

We must unleash the power of Egypt's youth

This was an ideology-free revolution. Politics must not stand in the way of progress.

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The Egyptian people have overthrown the Mubarak regime in a peaceful revolution. Now that the tumult has subsided, the hard work of reconstruction must begin. There is a strange mix of excitement and trepidation in the air, but underlying it all is the prospect of real progress—not least in reintroducing Egypt's leadership of the Arab world.

Ahmed Zewail



For democracy actually to succeed, however, concrete steps must now be taken. First of all, the army, as it has pledged, must swiftly transfer authority to a civil government and step back into its role as guardian of the Constitution. Using Egypt's respected judicial system, a new constitution will be written to incorporate the ideals of liberty, justice and national unity.

Equally important, Egypt's new leaders must develop a national vision for economic and social development. The birth of democracy in Egypt requires that we sacrifice ideological battles and political games to focus on genuine reforms. Our young people cannot afford to be lured into traditional politics as usual.

The country faces big problems. At a national level, Egypt has to cleanse the deep-rooted corruption of the old regime and begin immediately to reform the bureaucracy of government.

It had no hero of Left or Right, no slogans saying 'War with Israel'.

Under the Mubarak regime, tourism, the Suez Canal and natural resources made up the bulk of the country's wealth. That is too narrow an economic base for an ambitious 21st-century country. Egypt is rich in human capital but it suffers from appallingly low levels of literacy. With 85 million people, nearly half of them on the poverty line, the No 1 issue

for reform is education. The country will never compete in global markets while 30 per cent of its population are unable to read and write.

The ideals and aspirations of Egypt's young people are real. What they are seeking is a new Egypt. They know their glorious past and wish to forge a new future. Their revolution was peaceful, civil and technologically advanced. They used the internet, texting, Facebook and other systems to co-ordinate their activities and ensure peaceful action against the brutal force of the regime.

The revolution did not have a hero of the Left or the Right. Nor did it have slogans such as "Death to America", "War with Israel" or "Islam is the solution". Young people cleaned up the streets, organised the traffic and even made human shields to protect national treasures such as the Egyptian Museum.

President Obama acknowledged the nature of the revolution when he declared from the White House: "Egyptians have inspired us, and they've done so by putting the lie to the idea that justice is best gained through violence." Egypt's youth—in contrast to the stereotype of young Muslims as the source of terrorism—deserve to be honoured.



Perhaps the most fitting way would be for the United States, Europe, Japan and China to create a significant fund to invest in their education. What we need most in this part of the world are science and technology centres of excellence. Such institutions would become beacons of knowledge, boost national pride and enable our youth to participate in the global economy.

A brutal regime was brought down by the peaceful power of technology.

One of the forces that will drive progress in Egypt is an appreciation of the value of scientific thinking. Some 35 per cent of the Egyptian population is 14 years old or younger. We have seen how India's investment in science has paid off, propelling the country up the global league of nations. If we instill this core value in our young people, we will create a powerful workforce that can truly change Egypt.

This opportunity must not be lost. In the 1960s, with the aid of the former Soviet Union, Egypt constructed the Aswan High Dam, a national project that generated huge power for Egypt's economic development. Through their peaceful revolution, young people have generated energy on a similar scale for Egypt's human development.

Egypt is the heart of the Arab world and the beating of that heart is being felt across it. It is more critical than ever that we support and sustain the spread of liberty and democracy in the Middle East. If they are to endure in this region, we need to train the minds of the generation who made this revolution happen. Joining hearts and minds together is what will ultimately make us part of the modern world.

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