

ElBaradei abandons Egyptian presidential candidacy

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On January 14 Mohamed ElBaradei, the leading representative of the liberal bourgeois parties in Egypt, announced he was abandoning his presidential candidacy.

The former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency stated that the ruling military junta had failed to establish “a real democratic system”. He then rebuked the military for not heeding his advice, comparing it to an obstinate captain trying to save his ship in the middle of a storm.

He said: “Under his leadership, the ship is being rocked by waves. [...] We offer him all kinds of help, but he declines, insisting on taking the old route as if no revolution had taken place and no regime had fallen,” he wrote in his statement. ElBaradei added: “My decision does not mean I am leaving the arena, but continuing to serve this nation more effectively from outside authority and free of all shackles.”

ElBaradei’s depiction of himself as a spurned advisor of the junta is perhaps the only politically honest element of his speech. One of the military’s main backers from the start of the revolution one year ago, he is now trying to cover up his support for the junta over the last year. This is part of an attempt to mask the support the broader Egyptian bourgeois and petty-bourgeois “left” gave the junta, so they can again attempt to divert working class struggles behind a fruitless perspective of pressuring the army dictatorship for democratic reforms.

There are deep fears in Egypt’s ruling class that social discontent could explode in the run-up to the one-year anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, on January 25. Over 40 per cent of the Egyptian population still lives on less than \$2 per day, and wages remain amongst the lowest in the region. According to Karim Helal, board member of Egypt’s CI Capital, unemployment is a “time bomb.”

A class gulf separates workers’ social and political

demands from entire political establishment in Egypt, including ElBaradei and his petty-bourgeois “left” allies. There is mass disaffection with the elections overseen by the junta, which is set to produce a right-wing government led by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and closely aligned on the junta. On low turnout, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the MB’s political arm, obtained around 40 per cent of the vote in parliamentary elections.

The FJP is signaling that it will try to prop up the hated junta and provide a blanket amnesty for its crimes. According to the privately owned Egyptian daily *Al-Tahrir*, FJP Vice-Chairman Essam Al-Erian recently announced that “the military has the right to enjoy a special position in the upcoming constitution, more than in previous ones.” He also stated that the transfer of power to an elected civilian authority “should not result in the disappearance of the junta from the political scene.”

ElBaradei and his supporters amongst the youth groups and the Egyptian “left” have sought a more sophisticated mechanism to prevent the overthrow of the Egyptian bourgeois state. He met with the junta several times and issued public calls for a “national salvation government,” with the support of various youth groups and petty-bourgeois “left” forces. This included the leader of the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), Kamal Khalil.

The generals decided against a “national salvation government” headed by ElBaradei, however. Instead, they replaced Prime Minister Essam Sharaf with Kamal Ganzouri (both former ministers under Mubarak) and crushed protests in the lead-up to the parliamentary elections. Around 60 protesters were killed and thousands injured.

For the time being, it also appears unlikely that US imperialism—which funds the Egyptian army to the tune of over \$1 billion each year—would require ElBaradei’s political services. Instead, it is building closer ties with the Islamists.

Last week US Deputy Secretary of State William Burns met FJP leader Mohamed Morsi at the FJP's Cairo headquarters. Morsi said the FJP "believes in the importance of US-Egyptian relations." He welcomed Burns' visit, asking "that the United States review its policies in line with the aspirations of the Arab spring."

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland praised the Burns-Morsi talks and confirmed that US embassy staffers in Cairo are in talks with the Salafist (far-right Islamist) Al-Nour party.

The last year has seen a steady warming of Washington's relations with the Islamists, whom it has identified as a key ally to defend its regional interests against working class struggles. Islamists played a leading role in the imperialist war in Libya and the installation of a pro-Western puppet regime there last year. The Brotherhood is also active in the Syrian National Council, which now aims to destabilize the Iranian-backed Syrian regime with the support of the US and its Middle East proxies.

The goal of this "historic shift" (as the *New York Times* described it) is to suppress revolutionary struggles and divert mounting social conflict into military confrontations between a Sunni Islamist bloc led by US imperialism and regimes that Washington views with displeasure—notably Iran. At every stage, this reckless strategy poses the risk of setting off a major regional war.

ElBaradei's decision does not represent any principled opposition to the reactionary plans of US imperialism or the Egyptian junta. This is perhaps clearest in his support for finance capital's attacks on the working class in Egypt. At the beginning of January, the junta issued a decree cutting public spending by 14.3 billion EGP (\$2.36 billion). According to Finance Minister Momtaz Al-Said, the biggest cuts will hit wages (4 Billion EGP) and also government purchases and services.

On Monday, January 16, a delegation from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) arrived in Cairo for discussions for a \$3.2 billion loan. These economic policies are fully supported by the Islamists. The daily *Al Masry Al Youm* reported that Ganzouri met with Morsi and the deputy leader of the FJP, Saad al-Katatny, to discuss the IMF loan.

ElBaradei supports similar austerity measures. On December 15 he submitted a "stimulus" plan to Ganzouri that aims to help "attract investments, boost production, [and] provide job opportunities." His plan also called for wage cuts and assistance from Arab and international organizations.

ElBaradei's right-wing policies have not prevented youth coalitions and petty-bourgeois "left" parties from praising his latest maneuvers. Shady ElGhazali Harb, spokesperson of the 25 January Youth Coalition and a member of the Democratic Front Party, said: "He is not withdrawing and leaving a void in his trail. He will be back doing grass roots work and that may help unite the youth to effect change."

Characteristically, these initiatives involve promoting the military-run "elections" that ElBaradei is supposedly criticizing. Numerous youth groups, liberal parties, and petty-bourgeois "left" forces, including the April 6 Youth and Kefaya, recently started an initiative titled "Power Handover to the Elected People's Assembly on January 25, 2012." They try to present falsely this demand as the "completion of the revolution."

The pseudo-"left" RS are again playing a deceitful role, presenting such initiatives as progressive. They issued a statement calling for critical support of the initiative, praising its "sincere" and "dedicated" initiators. At the same time, they state that the "revolution is not confined to search for initiatives" and add that the masses "still want to overthrow the regime in order to achieve life, liberty, social justice and human dignity."

The thread uniting the politics of the RS, Kefaya, and ElBaradei is their hostility to an independent struggle by the working class to overthrow the junta and build a workers' state fighting for socialist policies in Egypt and internationally. In the final analysis their initiatives, like ElBaradei's politically dishonest attempts to distance himself from the army, are simply attempts to promote political illusions already refuted by the experiences of a year of bitter struggle between the working class and finance capital in Egypt.



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