

Egypt 2018: An Ancient Nation is Moving Forward

A Very Personal Account

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Since the late 1990s, I have been a regular visitor to my birth country of Egypt. My love for its unique people, history, nature, food and culture keeps drawing me back. And despite some daunting challenges since 2011, this ancient nation is moving forward.

My latest visit in 2017 confirmed that Egypt has taken its first major steps in becoming a full-fledged member of that coveted international club known as “developed” countries.

With more than half a century of experience at it, I consider myself a good reader of both history and current affairs.

I know of no other state or nation today that manages more effectively to fight terrorism from within and without, while at the same time building (and rebuilding) infrastructure, attracting local and direct foreign investments, and augmenting its democratic institutions.

Terrorism is admittedly an ongoing economic and security concern in Egypt. In addition, home-grown terrorists (and every country has them), neighboring Gaza and Libya are major sources for industrial-scale terrorist incursions.

Qatar, Turkey, Israel and the US not only support terror groups militarily through recruitment, training, ordinance, and heavy armaments; they also provide intelligence and financial resources.

Egypt's fight in the war against terror is further hampered by media giants such the Al Jazeera Arabic cable TV network and Qatari-owned British media.

And there is also the corrosive influence of Egyptian-Qatari Mufti, Dr. Youssef Al-Qaradawi, considered by many as the supreme religious and ideological head of the Muslim Brotherhood, which has long espoused terrorism as a core policy.

The Muslim Brotherhood fuels its terrorist war against Egypt using propaganda TV stations located in Turkey and financed by Qatar.

Its aim is to drag Egypt into a prolonged civil war, similar to that which effectively destroyed the culture, economy and infrastructure of Syria, at the cost of tens of thousands of lives and billions of dollars.

Not surprisingly, the collusion of terror groups inside and outside Egypt has focused on both military and civilian targets. No one is exempt from attack – women, children, Muslims, Coptic Christians, security personnel, anyone.

Yet in spite of massive external forces working against it, Egypt seems more united than ever before and its people even more determined to defeat this evil.

I know my fellow Egyptians well; they will win this war while building their country and reclaiming years lost in economic stagnation, mismanagement and corruption.

Over eight weeks spanning October through December 2017, I witnessed real change happening as a direct result of hard work done by so many Egyptians under strong and able leaders, some of whom I am proud to know personally. Their collective achievements have inspired me to help as much as I can, considering my age and health.

Major recent infrastructural changes include new airports, shipping ports, energy generating stations, roads, and even whole new cities, all with vast potential to generate new capital. Real improvements in health care and education, from primary schools to universities, are also happening.

And Egypt is getting a firm grip on its once-chronic problem areas of urban traffic congestion, public mass transportation and pollution, with the coming year promising even more improvements.

While unemployment and inflation are still currently unacceptable at double-digit levels, both are on the way down, helped significantly by massive government housing and financial subsidy programs to aid Egypt's lowest income citizens.

I'm happy to report that the IT and microchip design sectors – my area of professional expertise – are thriving. The turnover is 30% and the supply of qualified personnel is still less than national demand, meaning that many opportunities continue to be available for youth who choose this field as a career.

With a stable democracy in place, I predict that President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi will win a second four-year term (2018-2022) with a sizable majority. I will be among those who vote for him.

I am encouraged by the fact that President Sisi told his supporters *not* to push for a constitutional change that would permit him to serve more than two terms. I am even more impressed that they listened.

El-Sisi's support is still high, even after his unpopular but necessary decision in 2016 to allow the Egyptian pound to float on the international currency exchange. The country's economy is now growing at more than 5 per cent annually, an excellent performance by today's world standards.

That economic growth is reflected in the welcome return of tourism. During my latest visit, I met Americans, Canadians, Europeans, East Indians, Chinese, Russians and South Americans.

All were very pleased with their experiences; they appreciated Egypt's unique history, culture, geography, wildlife, natural beauty and a year-round warm, sunny climate second to none.

But even with solutions almost in sight, there are still some two million new births adding annually to Egypt's population, which currently stands at some 110 million. The challenges

of such growth must be addressed soon, otherwise no improvements in real income will materialize.

So, Egypt continues to forge ahead with massive efforts directed at two main fronts: fighting a war against terror and building for its future generations.

And it must overcome these challenges in a region where it is surrounded by other nations and states in turmoil – the Israeli occupation of Palestine; continuing civil wars in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Libya; and the ongoing Muslim Brotherhood threat from Turkey, Qatar, Sudan and elsewhere.

But over its long and remarkable history, Egypt has always come through with flying colors. And it will keep on doing so in years to come. Happy 2018 Egypt. I love you!

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