

Egypt Fifteen Years On In Memory of Egypt's Failed Revolution

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Bonn, 2 February 2026. The Arab Spring in Egypt turned to winter as the promise of January 25th vanished. The ideals of accountability, dignity, and social justice must stay alive to honour those who gave their lives so that Egyptians may enjoy freedom.

Fifteen years have passed since the start of the Egyptian revolution leading to the overthrow of the Mubarak regime on 25 January 2011. But rather than celebration, grief has marked the days of the anniversary, amid an enforced silence and quiet remembrance of those who fell in pursuit of a dream which has been betrayed. The revolution has been dismantled, rewritten, and emptied of meaning. Not only for what was lost, but for what never came to be. Revolutions are measured not by slogans or moments of collective euphoria, but by whether they give birth to radical change in institutions that outlives the street. By

that standard, Egypt's January revolution failed, politically, economically, and morally.

Concentration of Power and Institutional Reversal

The dream was grounded in a vision of accountable rule, constitutional restraint and dignity anchored in law rather than fear. Yet since 2013 the country has moved decisively in the opposite direction. Power has been reconcentrated in the executive, checks and balances neutralised, and constitutional texts repeatedly amended to serve incumbency rather than citizenship. The possibility that President El-Sisi will extend his rule beyond 2030 is not an aberration. It is the logical outcome of a system that treats constitutional limits as temporary inconveniences. The constitution is not seen as a binding social contract, instead as an adjustable instrument of military incumbency.

The human cost of this political reversal is staggering. Thousands of political detainees, forced disappearances, prolonged pre-trial detention, and mass trials. Worse than under Mubarak. They are tools of rule. Families wait without information, without due process, without recourse. Equally troubling is the systematic subordination of institutions that once had a degree of autonomy. The judiciary has been reshaped through legal engineering, selective enforcement, and institutional pressure. Its function as an independent arbiter has been weakened. Securitisation has extended into religious institutions. Recruitment and advancement increasingly appear contingent on security clearance and political conformity. Institutional autonomy is eroded.

The economic record is no less disheartening. The revolution erupted against exclusion, precarity, and the concentration of privilege. Yet fifteen years on, inflation has reached levels that crush real incomes, while public debt has mounted to historically unprecedented heights, mortgaging the livelihoods of future generations. With successive devaluations, the currency has lost much of its value, eroding savings and wages, while social protection has lagged behind price increases. For millions of Egyptians, daily life has become an exercise in survival rather than aspiration.

At the same time, vast public resources have been channelled into capital-intensive, highly visible but economically unviable megaprojects. Real estate developments, monumental infrastructure, and a new administrative capital dominate the development narrative. Meanwhile public schools and hospitals are

crumbling, whilst the elite seek health and education in private establishments or overseas. Infrastructure investments may generate short-term activity and political symbolism, but they do not resolve Egypt's structural constraints. They do not fix deficient human capital, underfunded education and healthcare systems, or a private sector suffocated by uneven competition.

Fragile Growth, Sterile Investments

Most damaging of all is the systematic distortion of markets. Instead of unshackling the economy, policy has entrenched barriers to entry and tilted the playing field. Fair competition remains elusive. Contestable markets, the backbone of job creation and innovation, are the exception rather than the rule. When entry barriers are high, rules unevenly enforced, and state-linked actors enjoy privileged access, private initiative withers. Investment becomes speculative rather than productive, and employment becomes precarious. Without predictable rules, independent regulators, and equal treatment of economic actors, no amount of concrete can substitute for confidence. Under such conditions, appeals to "stability" ring hollow. Growth without inclusion is fragile. Investment without competition is sterile. Stability that rests on repression and economic exclusion is stagnation with police protection.

What makes this failure particularly painful is that the alternative was not a utopian ideal. Egyptians did not demand miracles. They demanded a state that respects its own laws, an economy that rewards effort rather than proximity to power, and institutions that serve citizens rather than discipline them. Those killed during January are now commemorated rhetorically, if at all. The principles for which they stood are treated as threats or treason. Their sacrifice is stripped of its political content and redeployed to legitimise the very order they opposed. A generation that dared to long for a different Egypt has been silenced, exiled, imprisoned, or exhausted.

To mourn January 25th is therefore not to indulge in nostalgia. It is to refuse erasure. It is to insist that demands for freedom, dignity, and social justice were neither naïve nor destructive, but necessary. And it is to remember, with clarity rather than sentimentality, those who lost their lives believing that Egypt could be free and worthy of its people.

Today, we mourn them. We also mourn a revolution whose promise has been buried beneath the past.

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