



Science and Politics In Egypt: A Life's Journey

Speakers

- Dr. Rushdie Said, former President and Founder, Geological Society of Egypt
- Dr. Hosam Mahmoud, Professor, George Washington University
- Ms. Nagwa Riad, Advisor to Executive Director, IMF

Moderator

- Dr. Jennifer Bremer, Director, Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise, Washington Center

Dr. Jennifer Bremer, Director of the Washington Center of the Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise, welcomed the participants and introduced Dr. Said and his book.

Dr. Rushdie Said, the author of *Science and Politics In Egypt: A Life's Journey*, began by saying that his memoirs, first published in Arabic in 2000, has received much attention and acclaim in Egypt and that he has been very candid about his views. He added that because he has spent much of his life in the United States, the book also deals with issues related to the Egyptian-American community.

Dr. Said put forward that Egypt in modern times has been prevented from achieving its full potential. His experiences after World War II, when Egypt was a leading member in the “non-aligned movement” of nations were very positive, especially with the Aswan High Dam project. He also had the opportunity to build a new school for scientific research and led the way in opening up many mining operations.

But following the 1973 war, Dr. Said maintains, the Egyptian government took the country down the wrong path, ending beneficial industrialization programs and becoming more corrupt and less secular. He feels that the system did not support the rising Egyptian middle class, mainly by not allowing the public to participate in administrative affairs or allowing peaceful assemblies. The corruption was such that appointed officials were only beholden to their benefactors and there was no transparency. Given this setting, it was almost impossible to do business in the country. In addition, he talked about the difficulties facing the Coptic community, of which he is a member.

Dr. Said concluded his remarks by saying that he has been fortunate to witness and participate in the birth of modern Egypt, yet remains frustrated that the country has not witnessed a full democratic transition. The revolution, despite its accomplishments, unfortunately turned the state into a repressive system with a lack of accountability. This in turn stifled the growth of civil society, halted initiative and prevented a system of merit from prospering.

Dr. Hosam Mahmoud, a Professor at George Washington University, paid tribute to Dr. Said as an inspiration, especially in the field of science. He praised the book, especially in its demonstration of how science was practiced in the 1950's and 60's where merit and

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promotion became intertwined with political positioning and religious bias. He emphasized Dr. Said's point that progress in science can only come through recognition of merits and accomplishments.

Ms. Nagwa Riad, the Advisor to the Executive Director for the Middle East at the IMF, next spoke, also praising Dr. Said's book and his lifetime achievements. To her, the book reflected three important dimensions of Dr. Said's rich character: the writer, the scientist and the politician. As a writer, his eloquent and gripping literary style provided a snapshot of important political and social events in Egyptian history. As a scientist, he has had an indelible impact in the field of geology and mining in Egypt, at both the academic and practical levels. His keen scientific foresight and managerial prowess enabled him to mobilize the necessary resources to develop the Egyptian Geological Survey and put it on par with similar institutions in developed countries. Dr. Said was also the only geologist in Egypt who had an important presence and impact on the political scene during critical years following the 1967 war, at the national level as a member of Parliament and international level as a member of the Council of Interparliamentary Union.

Q&A Highlights

Q: Should Nasser or one of his successors be blamed for the lack of democracy in Egypt?

Dr. Said: Egypt must have a democracy. This is the consensus of everyone, including the government itself. We have to have an open society too. When Nasser came in, democracy was not a priority, rather jobs and economic security were. Now that the government has forgotten those needs with the "open door" policy, the only solution is for democracy.

Q: As the population in Egypt is booming, what advice do you have for the next generation?

Dr. Said: First of all, we need incentives for people to keep the population stable, especially as Egypt is an agrarian country and social security is almost nil. Under such conditions children would be a great asset.