Egypt’s State-Society Dynamics and the Necessity for a New Social Contract
*Mohamed Elgohari & Elissa Miller, Atlantic Council*

Since the Free Officer Movement in 1952, Egyptians have strived for a just and representative system of government. However, the past sixty decades have wrought only failure. A major reason for this failure has been the lack of an alternative to Egypt’s decades-long social contract that has set repression as the price for stability. The January 25, 2011 revolution demonstrated society’s latest attempt to demand the establishment of a new, effective social contract that responsibly governs the state-society relationship. However, the post-revolutionary period witnessed the continuation of the same practices and dynamics relied upon during the Mubarak era. Current President Abdel Fattal al-Sisi has embraced these dynamics, employing repression and enforcing draconian laws in an effort to decimate the public sphere and silence dissent while claiming to be instituting stability. Yet it is clear that the tradeoff between repression and stability is a false representation of reality and grossly untenable.

This paper argues that that without the creation of a new social contract that can responsibly govern the state-society relationship, instability will continue to reign in Sisi’s Egypt. The paper seeks to explore the implications of authoritative laws -- the terrorism law, NGO law, and protest law -- and the regime’s use of excessive violence on the state-society relationship. The paper poses the following questions: How have these laws redefined the concept of citizenry? What are the political and legal implications on citizen-to-citizen relationships and the relationship between the state and its citizens? Can a new social contract be established and contribute to a positive transformation of the state-society relationship? What are the implications should the state continue to pursue repression in the name of stability? The paper also examines how the current security-centric environment in Egypt has shifted Egyptians’ priorities away from social justice and contributed to a radicalization of some segments of society. The paper concludes by reemphasizing the negative impact that repressive laws have on society and highlighting the benefits that could arise from a new social contract.