

Leading towards a better future

By AHMED ABOUL GHEIT

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AHMED ABOUL GHEIT has served as Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs since 2004. He joined the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1965 and served in several diplomatic posts including Egypt's Embassies in Nicosia and Moscow, as well as the Egyptian Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York. He previously served as Egypt's Permanent Representative to the United Nations (1999-2004) and Ambassador to Italy (1992-96). He was previously political advisor to the Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as Chief of Cabinet to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

When President Obama chose Cairo as the venue for his historic speech last year outlining his administration's new policy towards the Arab and Islamic worlds, he not only acknowledged the significance of Egypt's seven millennia of history, political clout and cultural influence, he also recognised Egypt's geo-strategic centrality and ability to lead vis-à-vis many of today's pressing regional and global challenges.

As the most populous and important country in the Arab world, Egypt has long played a pre-eminent role in the region as well as in the wider Middle East and Africa. Cairo has been, and remains, at the heart of peacemaking in the region, having been the first Arab country to conclude a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, and it continues to exercise a leadership role in the quest for a comprehensive peace settlement that would secure Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories and allow for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Based on this vision of an independent Palestinian State living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel, Egypt has sought to harness its diplomatic influence and efforts to bring the two sides to fulfil their reciprocal commitments and obligations and proceed directly to the end game – one whose parameters are already established and well known – that would inevitably result, within a specific time frame, in a final settlement to the conflict in the Middle East.

Beyond the paramount goal of achieving a peaceful settlement to the Palestinian question, Egypt has been instrumental in addressing a wide array of other priority issues in the Middle East. Cairo remains actively engaged in resolving the conflict in Darfur and preserving the national unity and territorial integrity of the Sudan. Egypt is also steadfast in its defence of Lebanon's political independence and sovereignty over its territory. It is a vocal advocate for Iraqi national reconciliation and economic and social recovery, and an ardent proponent of nuclear disarmament and equitable security arrangements in the Middle East.



State Dept Photo by Michael Gross

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hosts a bilateral meeting with Ahmed Ali Aboul Gheit at the US Department of State in Washington, DC

While Cairo's principled views vis-à-vis these and other issues may not always or fully intersect with those of policymakers elsewhere, they do invariably overlap on a multitude of complex and interconnected issues that can only be resolved with Egypt's full engagement and the commitment and support of our many partners abroad.

Our focus, and action, also transcends priority regional issues to include a plethora of pressing global and multilateral challenges that necessitate a response of a global and multilateral nature. Cairo has successfully worked, together with its many partners, to promote the shared goal of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, as was aptly demonstrated at the Nuclear Security Summit hosted by President Obama in Washington and during the recently concluded Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in New York.

Egypt has assumed inordinate responsibilities in working to prevent, manage and resolve conflict situations in Africa and promote the continent's ambitious development agenda, including through the New Agenda for African Development of which Egypt is an initiating state. And Egypt has been fully engaged, in all its diplomatic endeavours, in enhancing the rule of law and the effectiveness and representativeness of international institutions and their decision-making bodies, including at the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

With a population of over 80 million people and the 25th largest economy in the world, Egypt is well poised to assume an even larger role in today's global political, economic and financial decision-making architecture. In empowering Egypt to assume and discharge these additional international responsibilities, the international community will find a responsible partner capable of and willing to share the burdens of international leadership and a representative voice that bridges the policy gulfs that may separate the countries of the North and South or those of the industrialised and less-developed worlds. As the current Chair of the influential 118-member Non-Aligned Movement, and as the incoming Chair of the 57-nation Islamic Summit Conference, Egypt is already exhibiting its leadership and focusing its priorities to advocate the goals and aspirations of the Arab and Islamic worlds, Africa, and the countries of the South at large.

Egypt, for its part, has long recognised that its considerable political and diplomatic influence cannot be sustained without the sustained growth and development of its economy. With the support of its many development partners, Egypt has managed to modernise its economy and transform it into one

of the most dynamic in the Middle East and North Africa. The World Bank's Doing Business 2010 report ranked Egypt among the top ten global reformers for the fourth time in the past seven years.

Cairo has also managed to weather the global economic recession better than most industrialised and less-developed economies, recording impressive rates of growth in many sectors of the economy that have placed it on par with many of today's emerging economic powers. And with its network of free and preferential trade agreements, including the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ) agreement with the United States and Israel, Egypt is exceptionally well positioned to attract even larger inflows of Foreign Direct Investment that may well transform it into the Arab world's first Tiger economy.

While any candid discussion or examination will also reveal that Egypt, like most other states, still faces a host of considerable challenges that must be addressed, Egypt is proceeding – and progressing – with determination and full force in order to surmount them. For over half a century, Egypt has enjoyed an unprecedented, and unparalleled, degree of stability in a region that has seen its fair share of instability, and it is approaching the future with both candor and confidence and a firm belief in its ability to create a better tomorrow for its people, a more secure and prosperous Middle East, and a more stable and equitable system of international governance. **E**

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Ahmed Aboul Gheit, accompanies Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the Arab Peace Initiative meeting, after the launch of the International Compact with Iraq in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt



UN Photo/Mark Garten