

Innocence Abroad

Jun 25, 2008



Articles & Testimony

In the spring of 2002, I made my first post-9/11 visit to Cairo as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and South Asian Affairs. The trip's purpose was a soup-to-nuts review of the large U.S. economic aid package to Egypt. I had been asked specifically to look at what the United States and Egypt had been doing to support democratic development. The short answer was "not much," but the Egyptians have been around a long time and so do not lack a studied sense of humor. As they saw it, dredging the Nile as it opened to the Delta counted at the time as an act of democracy building.

As may be inferred from this example of pharonic wit, those early discussions did not go so well. Until the United States gave up its "double standards," stopped supporting Israel "unequivocally" and resolved the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, our counterparts told us, issues of domestic political reform in Egypt were off the table.

That the Palestinian-Israeli conflict had nothing to do with educating young Egyptians or ending market-distorting subsidies or making the Egyptian judiciary truly independent was a long-standing fact that our colleagues simply preferred to ignore, as usual. On the other hand, the idea that we Americans assembled in Cairo believed that such matters actually had a bearing on U.S. national security seemed to genuinely baffle them. The Egyptian government, like many others in the region, did not yet believe that the United States was serious about pushing internal reform as a facet of U.S. national security policy.

They soon became believers. . . .

Read the full text of this article on the [American Interest website \(http://www.the-american-interest.com/ai2/article-bd.cfm?Id=444&MId=20\)](http://www.the-american-interest.com/ai2/article-bd.cfm?Id=444&MId=20).

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