



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## Egypt

Egypt – EGY39173 – Intelligence  
apparatus – NAC – Monitoring overseas  
activism

6 October 2011

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**1. Please confirm whether a security or intelligence apparatus currently exists. Has it been disbanded under the interim government?**

A security/intelligence apparatus does exist in post-Mubarak Egypt. Whilst the interim authorities have dismantled the former intelligence agency, a new organisation has been established to replace it.

On 15 March 2011 Egypt's new Interior Minister, Mansur al-Essawy, announced the dissolution of the country's 'widely hated' state security agency, the State Security Investigations Service (SSIS).<sup>1</sup> The SSIS had been accused of committing torture and other human rights abuses in the suppression of dissent against President Hosni Mubarak's rule.<sup>2</sup> The *Associated Press* reports that 140 police officers have been put on trial for killing protestors during the revolution, and in July, Minister al-Essawy sacked 700 senior officers from the various police branches, including the SSIS, however 'most of them were near retirement anyway'.<sup>3</sup>

Although the interim government has dissolved the SSIS, a new National Security Agency (also referred to as the National Security Authority, National Security Division or National Security Sector) has been established to replace SSIS. Minister Mansur al-Essawy has reportedly stated that the new agency would be tasked with maintaining security within the country and combatting terrorism 'in line with the constitution and principles of human rights'.<sup>4</sup>

*Associated Press* reports that the National Security Agency (NSA) has kept on nearly half the staff of the outgoing agency.<sup>5</sup> According to a 19 August 2011 report from *Time*, the agency's staff 'hasn't changed much' with many former field-based officers being 'simply reassigned

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<sup>1</sup> Karam, Zeina 2011, 'Egypt dissolves hated security apparatus' *Associated Press* 15 March  
<http://www.thestar.com/news/world/article/954095--egypt-dissolves-hated-state-security-apparatus> - Accessed 5 October 2011

<sup>2</sup> Karam, Zeina 2011, 'Egypt dissolves hated security apparatus' *Associated Press* 15 March  
<http://www.thestar.com/news/world/article/954095--egypt-dissolves-hated-state-security-apparatus> - Accessed 5 October 2011

<sup>3</sup> Karam, Zeina 2011, 'Egypt dissolves hated security apparatus' *Associated Press* 15 March  
<http://www.thestar.com/news/world/article/954095--egypt-dissolves-hated-state-security-apparatus> - Accessed 5 October 2011

<sup>4</sup> Karam, Zeina 2011, 'Egypt dissolves hated security apparatus' *Associated Press* 15 March  
<http://www.thestar.com/news/world/article/954095--egypt-dissolves-hated-state-security-apparatus> - Accessed 5 October 2011

<sup>5</sup> Hendawi, Hamza 2011, 'Reform of Egypt's police hits a wall: The police' *Associated Press* 18 September  
[http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5ijDBVLcbcU29FKD89PjVmzdQx\\_Lw?docId=bb5fc4b396774295b00163de4930f06a](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5ijDBVLcbcU29FKD89PjVmzdQx_Lw?docId=bb5fc4b396774295b00163de4930f06a) - Accessed 5 October 2011

to other police-related posts' and the rest placed in headquarters of NSA.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, *Associated Press* notes that 'many State Security officers whom activists and victims have identified as being involved in torture have simply been transferred to other posts'. Minister al-Essawy confirmed that many former SSIS employees would be rehired for the new agency, noting that 'their experience is still needed'.<sup>7</sup> Minister al-Essawy has also reportedly stated that the security apparatus "cannot be dissolved".<sup>8</sup>

*Time* notes that 'despite the Interior Ministry proclaiming a new era of transparency and political neutrality, its [NSA] operations remain almost entirely opaque'.<sup>9</sup> Rights groups have reportedly claimed that State Security have new plans to investigate civil society groups.<sup>10</sup> According to *Time*, 'there's little happening to change the image of an institution still shrouded in mystery, whose operatives still patrol in plainclothes and rarely show identification'.<sup>11</sup>

## **2. Is there any information suggesting that members of the National Association for Change (NAC) are currently being targeted by security forces, agents of the old government or the interim government, or Salafists or the Muslim Brotherhood?**

Members of the National Association for Change (NAC) were targeted during the Mubarak era, however little information was found to confirm that members have been targeted since Mubarak's resignation. An El-Baradei supporter was reportedly abducted in Alexandria, however the identity and intent of the perpetrator/s is unclear.

A September 2011 edition of the government-owned *Al-Ahram Weekly* notes that former Mubarak regime officials have conducted defamation campaigns against Mohammed El-Baradei. Additionally, the article states that one member of the El-Baradei team was abducted by 'a group of thugs' in Alexandria and released some days later. The article does not state who was behind the abduction. According to the report, banners carrying photographs of El-Baradei were torn down in Suez and Ismailia while banners for other presidential candidates remained visible.<sup>12</sup>

Members and supporters of the NAC were targeted during the Mubarak era. The US Department of State *2010 Human Rights Report* and Amnesty International reports covering

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<sup>6</sup> Hauslohner, Abigail 2011, 'Egypt's secret police promise to serve a sceptical public' *Time* 19 August <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2089390-1,00.html> - Accessed 5 October 2011

<sup>7</sup> Middle East News Agency and Bikya Masr cited in Andrew McGregor 2011, 'Egypt's Internal Security Service Collapses in a Storm of Charges and Revelations', *Terrorism Monitor*, Jamestown Foundation, Vol. 9, Issue. 14, 7 April; Hendawi, Hamza 2011, 'Reform of Egypt's police hits a wall: The police' *Associated Press* 18 September [http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5ijDBVLcbcU29FKD89PjVmzdQx\\_Lw?docId=bb5fc4b396774295b00163de4930f06a](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5ijDBVLcbcU29FKD89PjVmzdQx_Lw?docId=bb5fc4b396774295b00163de4930f06a) - Accessed 5 October 2011

<sup>8</sup> Middle East News Agency and Bikya Masr cited in Andrew McGregor 2011, 'Egypt's Internal Security Service Collapses in a Storm of Charges and Revelations', *Terrorism Monitor*, Jamestown Foundation, Vol. 9, Iss. 14, 7 April

<sup>9</sup> Hauslohner, Abigail 2011, 'Egypt's secret police promise to serve a sceptical public' *Time* 19 August <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2089390-1,00.html> - Accessed 5 October 2011

<sup>10</sup> Hauslohner, Abigail 2011, 'Egypt's secret police promise to serve a sceptical public' *Time* 19 August <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2089390-1,00.html> - Accessed 5 October 2011

<sup>11</sup> Hauslohner, Abigail 2011, 'Egypt's secret police promise to serve a sceptical public' *Time* 19 August <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2089390-1,00.html> - Accessed 5 October 2011

<sup>12</sup> 'El-Baradei's not there' *Al-Ahram Weekly* 8-14 September Issue no. 1063 <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1063/eg3.htm> - Accessed 6 October 2011

events in 2010 detail a number of incidents in which supporters of El-Baradei or the NAC had been detained and subjected to harm.<sup>13</sup>

According to *The Economist*, Salafists have also threatened El-Baradai. The article, published 31 March 2011, states that, shortly before the revolution, one Salafist preacher 'went so far as to pass a death *fatwa* on Mohamed ElBaradai'. This was reportedly 'for the sin of disobedience to the country's "rightful leader", Mr Mubarak'.<sup>14</sup>

### **3. Is there any information to suggest that any of these groups monitor the internet or other political activities conducted overseas by members of parties such as the NAC?**

No information could be found regarding whether these groups monitor internet or other political activities conducted overseas by members of parties such as NAC; however reports indicate that the interim government does monitor internet sites such as Facebook,<sup>15</sup> Twitter<sup>16</sup> and blogs<sup>17</sup>.

On censorship capabilities in Egypt more broadly, the 2011 Freedom House *Freedom on the Net* report (covering developments until 31 December 2010) notes:

... articles of the penal code and the Emergency Law ... give security agencies broad authority to monitor and censor all communications, and to arrest and detain individuals indefinitely without charge.

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which Egyptian security services monitor internet and mobile-phone communications, although a history of distrust between citizens and security forces has led to the widespread assumption that such monitoring could be in place at any time.

Social networking sites make it much easier for internet activists to organize, but they also allow government agents to monitor such activity and identify participants. The government regularly applies offline punishments or intimidation to online activists.<sup>18</sup>

Freedom House also reports that several companies supplied sophisticated surveillance technology to Egypt during the Mubarak era:

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<sup>13</sup> US Department of State 2011, *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 8 April; Amnesty International 2010, *Egypt: 'Shouting slogans into the wind' Human rights concerns ahead of the parliamentary elections*, November; Amnesty International 2011, *Annual Report*, 12 May

<sup>14</sup> 'Islam and the Arab revolutions: A golden opportunity?' 2011, *The Economist*, 31 March  
<http://www.economist.com/node/18486089> - Accessed 6 October 2011

<sup>15</sup> 'Egypt police arrest man for Facebook "Islam insults"' *Almasry Alyoum*, source: *Agence France Press* 21 August  
<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/488524> - Accessed 6 October 2011

<sup>16</sup> Mayton, Joseph 2011, 'Egypt: ElBaradei speaks out against military over activist's crackdown' *Bikyamasr* 15 August  
<http://bikyamasr.com/39476/egypt-elbaradei-speaks-out-against-military-over-activists-crackdown/> - Accessed 5 October 2011; Sheffer, Sarah 2011, 'Rising fears over media crackdown in Egypt' *Bikyamasr* 13 September  
<http://bikyamasr.com/42127/rising-fears-over-media-crackdown-in-egypt/> - Accessed 5 October 2011; El Dahshan, Mohamed 2011, 'Amnesty calls on Egypt to drop charges against activist for Twitter comments' 16 August  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/16/egypt-charges-activist-twitter-comments/print> - Accessed 5 October 2011

<sup>17</sup> Mayton, Joseph 2011, 'Egypt: ElBaradei speaks out against military over activist's crackdown' *Bikyamasr* 15 August  
<http://bikyamasr.com/39476/egypt-elbaradei-speaks-out-against-military-over-activists-crackdown/> - Accessed 5 October 2011

<sup>18</sup> Freedom House 2011, *Freedom on the Net 2011: A global assessment of internet and digital media*, 18 April  
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fotn/2011/FOTN2011.pdf> - Accessed 6 October 2011

Boeing subsidiary Narus sold technology to state-run Telecom Egypt to intercept and inspect internet and mobile phone communications. Britain's Gamma International provided its product FinSpy to Egypt's security service, which used the product to monitor dissidents' online activities. This spyware infects the computers of dissidents and allows the security service to capture key strokes and intercept audio streams, even when the dissidents are using encrypted email or voice communications such as Skype.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Freedom House 2011, *Growing Challenges to Internet Freedom*, 22 September  
<http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=700> - Accessed 6 October 2011

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Hauslohner, Abigail 2011, ‘Egypt’s secret police promise to serve a sceptical public’, *Time*, 19 August <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2089390-1,00.html> - Accessed 5 October 2011.

Hendawi, Hamza 2011, ‘Reform of Egypt’s police hits a wall: The police’, *Associated Press*, 18 September [http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5ijDBVLcbcU29FKD89PjVmzdQx\\_Lw?docId=bb5fc4b396774295b00163de4930f06a](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5ijDBVLcbcU29FKD89PjVmzdQx_Lw?docId=bb5fc4b396774295b00163de4930f06a) - Accessed 5 October 2011.

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