number of

◁ Nabil Elaraby, Cairo, May 15, 2011. *Amr Nabil/Associated Press*

years by regimes that came to power by coup d'état. Military regimes that came to power by coup d'état. And they promised a lot for the people. Time passed, and they could not deliver. Even the Egyptian revolution, or whatever it's called, of 1952, which really had achievements. But everything stopped at a certain moment. Under [Gamal Abdel] Nasser, there were a lot of achievements that really changed the substance of the Egyptian life. Agrarian reform, standing against colonialism, industrialization. But there was no political reform at all. Under [Anwar] Sadat, he had achievements—enough to say “1973” [Egyptian attack on Israel]. I would say also getting Israel out of Sinai was an achievement. Maybe I don't like the conditions, and I have made that very clear before, but the net result is positive. Under [Hosni] Mubarak, yes there were at the beginning some achievements. Definitely reconciliation with the Arab world. But then stagnation, political stagnation, economic development that never trickled down to the man and woman in the street. And then this question of “inheritance,” that the son would inherit the throne, it was said. But people were suffering for a long time without any liberty or democratization. And then the economic situation was really dire and people couldn't take it anymore. So, these are different phases, but it affected five countries. I read a very interesting article the other day in *Al-Hayat* about why republics are failing and monarchies are not. Monarchies got the lesson and all of them—all of them—tried to improve the situation. Maybe not full democracy, but at least in the economic side. Because what prompted really the explosion in a country like Egypt and others was the economic situation. And no social justice.

CAIRO REVIEW: *I was about to ask you to explain why the monarchies have not suffered the same kind of upheavals.*

NABIL ELARABY: First of all, the Gulf countries have enough resources to please the man in the street. They doubled and tripled salaries, and everybody is happy from that point of view. When they realize that maybe they want a better political system, it will take time. People may be satisfied like that. The only problem is in Bahrain and for different reasons completely. But in Morocco and in Jordan, they are monarchies but they are improving the situation. They have difficulties, but they are improving the situation.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Do monarchies have a certain legitimacy that is different than the legitimacy that republics tried to build? Because of the tribal system, traditions, the religious connections in some cases?*

NABIL ELARABY: You can say that. In Morocco, definitely the religious connotation has a role to play.

CAIRO REVIEW: *The anti-colonial coup d'état, the revolution in Egypt in 1952, was legitimate, but at a certain point the legitimacy became untenable, maybe long before 2011?*

NABIL ELARABY: You can point to one indicator: continuation in ruling for a very long time. Even if they have the legitimacy. You cannot say "I'm going to govern the country for thirty years." It's not acceptable. I left New York as an ambassador there in 1999. In my farewells, people would ask me about Mubarak. How long has he been in power? When I say eighteen years, they couldn't believe it. They could not believe in the United States that someone would be in power for eighteen years. They did not have more than eight in their history. The only exception is [Franklin] Roosevelt. It's very normal to have rotation and to have change of power. Even without everything else, people were supposed to do that. So the longevity of the ruling class, or ruler—you have no way of changing that. All elections were rigged. The only way to do it was to go to Tahrir Square.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Why didn't the Arab world have democratization, much longer ago? Is there something inherently undemocratic about Arabs?*

NABIL ELARABY: No, you cannot say that with respect to Arabs or any people. You had democracy working in Lebanon. The problem in Lebanon, in my view at least, is the constitution, which is sectarian, mainly put by the French before they left. Syria had democracy. Egypt had democracy. But then the coups d'état came. It started in Syria in 1949, and now it's clear and accepted that the CIA was behind it. There has been democracy working sufficiently well in Egypt and Syria, in Lebanon.

CAIRO REVIEW: *So you consider the 1952 "revolution" in Egypt as an interruption of democracy?*

NABIL ELARABY: Yes, definitely. Listen, I was for it, for many reasons: it changed the thinking in the area, for the role that Egypt played against colonialism, for de-colonization in Africa. African leaders say till now that Egypt at that time was the Mecca of Africa and they all came here. Even Mandela was imprisoned so that he would not come here. There are achievements that should be recognized and to be proud of. But political development, liberalization, democracy, were missing.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Some say that it's the Arab society being a traditional society.*

NABIL ELARABY: Arab society, traditional society, tribal society—that's only in the Gulf. It doesn't apply to Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Syria, Lebanon.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Is the region capable of emerging from the Arab Spring in a peaceful and positive manner? Or do you see risk of permanent state of chaos and destabilization?*

NABIL ELARABY: You cannot jump from dictatorship that has been in power for a long time to full democracy overnight. Just let's look at the Eastern Europeans. Last year, when I was [Egyptian] foreign minister, four foreign ministers from Eastern Europe came. To give you an example, Poland. They said it took two to three years, and then we had elections and we had the Communists back [in power]. And they are more advanced economically and culturally and so on. So, it takes time. I was in Riyadh a couple of days ago. There was a meeting with the friends of Yemen, and next to me was the vice president of the World Bank. She is from Bulgaria. We were discussing this matter and she said "Listen, believe me, it will take ten years." That's what she said. "You will not have a normal life again for several years and you will have to be going through many upheavals."

CAIRO REVIEW: *What do you think?*

NABIL ELARABY: I hope not, [laughs] because I don't think I'll be here in ten years to see what will happen.

CAIRO REVIEW: *I'm trying to pinpoint if you feel that the region is on the cusp of renaissance, or we actually watching the region go over the brink.*

NABIL ELARABY: No, no. It's a renaissance, but it will take time. I'll say this. Let's take Egypt. Had the [Supreme Council of the Armed Forces] accepted to [draft] the constitution first, many things would have changed. Why do I say that? For a very simple reason. What is a president? Or what is a parliament? They are part of the general framework of a country. This general framework which says what parliament can do, what the president, what the prime minister, is written on a piece of paper called the constitution. So, if you go to certain aspects of it without having the whole picture in front of you, it will not work. It will not work. Now the parliament is dominated by the Islamists and they all want a parliamentary system that the president will be a figurehead. But you cannot run a country unless there is a certain balance. The best thing in the American Constitution is the checks and balances. And we don't know what the checks and balances are going to be in Egypt. A new president will be elected two weeks from today but we have no idea. So we are entering into the unknown.

CAIRO REVIEW: *What are the three biggest challenges that the region is facing now?*

NABIL ELARABY: Each country has its own internal balances. You can't compare them, from my point of view. In Egypt here we do have an Islamic movement. We Egyptians underestimated their numbers, but there is one. We also we have large Coptic population. And they are all Egyptians, like the others. But also you have others, whether

Muslims or Christians, who cannot accept an Islamic rule. Because it boils down to a very important choice. Do we want a modern secular state where there is a division between state and church, as happened in Europe at a certain moment. Or would we like to go back to—I consider it the unknown, because we have never had in the Islamic heritage a clear form of government called “Islamic government.” Only those after the Prophet—four of them—and they were great men but three of them were assassinated for one reason or another. So, we cannot say it was a clear-cut form of government. And the government at that time was very much limited in its authority, in its responsibilities and in the kind of challenges that a government faces in the modern times. So, what is needed in all Arab Spring countries is a modern secular state that will be able to run things for the sake of the people. By the people and for the people.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How do you get there?*

NABIL ELARABY: I don’t know. Don’t ask me this question. I don’t know. Nobody knows.

CAIRO REVIEW: *We need your wisdom!*

NABIL ELARABY: No, no. I hate to say, I really don’t know. The main thing is for people to realize that nothing is going to come overnight. What I would say to the people who are to going to Tahrir Square—and I was in Tahrir Square last year, my children were there, even my fourteen-year-old granddaughter was there—is that nothing will come overnight. Yes, people are suffering. Definitely. And something has to be done. It’s all on the economic side. You cannot get enough money to meet the demands unless the country works in normal way and tourists will come and investment will come. And the conditions that are being created now do not help investment and do not help the economy at all.

CAIRO REVIEW: *You were in Tahrir Square? Protesting?*

NABIL ELARABY: Yes, of course.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Against the regime in Egypt?*

NABIL ELARABY: Yes.

CAIRO REVIEW: *And what were you thinking?*

NABIL ELARABY: No, no. At that time, I must admit, maybe I should explain this. With a group of friends, some from my age group and older, like Kamal Aboul Magd and others, and some younger people like Amr Hamzawy and Nabil Fahmy. We created a group where we used to meet, and the paper said it was the “committee

of wise men,” and kept thinking about what should we do. The revolutionaries contacted us and they asked for our assistance. I was asked to go and meet [Ahmed] Shafik as prime minister and raise with him some matters, which I did with Kamal Aboul Magd. The two of us again were asked to go and meet Omar Suleiman and raise with him that, no way, the president has to leave. He cannot continue like that. In this context, I came to Tahrir.

CAIRO REVIEW: *But you were not protesting as a protester?*

NABIL ELARABY: No, I was not there all time. I went twice, that’s all.

CAIRO REVIEW: *But your children?*

NABIL ELARABY: My youngest son was in the Camel Battle that day. Yes, of course, he was there, with his American-Egyptian fiancée.

CAIRO REVIEW: *When I asked you about challenges, I’m thinking about things like the constitution, development, transitional justice. Do you see any of these as more important or less important than the others?*

NABIL ELARABY: All are important. I cannot pick one really. Because you will not have a stable community unless they know that there is social justice and freedom, unless they know that they can exercise their rights in a normal way. What is needed in all the Arab countries and here, I can say—very few countries have what I think is the ultimate objective: good governance. If you ask me if I have any comments about all the programs of the thirteen candidates who were running for [Egyptian president], I will tell you that they were promising everything under the sky, even over the sky, and maybe someone promised the moon. But this is not it. They did not really articulate a system of good governance. What is needed is a system of good governance. It’s not a question that once you elect a president, it’s over. Even the best man in the world, or the best woman in the world. No, it’s a question of how is he going to deal with other institutions. You need institutions, not a one-man show. What is needed here is creating an institution that can work in modern times.

CAIRO REVIEW: *There has just been a verdict in the case of the former Egyptian president. How important is transitional justice in your view, and how much is it being addressed in Egypt?*

NABIL ELARABY: I am by tradition a lawyer. I was a judge on the International Court of Justice, and whenever a court has a judgment, I don’t comment on it.

CAIRO REVIEW: *What is your view about the concept of transitional justice?*

NABIL ELARABY: I have been contacted by many while here [at the Arab League] or when I was foreign minister, even the secretary of state, telling me, “Why don’t you try to copy what South Africa did in the question of truth and reconciliation? And look to the future, not only to the past?” I think there is an element of truth in that.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Is anything serious being done in this region for transitional justice? What would you recommend be done?*

NABIL ELARABY: You cannot recommend certain measures unless people would calm down. The reaction to the verdicts the other day, I could not understand it, really. But I’m not going to comment on it. But what you need is a system, and everything cannot be worked out unless there is a constitution. The constitution will lay down the foundation for justice, transitional justice, for everything. Otherwise, it will not work.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Do you believe there has to be an exercise in transitional justice to account for the past, in all of these countries that have had revolutions or uprisings? Can the region move on without it?*

NABIL ELARABY: It’s not black and white. Every country has its own system and its own way of thinking. You cannot generalize here. But to me, the most important thing is to create a system that can govern. The question of transitional justice and everything else will be part of that. It’s not the main objective, in my view.

CAIRO REVIEW: *To what extent is a military role in governance going forward an obstacle to political development?*

NABIL ELARABY: Let me go from the beginning. On the eleventh of February, President Mubarak did not step down according to the constitution. And there was, you can even say, a form of military coup. He stepped down but he decided to give the country on a silver plate to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. That was wrong. What the next step should have been was that the Supreme Council would form a government and ask the government to prepare for drafting the constitution. And many, including myself, have said that. But they thought they went step by step and I don’t understand why. And I am not going to comment on that more than that.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Can these countries move forward in their political development in light of the fact that you still have strong military roles in governance?*

NABIL ELARABY: Yes, but military role in government—every country has its own peculiar dealing with the military. Yes, in the United States, civilian authority is really above. But everyone pays tribute to the armed forces. In countries which went through several wars, like Egypt, there is some kind of pedestal where you can

put the armed forces. You cannot say anything more than that. But they should not really play any role in governing the country. Maybe civilian rule should not interfere in limiting their budget, or trying to tell them what kinds of arms development they should have, or stop them from having an air force, or navy, or [say] you should not put armed forces here or there. You should not intervene in that. But they should not really govern the country.

CAIRO REVIEW: *But how much is it an obstacle to democratic development, the fact that you have these entrenched militaries?*

NABIL ELARABY: I am not speaking about the military. I'm speaking about how the Supreme Council handled the situation since last February. But the military is part of the government and has to be handled like every other part. It has to be part of the government and under the prime minister's order, and under the president's order.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Is it going to be possible in these countries?*

NABIL ELARABY: We have to wait and see. I don't have a crystal ball, so I don't know.

CAIRO REVIEW: *The situation in Syria is horrifying, the news gets worse and worse. You've called on the UN again to do what it can to stop the killing. How do you see—without a crystal ball—developments going forward in Syria?*

NABIL ELARABY: I'll start by telling you it's extremely unpredictable, and it's very bad. The problem, let me put it that way, is internal. President [Bashar] Assad is always trying to say that it's a—I met him one week after I took over here. I called Syria and asked to see the foreign minister and they told me, "No, you'll see the president." I saw the president on the thirteenth of July last year. What I told him is exactly what I am saying now: stop the fighting, release the prisoners, and enter into meaningful and genuine political reform. Nothing happened from that. But his argument is interesting, because to him, there is nothing in Syria itself. Everything is fine. It's only some border town under foreign influence. So, he's presenting what happens as the outside world trying to change Syria because they don't like Syria because Syria is one of the countries that stood up to Israel, and so on. I'm not going to comment on that. I would have if I was not in this position. And he would say, "Look, you are now in Damascus"—he told me that three times—"you are in Damascus. Go around. Nothing is happening here. Go to Aleppo. Nothing is happening there. The two of them are more than half the country. It's only the border." And he would repeat it. Now he is still staying it's an outside conspiracy. The problem in Syria is internal. This regime has been powerful for a long time and people are entitled like every people in the world to go to the streets and ask for freedom,

democracy, and social justice and so on. But I realize that resolving it will not be internal. Resolving the situation in Syria, stopping the fighting and changing the—I don't want to say the government—changing the system itself and improving it and opening it up and having democracy and so on, yes, that definitely requires the Syrians to reach agreement. They have to reach agreement on that. But it will never happen without outside intervention, and I'm not speaking about military intervention at all. This is a peaceful organization, we don't speak about anything military. But outside intervention, an agreement between the five permanent members of the Security Council.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Is the situation in Syria solvable.*

NABIL ELARABY: Everything is solvable. Even the question of Palestine is solvable.

CAIRO REVIEW: *And, if so, what's holding up the solution?*

NABIL ELARABY: What's holding up the solution very frankly is that the government in Syria is in a state of denial about what's going on and will not change their minds unless there will be pressure from the five permanent members, particularly Russia and China.

CAIRO REVIEW: *So what's holding that up?*

NABIL ELARABY: You go and ask them in Moscow. I'm telling you that.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How do you analyze it?*

NABIL ELARABY: The only analysis I can present is that there are two issues. One of them was made very bluntly by the Russians and to lesser extent by the Chinese: "We have been duped and fooled in Libya, and we will not accept a change of government without our acquiescence." Secondly, they have certain interests there.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Do you think the regime there is salvageable?*

NABIL ELARABY: No, no, no. What will happen to the regime is up to Syrians. I'll never comment on that. The Syrians will have to decide what happens: the Syrian opposition, the regime, they all will have to work this out.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Why did the Arab world accept Western military support for the rebels in Libya but it doesn't seem to be on the cards at all, even as a proposal, in Syria. Wouldn't this make a difference if there was air cover for the rebels in Syria?*

NABIL ELARABY: I will not say "this is a very good question." I expected that. Why? Because I thought that you would know the answer and it's very clear. First

of all, what prompted the urgent decision taken in early March last year was that there was a clear threat from the Gadhafi regime that they are going to annihilate Benghazi. Secondly, everybody knows that Syria has a strong army. It will not be a picnic like in Libya. Already in Libya, I do not know how many tens of thousands have died, nobody wants to repeat that. But Syria has a strong army and professional army that has commanders. Many of them have been in war, have been trained in sophisticated ways. In Libya there was no army, there were militias headed by the children of Gadhafi who had no idea what they were doing. They thought they were shooting ducks or something like that. They had no idea what they are doing. This is completely different. The arms in Syria are completely different than in Libya. Libya has not been in the center of the Arab world. But in Syria, it'll be very different. And whatever happens could affect key countries around there: Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, Israel, Jordan, all of them could be affected. Even Egypt, even Saudi Arabia. Moreover, I say it always jokingly and I'm saying it now jokingly, there is no oil in Syria. Even more than that, and it's related maybe to the question of oil or something else, I don't know: in Libya's case, there were countries ready and eager to intervene. Here no single country is eager to intervene. Even Turkey made some noises, but doesn't do it anymore.

CAIRO REVIEW: *You are not in favor, yourself, of military intervention?*

NABIL ELARABY: I'm always against military intervention. It could happen, circumstances could do it, but this organization does not speak about military intervention.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How do you protect civilians in Syria?*

NABIL ELARABY: Well, I've been saying that for a long time, that's why I want to change the mandate of the observers to go from observers to peacekeeping, like the peacekeeping forces which were established for the first time in Egypt in 1956 to supervise the cessation of hostilities. To make sure that the parties will not shoot at each other. And will stop, let's say, the use of heavy artillery and tanks and so on in shooting at people.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How would you evaluate the reactions and policies of the United States toward the Arab Spring in general?*

NABIL ELARABY: Well-established governments of big countries, of super powers, it always takes time for them to realize how to react for such event. For thirty years—or may be if you go back ten more years under Sadat, for forty years—the United States thought that everything is settled in Egypt and that they know what's happening. All of a sudden, there is an explosion and it took them some time, but I think they

are reacting very well, at least here in Egypt and in other countries. The reaction from the United States is very rational.

CAIRO REVIEW: *What do you mean by that?*

NABIL ELARABY: They accept the situation. They met the Muslim Brotherhood. I had lunch last Friday with President Carter. He was praising the Muslim Brotherhood. They have to accept, if it's the majority, they have to accept the majority.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How do you think ultimately the rise of these Islamist parties like the Muslim Brotherhood, the most significant party in Egypt now, will affect the Egyptian-American relations?*

NABIL ELARABY: Not necessarily. But I have no personal point of view about the rise of this trend. I will not answer the question.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How has the Arab Spring affected Israel?*

NABIL ELARABY: Before the Arab Spring, I have written many articles in newspapers here that we are acting in a very wrong way against our interest with respect to Israel. There is a peace treaty, that's fine. You don't have to abrogate the peace treaty. Why? No one abrogates peace treaties. There were reasons to fight and then the countries were at peace and they have to establish their relations. Now, Israel is violating every day what they have committed themselves to do. What I've been asking is look at every step taken by Israel and see whether it really fits with its commitments. I'll tell you: no. I'll just give you one example: Camp David, and I was there. They committed themselves that [UN Resolution] 242 will apply to every single front, or to every single country, which accepts to live in peace with Israel. Fine. Palestinians have said for twenty years now we have recognized Israel, but they don't want to apply 242, they don't want to withdraw, they don't want to stop the settlement activities. They have tens of thousands of prisoners who have been there for over twenty years. They are acting in a wrong way. They claim that they have withdrawn from Gaza, but they are surrounding Gaza and any day they will go and kill people in Gaza and go out. They are the occupiers. It's not necessary in occupying a territory to be in every single yard of territory. They are outside but they are occupying it. So, everything is wrong. You need to rectify the relations. This is not going to work at all. You need to rectify the relations to have a healthy relationship in the future.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Will the Arab Spring change this dynamic?*

NABIL ELARABY: That depends on Israel and the international world. That depends again on the position of the United States in particular.

CAIRO REVIEW: *What's your estimation?*

NABIL ELARABY: I give up on the United States changing its positions, but always there is a possibility in the second term of the president.

CAIRO REVIEW: *You gave up on what?*

NABIL ELARABY: To see a change. Every four years, we have the same thing. The cycle goes every four years: a president will come, for the first year he will do nothing because he's still working on what he should do. Second year, he'll make up his mind. Maybe in the third year he will do something. Forth year, it's out. Then we have to stay to the next term. It's going on since 1967.

CAIRO REVIEW: *You seem to have hope with President Obama's second term.*

NABIL ELARABY: In every second term, there is always a window of opportunity. Whether it will be seized by Obama or not if he gets a second term, I don't know.

CAIRO REVIEW: *You were personally present at Camp David, in the Egyptian delegation.*

NABIL ELARABY: Yes, I was there as an advisor.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Since the Camp David Accords and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, you've had a certain security arrangement in the region. Now you have the Arab Spring, the rise of Islamist governments in Tunisia, in Egypt, and in other countries. Is this going to change the dynamic of the Arab-Israeli conflict?*

NABIL ELARABY: Definitely.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How?*

NABIL ELARABY: It should make Israel look back, read the writing on the wall, and realize that they have to change their policies. The way that they were using brute force and not taking into consideration the rights of the people around them, particularly the Palestinians, will have to change. But they are reading it wrongly.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How are they reading it?*

NABIL ELARABY: They are claiming to the Americans, to the Europeans, "It is changing here. We don't know what will happen. We will not talk unless they accept our conditions." They should've realized, this will not last. They have to change. They have been pursuing very aggressive policies for the last forty to fifty years. They have to change that. They have to realize that if they want to live in peace with their neighbors, they have a chance to do that. But they have to live in peace, they have to act

according to the rules of international law everywhere. [The Arab peace plan] is there ten years there now, and it's still there. The resolution we adopted on Saturday, we repeated that again. Ten years, they've not reacted to it.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Is it survival?*

NABIL ELARABY: The only reaction that I know of was last May, when I was a foreign minister. I was contacted by a group from Israel, they wanted to see me. They called themselves the Israeli Peace Initiative and they came. Former high officials, directors of Mossad, Shin Bet, all these organizations, former ambassadors, some lawyers, some journalists. They came and said we are a group of very well respected Israelis and we are willing to work for the implementation of the 2002 peace plan. But we would like Egypt, being the first country to make peace with Israel, to get the Arab countries to implement the peace plan, their obligation under the peace plan, so that we can try to convince the Israeli people to carry out their obligation. I told them thank you very much, nice meeting you. I offered them coffee.

CAIRO REVIEW: *On the peace treaty, almost all Egyptian politicians are saying this should be amended. What's your view on this?*

NABIL ELARABY: Listen, every agreement, every treaty, has to have a balance between the interests and the rights of both sides. The treaty has reference to the security arrangements. There are two aspects. One of them is security arrangements. The treaty has a clear-cut provision that they could be amended. The second is that people in Egypt under the former regime have added things which are not in the treaty. People say Camp David requires Egypt to sell gas to Israel. Gas was not there at that time. Camp David and the treaty speak about the right of Israel to bid for oil which Egypt does not need. But people think that it contains obligations on Egypt to sell oil to Israel, which is not true.

CAIRO REVIEW: *From a legal point of view, is it a non-starter to amend the treaty?*

NABIL ELARABY: No, no. Every treaty, I said, has to maintain a balance between the rights and obligations of the parties. If this balance is tilted, it has to be rectified. And in this particular treaty, due to the activity of Israel, like neglecting completely the Palestinian rights, we have a bilateral obligation to tell them, apply your bargain in the treaty. And they are not doing it. Without amending the peace treaty we can say that.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How would amending the peace treaty help that?*

NABIL ELARABY: Amending may have to do with security arrangements, that's all.

CAIRO REVIEW: *But you would agree with that, to amend the peace treaty?*

NABIL ELARABY: Yes, definitely yes. If I had stayed as foreign minister, I would've worked on that.

CAIRO REVIEW: *And what specifically is the amendment?*

NABIL ELARABY: The peace treaty speaks about certain security arrangements. About limitation of arms. And it says this should be reviewed. I never participated in that, the military did it. The military should come again and study the situation. But what should be needed and what should be amended definitely in my view is adding something which is not in the treaty, that is to have the MFO [Multinational Force & Observers]. The MFO is not in the treaty. The treaty says "United Nations peace keeping force." So this should've been done. It has cost us a lot of money. I wrote several memos when I was in the foreign ministry on that. My estimate now is since 1982 till today, maybe Egypt has paid maybe a billion dollars for the MFO. While it should have been UN force, it would've cost Egypt in all this time maybe \$50 million. So, there is a big difference here. This should be done without amendments. If the militaries will meet together and see that the limitations of armaments will require change, they will decide that.

CAIRO REVIEW: *What is the Arab view on Iran's intentions in its nuclear project? Is Iran building an atomic bomb to threaten the region or have a strategic hegemony over the region? Do you believe Israel will attack Iran?*

NABIL ELARABY: The last question, I don't answer. Nobody knows that. Not even President Obama knows what Israel will do, so I won't answer that. First question, our position here in the Arab League and as Egypt also and as every single Arab country is that we want to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. That will apply to both Iran and Israel.

CAIRO REVIEW: *What do you think Iran's intentions are?*

NABIL ELARABY: I don't know about Iran's intentions.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Are you concerned about them?*

NABIL ELARABY: I'm always concerned about intentions.

CAIRO REVIEW: *America was an important partner for some of regimes in this region up until 2011. Where is all this leaving the United States and its position with the governments and the people in the region?*

NABIL ELARABY: Well, I think they will wait and see. They don't know how things are going to develop. But I think their reaction is very intelligent. They are trying to

find out what's happened. They have good relations. The U.S. ambassador and I had dinner yesterday and she has asked for a meeting to see Dr. [Mohammed] Morsi [of the Muslim Brotherhood] and I think they are acting in a very dignified and rational way. I think they are making up their mind. You don't know what the end result will be. So, they are preparing themselves and they are satisfied with what's going on. You ask the Americans.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Has America lost out in this Arab Spring?*

NABIL ELARABY: No, no, no. I will not accept that because we don't know what the end result will be. We are still going through a transitional period.