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## Don't Cut Aid to Egypt: The Hopeful Case for Supporting Egyptian President Sisi

**Today, the U.S. needs Egypt's partnership more than ever.**

Op-Ed by Ahmed H. Zewail

Some members of Congress have criticized Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi lately and called for a reduction in or elimination of U.S. military aid as a way of punishing his administration. After meeting with Sisi in Cairo recently and talking to a wide range of citizens there, I have come to understand why most Egyptians now support him. And I believe that cutting foreign aid to Egypt at this point would harm the U.S.-Egypt relationship and have serious consequences for the Middle East.



*Abdel Fattah Sisi, center, has taken serious steps toward reforming the ailing Egyptian economy. (Pablo Martinez Monsivais / AP)*

History illustrates the danger. In 1955, in the wake of the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, the United States agreed to provide funding to help build the Aswan Dam and create a source of hydroelectric power considered pivotal to Egypt's industrialization. Then, just months later, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles became convinced that Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, wasn't trustworthy, and he withdrew the U.S. offer of funding. The result: Egypt's political compass swung from West to East, and the Soviet Union quickly stepped in to fill the void.

It wasn't until 1973 that the direction was reversed by President Anwar Sadat. In the 40 years since then, the U.S.-Egypt relationship has been extremely important, and for 40 years the Middle East has witnessed peace between Israel and Egypt.

Today, the U.S. needs Egypt's partnership more than ever. In addition to the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, which is crucial to U.S. interests both domestically and in the Middle East, the U.S. has had and will continue to need Egypt's collaboration in the war on terrorism. Just last month, northern Sinai was struck by terrorists, who killed more than 30 Egyptian army personnel and wounded a number of civilians.

The partnership between the United States and Egypt is crucial to both countries, and it can't be predicated on political manipulation and threats of withholding aid. Moreover, the United States must be aware that it is no longer the primary provider of foreign aid to Egypt. Today, the Gulf States contribute more than 10 times what the U.S. does.

When Mohamed Morsi was elected president of Egypt in 2012, many in the country, including me, were hopeful that he would become a democratic president for all Egyptians. Unfortunately, his presidency quickly became a proxy for the Muslim Brotherhood, and under his leadership the country was driven to the edge of civil war. Millions took to the streets on June 30, 2013, to demand change and greater stability for Egypt.

President Sisi did not initially intend to run for the office in which he now serves, but he was urged to, I was told, by the chief justice of Egypt's Supreme Court and others. If the election that put him into office was rigged, as some politicians and editorials have claimed, why would Egyptians continue to support him after the election?

It is certainly not because he has taken the path of political expediency. Shortly after Sisi was elected, his administration announced cuts of "subsidies" on natural gas and energy consumption and lowered those for bread and other goods. This was an important step for economic stability in Egypt, but was considered politically impossible for more than half a century during the presidencies of Sadat and Hosni Mubarak. Sisi was able to convince Egyptians he was taking necessary action.

In another post-election call to Egyptians, he proclaimed the inauguration of a national project — the New Suez Canal — a waterway parallel to the one dug in 1869, and he called on Egyptians to invest in the project. In eight days, the Central Bank of Egypt raised nearly \$8.5 billion by selling investment certificates. I visited one bank during those eight days, and the line circled several blocks. Banks had to stay open late to handle the unexpectedly huge volume of transactions.

It is true that Egypt's attempt at democracy after the 2011 revolution encountered

many obstacles. And there remain issues to address, among them establishing fair laws governing NGOs, enforcing the rule of law for political prisoners awaiting trials, and the integration of Muslim Brotherhood members into the political fabric of Egypt.

These issues make it all the more crucial, however, for the U.S. to continue to engage Egypt through direct dialogue and partnership. America should not hesitate to wield its considerable soft power — providing access to American markets, initiating trade agreements, providing aid for building new educational and democratic institutions. The so-called Arab Spring has proved that the fall of a Mubarak-like presidency does not mean the immediate rise of democracy. That will take time and nurturing and encouragement.

Egypt is facing monumental problems. Besides internal issues, including a troubled economy and high unemployment, it has security problems to its east with Islamic State, to its west with Libya and in the south toward Yemen. But despite these issues, Sisi has managed to get the majority of Egyptians behind him, taken serious steps toward reforming the ailing economy, and given hope to the country by initiating major national projects, including the City of Science and Technology, which I have been actively involved in promoting for many years. As the Economist put it in a piece about Sisi's first 100 days, the president “has brought economic and diplomatic advances as well as hope to Egyptians wearied by years of political turmoil.”

The U.S. needs to feed that hope, and cutting aid to Egypt won't accomplish that.

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<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-zewail-egypt-el-sisi-20141104-story.html>

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- LongieDude
- Rank 243

I have a better idea. Cut aid to Israel from \$10 million PER DAY to a mere \$5 million per day and give the savings to Egypt. Ban all military assistane to all sides. We've armed the region.

- Dougdingle
- Rank 67

It's astonishing how we never learn, continually finding military dictators to push into office, then propping them up with the CIA. It used to be, they had to be vocally anti-communist; now, it's anti-Islamic militant. A VERY long list over the last 75 years or so. And of course planted deranged editorials like this one, saying it's still OK to do this.

The result is always the same: political expression banned, people disappearing off the streets, sanctioned torture, rape, murder, looted... [» more](#)

- Anthony McArdell
- Rank 0

First, WE (the USA) don't need Egypt. Israel needs Egypt. Second, ALL our foreign aid to Egypt over the past decades HAS BEEN TO THE EGYPTIAN MILITARY. When Mubarek and then Morsi stopped taking orders from Washington, the CIA finally got the Egyptian military chief into office. HE will be an American puppet.

Basically, what we have in Egypt is a military coup where ALL opposing political thought and groups are declared to be terrorists and are banned. We DO NOT have an American style... [» more](#)

- Jake Gimbel's Guppies
- Rank 1630

Well, I certainly am not sorry to disagree. Egypt and its current dictator are undeserving miscreants who deserve to receive not a single penny. Let them go pound sand.

- depchf20
- Rank 0

Sorry to disagree tlemgr, Pres. Sisi is the biggest and best hope Egypt has right now, he just liberated Egypt from the hands of a terrorist President Morsi and is the only person alive in Egypt today to lead the Egyptian people out of years of neglect and abuse of power by others in the past. I am an American and lived for the past 2-1/2 years in Egypt. We, the US need to support Pres. Sisi and the Egyptian people. Egypt is too big to fail and the consequence's would be catastrophic to the... [» more](#)

- NadiaEg
- Rank 0

As an Egyptian who supports Pres. Sisi, I agree with you completely, depchf20. I get the impression that some Americans can't stand the idea of Sisi because they perceive this as a fight between democracy

(Morsi) and military dictatorship (Sisi). Another way to look at it is as a choice between religious theocracy (Morsi) and secular rule (Sisi). Mixing religion with politics was a disaster for the political and social fabric of Egypt. It could have lead to a civil war like the one going on... [» more](#)

- tlemgr
- Rank 6426

Ship the idiot who wrote back where he came from.

- tlemgr
- Rank 6426

@NadiaEg He's definitely an idiot or he thinks everyone who doesn't keep up about Egypt is. Only an idiot thinks 1) A coup is legitimate. 2) A military leader who jails all opposition is not a dictator. 3) That millions of people asked him to oust Morsi. Keep in mind that the "millions" were in Cairo alone. All of the other provinces, including Alexandria counter protested against the anti-Morsi idiots. In fact, the Brotherhood only lost votes in Cairo.

- ashrafyoussef
- Rank 0

33 millions ousted the Terrorist Morsi on 6/30/2013, and not SISI, A coup ( if you want to call it that, is an act of support of the army to the people of Egypt against a terrorist group.) The "coup" is most welcomed by Egyptians.

Muslim Brotherhood is a terrorist organization, Hamas is already declared a terrorist group by USA ( they state they are part of MB in their first page of constitution). All terrorist groups who looted, killed, and burn Egyptians are to be jailed, that is a natural... [» more](#)