



Published on *The American Task Force on Palestine* (<http://www.americantaskforce.org>)

[Home](#) > [Printer-friendly PDF](#) > [Printer-friendly PDF](#)

Americans must never ask themselves, ?Who Lost Egypt??

Media Mention of Ziad Asali in Asharq Alawsat - March 1, 2014 - 12:00am
<http://www.aawsat.net/2014/03/article55329525> [1]

After 4,500 years, the great pyramids of Giza are the only surviving wonder of the ancient world. The armies of Persia, the Hyksos, Alexander the Great, Rome, the Arabs, the Ottomans and the British camped in their shadow. It was in Egypt, that melting pot of Asian, African and Mediterranean cultures, that Napoleon Bonaparte addressed his soldiers in 1798. Humbled by the mightiness of the pyramids, he began, “French soldiers . . . Forty centuries gaze down at you.”

Today, a dire specter hovers over Egypt, this mother of the world, threatening its existence. In recent remarks in Moscow, Field Marshal Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi warned that there were “huge problems” in Egypt, adding that scenarios akin to those in Yemen, Iraq, Libya and Syria might be repeated in his own country. So where is Egypt heading? And how will it be saved from such a fate?

Some might question the credibility of these warnings, casting them as alarmist and merely intended to position Sisi as the savior of Egypt. They would be mistaken. Many such “experts” are housed in Washington-based think-tanks that are still trapped in the delusion that the Muslim Brotherhood is the Arab political future and the “authentic” representative of the Muslims of the region.

Even assuming, for the sake of argument, that there is an element of hyperbole in these warnings, one should still not underestimate the potential threats to Egypt’s future. The country is working toward establishing a new political system, one that will be “democratic,” we were assured by Egyptian foreign minister Nabil Fahmi in a recent television interview. This does not, of course, negate concerns over violence against protesters, especially as it is being portrayed by some organizations and media outlets.

Some of the criticism is driven by a biased view of Egypt that leans towards the Muslim Brotherhood. Most of these voices are, essentially, Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers dedicated to helping this radical group take power all over the Middle East by portraying them—either explicitly or implicitly—as a rising Islamic tide that should, and perhaps inevitably will, surge to power, even if that is through a one-off election.

Others base their criticism on comparisons with the fully realized democratic systems of the West that they want Egypt and other developing countries to follow instantly and scrupulously, no matter what the other circumstances may be. Commentators of this second type certainly have a degree of credibility and professionalism, but it is unrealistic of them to demand that Egypt replicate something close to an American political model—and on an external timetable to boot. Such analysts are undoubtedly genuinely committed to democracy, but they lack a due sense of humility towards the complexities facing a society, which is not their own, that is in turmoil.

Sisi, accompanied by Fahmi, recently visited Moscow, in a move that might be seen as a tilt towards Moscow and away from Washington. The United States quickly responded by criticizing what was perceived as a Russian attempt to influence upcoming Egyptian presidential elections when Russian President Vladimir Putin said Sisi would make a good president. A former senior US diplomat who now works for the United Nations, Jeffrey Feltman, rushed to meet Fahmi in an effort to assess the situation and remedy any negative fallout.

It’s only natural that Egypt seeks to strengthen its security capabilities and tries to solve its economic challenges by building stronger relations with Russia and other countries, especially in light of the rising security threats in the country. But this

should not be at the expense of vital strategic ties with Washington, because that would be counterproductive and against Egypt's interests. The second half of the 20th century demonstrates exactly why and how this would be the case, and no one understands the depth of this reality better than Fahmi. That's exactly why he later announced that Moscow is not, and cannot be, a replacement for Washington.

The danger is that Egypt could find itself trapped in the middle of growing US–Russian tensions. If it did, that would only expedite the fulfillment of Sisi's warnings that the Syrian crisis, or something like it, could be replicated in Egypt.

Much has to be urgently done to repair the undoubtedly damaged US–Egyptian relations. But the responsibility for achieving and ensuring this is not restricted to these two governments alone. All involved and interested parties must play their own constructive roles over the long run, and work together intelligently and diligently to achieve this aim.

Nothing is more important than working inside Washington to counter the powerful wave that aims at furthering deteriorating relations between the two countries under the rubric of “freedoms, democracy and human rights.”

The response to this flourishing anti-Egypt drumbeat must come from within Washington itself. And the only way to effectively counter it is by formulating a focused and effective message promoted by think-tanks dedicated to upholding the interests of the United States in maintaining and building its strategic relations with Egypt and other Arab countries. This message has to highlight the necessity and benefits for the US in having stable, pluralistic and moderate Arab regimes in the region that are capable of standing up to terrorism and defeating it, while also being able to pursue viable economic reforms and develop open markets.

Egypt, a major Arab country that ought to be empowered in its leadership role, is capable of sending such messages—both on its own and through its friends in the region and in the US—to Washington. The American system, after all, ensures open interaction, free speech and, for its citizens, the constitutionally guaranteed right “to petition the government” on any issue of concern. Failing to take full advantage of this open system, especially as it applies to American friends of the Arab world, will allow unfriendly others to define the image of Egyptians, and Arabs more generally, in Washington. A good number of them are ready and willing to do so to the detriment of that image, and are already at work damaging it.

Egypt—whose pharaohs challenged death with dreams of immortality—is its own leader. Its revolution, which astonished the world, is a testament to the will of the Egyptian people, who have overthrown two objectionable regimes in the past three years. Egypt will find its way by itself, and its significance cannot be dismissed.

One of the reasons for the current disquieting US–Egyptian rift is perspectival. Americans tend to see the primary expression of their own democracy through their elections, and typically view other countries through this narrow lens. Often the broader social and political context is ignored, in favor of a single-minded focus on elections as the sole criterion for good governance. No wonder, then, that many in Washington would reject the idea that the current Egyptian experiment is, thus far, in any sense democratic. But, while elections are a *sine qua non* of democracy, they are hardly its only element. And in countries experiencing transitional periods, as Egyptians have recently twice shown, elections are not the sole means of expressing the popular will.

“Losing Egypt” should not be considered an option for the US, especially given the prolonged and difficult turbulence Egypt is experiencing. Thoughtful people on both sides must recognize the importance of maintaining the strategic ties between the two countries and also fully comprehend the heavy ramifications of “losing” each other, if such an eventuality were to come to pass.

Egyptians will not forget that 45 centuries of civilization are gazing down at them, and they will restore their society to peace and stability, even if it's going to take some time. Americans would be wise to stop calling for cuts in aid to Egypt. The Arabs, meanwhile, will not forsake Egypt, because they still consider it the backbone of the Arab world. Russia, which did in fact “lose Egypt” in the last century, fully understands the meaning and depth of this loss.

It's easy to imagine that there is at least one American commentator, if not many, already contemplating writing a book with a working title of “Who Lost Egypt?” If there is one book I would be most willing to prevent through the prior restraint of wise policies, it would have to be that.

[Events](#) | [Daily News](#) | [About Us](#) | [Resources](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Donate](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

[!\[\]\(1d3a1175dd4902218e694b9c098adb83_img.jpg\) Front Page Features](#) [!\[\]\(e2297bc882e4a3f95bff068ab9c9101f_img.jpg\) World Press Roundup](#) [!\[\]\(69eafe5577bb2820ded2637faee72eea_img.jpg\) ATFP in the News](#) [!\[\]\(63df79f9df20930b0436ff68907f4313_img.jpg\) Policy and Analysis](#)
[!\[\]\(206bcee4096a3ee3b0f7e354023a5ee1_img.jpg\) Briefing Summaries](#)

Source URL (retrieved on *Feb 23 2019 - 7:55am*):

http://www.americantaskforce.org/in_media/mm/ziad_asali/2014/03/01/1393650000

Links:

[1] <http://www.aawsat.net/2014/03/article55329525>

[2] http://www.americantaskforce.org/us_arab_relations