

Al-Sisi: Egypt's New Pharaoh

News:

In early February Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the Egyptian dictator filed his papers to run in the presidential election in March 2018. The submission came as potential rival Khalid Ali withdrew from the race, after being threatened for standing against Sisi. Other candidates have been arrested or have also withdrawn from the race. Sisi just like Hosni Mubarak before him is so focused on maintaining power, to the exclusion of Egypt's social and economic problems, which will eventually cause his demise.

Comment:

The uprisings in 2011 brought much hope to Egyptians, especially when millions of protesters believed they had forced President Hosni Mubarak to step down after 30 years in office. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) held fast to power as it scrambled to respond, launching Cabinet reshuffles, partially lifting the state of emergency and prosecuting officials from Mubarak's fallen government, but much of the country's power structure remained in place. The move by the military were merely to appease the public rather than to change the country's political system. During his year in office, President Mohammed Morsi made no attempt to push the army out of politics and instead opted to work with select factions of the military against others. General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the director of military intelligence, appeared willing to work with Morsi, who made him minister of defence. The promotion backfired for Morsi, as Sisi took advantage of Morsi's political inexperience and weak rule and seized power in 2013. Ever since, Al-Sisi has been busy in consolidating his rule. Al-Sisi is now gearing up for re-election with a track record of failure.

Al-Sisi purged potentially troublesome officers from the military before replacing the chief of staff of the armed forces. The nearly four-year firing spree culminated in January 2018 with the dismissal of the director of general intelligence.

The economic situation has worsened under al-Sisi. Currently inflation stands at 14% with the government removing previously subsidised amenities including electricity which has risen by up to 40% in price. Economists are expecting this situation to worsen with the expected removal of food subsidies potentially putting tens of millions at risk of having no food due to rising costs. What will in all likelihood make things even worse is the attempt to use debt to navigate out of this problem. The Sisi regime has turned to the IMF for a \$12 billion loan which will bring Egypt's total debt to \$54 billion. Currently 60% of state income is spent on debt repayment which leaves very little for public services. Egypt has had a torrid history with the Bretton Wood Institutes. In 1990, the Egyptian economy was forced to transition from an exporter of food to a food importer. Any food it produced, 50% was exported to receive export revenues to repay the debt. All of this shows that instead of the economic situation improving under Sisi, it has in fact become worse. Going to the IMF is only a short term solution and will add more debt, it will lead to the re-organising of the economy in ways which will perpetuate existing problems.

Sisi like the dictators before him, has no tolerance for opposition. Col. Ahmed Konsowa received a six-year prison term for announcing in November 2017 that he would run against al-Sisi in the next election. Lt. Gen. Sami Annan, the Egyptian army's former chief of staff, met a similar fate when he unveiled his plan to run for president; the military arrested him on an array of charges, their examples seem to have persuaded human rights lawyer Khaled Ali to withdraw his candidacy.

The Arab spring uprisings have been stolen from the people. The military has remained in power whether behind the scenes or in running the government. What the people of Egypt should now understand is the system in the country is not one person but one in which the military controls over 40% of the economy and where a few from amongst them care little for the masses. Sisi like Mubarak, Sadat and Nasser are only interested in their own thrones.

They should take heed from what happened to the fir'awn in history.

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