

**Historic Hours and Tumultuous Times**  
**Reflections on the Third Anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution**

By

**Ismail Serageldin**

**Alexandria, 25 January 2014:**

Today we celebrate the third anniversary of the Egyptian revolution. A milestone that calls for reflection on those three years of chaotic action, great moments, dashed dreams, big achievements, sacrifice and betrayal, and all the components of a human drama of the highest order. Tumultuous times, historic hours... greatness achieved, then lost, retrieved and lost again in the fog of uncertainty as the elusive dream of building our new republic on an inclusive society and a system of laws seems to be overtaken by an active war on terror.

Yesterday, four bombs killed and maimed many innocent victims in Cairo, and destroyed part of the Museum of Islamic Art. An unbelievable jewel, one of the finest museums in the world, irreplaceable pieces shattered and lost to future generations. Umayyad artifacts, Mamluk lanterns, Fatimid woodwork, medieval manuscripts... some of the finest legacies of our history are destroyed. It is amazing how artifacts of bygone times should touch us so deeply in the midst of the real blood of real people, but they do. People are not defined just by current bonds; they are defined by their culture and historical legacy. Our heritage counts.

The promoters of political Islam having lost the support of large parts of the public, and having failed to undo the removal of their regime, have opted for terrorism. We are no longer talking of violence during massive public demonstrations, we are no longer talking of individuals killed in massive confrontations in the street, we are now witnessing bombs, sometimes targeted at the symbols of state power, sometimes against ordinary people, always intended to terrorize and intimidate. But the people are not intimidated. They demand the repression of the fanatics by the army and the police. The calls for law and order and for an iron hand are widespread, and they are demonstrating a strong streak of determination among the public, but they are also raising the ever-present specter of the autocratic state and its apparatus of repression.

The revolution started with a magnificent grandeur in its waves of youthful peaceful protesters, armed only with their convictions. Violence and the scramble

for power tainted that greatness. Blood has been spilled. Violence has taken its toll. And today we are locked into an epic struggle, between the forces of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and its Jihadist allies, and the forces of the state being cheered on by the vast majority of the population, and an incessant stream of attacks in the national media.

Today, Egypt is at a difficult cross-roads. It is affirming its right to build a democratic system where human rights shall be respected and protected. But forces are pulling in different directions. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and the Jihadists seem determined to use violence and terror. The machinery of the state is determined to stop them. And the people with a profound anger against the Brotherhood and their Jihadist allies are calling for that machinery of state to crush them, to destroy them. They are willingly calling upon and egging on the forces of the state. But that same machinery will also unleash the forces of the autocratic state. And there, our dreams of democracy and pluralism are themselves at risk. That is the price we pay for waging a “war on terror”, for wanting security at any cost, order by any means... we risk embarking on a slippery slope towards the autocratic state.

The terrorism of the MB and its allies will eventually fail, for ultimately terrorism always does. But it leaves its legacy of dead and maimed behind. The chaos they try to launch, mostly at universities, brings the forces of government to restore order and inevitably lives are lost. Sometimes local residents, not the police, take on the MB and their allies. But violence still erupts, with its horrors and its anguish, and brings sad stories of innocent lives lost, whether police or demonstrators. We as a nation have to end this spiral of death and destruction.

But what makes the usually mild Egyptian people so fierce in their opposition to the MB and its Jihadist allies? It is that when unable to manipulate and mobilize large enough numbers of people to publicly support their cause, the MB and its Jihadist allies have turned to violence and terror. Mistaking the mild temper of the average Egyptian to be a weakness that would succumb to intimidation, they completely missed the real dimension of the unique phenomenon that is the Egyptian Revolution. That revolution, peaceful though it was, broke the traditional docility of the people, broke the barrier of fear that erstwhile repressive services had imposed. The people are no longer afraid. They will not be intimidated. Their caring side is transformed into anger by the loss of life that has become a staple of Egyptian politics today. True, it is proportionately far less than the violence that is found in other Arab countries, but it is still a very significant departure from the Egyptian norm, enough so to be recognized as a qualitatively different situation.

We are – literally – in a new world, fashioned by the events of the last three years. It is a different Egypt.

In that different Egypt, the loss of life has taken its toll... Death is the ultimate price that a human being can pay. And today, as I reflect on the three years of the revolution, I must write of terrorism and its repression, I must write of death.

So how can one write of events that bring repression and death and threaten even more? How can we communicate the passion and tumult, the chaos and purpose that gives crowds their character and individuals their resolve? O to be able to write in a strict, distant prose in a swift and uncompromising manner that feels like sudden death... a surprise, yes for death always is a surprise, even when it is expected. For it is the finality of death that surprises us. For we continue to advance, day to day, in the narrative of life, but the dead have aborted their narrative in mid-sentence so to speak.

Every life is precious. Every death touches many hearts.

### **Death and its aftermath:**

People react differently to death. Not death in the abstract, but death of a loved one, especially the death of someone young who is killed in the flower of youth, without warning. And every death is connected to many lives, and it affects each of them.

Families and friends can perhaps find in themselves the emotional resources to cope with the pain of separation in the case of prison, and may even be able to marshal the tenderness and support that can help overcome the legacy of prison, but they have no recourse to deal with the finality of death, except grief and mourning. Some scream and wail as if to exorcise the devilish anger and searing pain they feel. Others keep it locked up in silence and sadness, a veritable miracle of restraint. But wherever you look, wherever the violence took its toll, the grief of mourning in all its searing agony, writhing incoherence, painful confusion, and frustrated anger is there....

The process of mourning the dead creates a bond cemented by the grief that binds together the dead and the living they leave behind. To me, the manner of mourning is important. I remain convinced that it is most true and powerful when it occurs in the dignity of internal reflection, not in the practiced forms of public howling and crying in a ritualized process. These societally sanctioned rituals have

even developed a professional caste of performers who ensure for the grieving family that there is enough wailing at a commemorative event for the departed. But whatever the manner of its expression, the grief is real. It is palpable. It leaves scars on the living.

Egypt has had more than its share of such death and anguish in the last few years, and every one of them needs to be accounted for. It needs to be properly investigated, with the responsible parties brought to a court of law. We cannot simply turn a blind eye to the loss of life. Every human life is precious, and the murder and mayhem of terrorism cannot be justified no matter what the political cause the terrorists are trying to advance. Killing and maiming innocent people can never be justified.

It is usually the young who die in such conflicts. Whether they are the ones who strap explosives to themselves or who shoot and are shot at. Whether they serve in uniform or are caught in the crossfire. The mothers weep for their sons; the fathers are shattered. Parents expect to be buried by their children, not to have to bury their offspring. It is the most devastating loss. The lives unlived, the dreams unfulfilled, the story of a life's journey aborted at its very beginning, in the flower of youth.

The siblings and friends are also overwhelmed by the loss and shaken to the core. For in youth we feel invincible, we think death is far away in the future. Now it becomes close and personal.

There is a finality in death that is insurmountable. The loss, even if expected after a long illness, is still a painful and difficult transition. It forces us to confront our own mortality, our own lives. And the loved one leaves a vacuum in our lives. But the loss of the flower of youth brings pain and anger not just sadness and grief.

Egypt has had a lot of that pain and anger in the last three years, and at an accelerating pace in the last few months. Mothers burying their sons in Northern Sinai, or receiving the coffins of bodies of officers and service men killed in action there; wondering "Why? Why him?"

The pain. The anger. These are deep felt emotions that touch all those who lose a loved one. But all of us feel another form of pain and anger. The pain of dreams unfulfilled, the anger at feeling that our revolution has been betrayed, time and again. The dreams of freedom, social justice and human dignity for all has eluded us in successive regimes. The dream of an inclusive participatory democratic

republic that involves all and protects all as equal citizens in a system of just laws remains elusive. Economic well-being, a booming economy with opportunities for youth to find gainful and dignified employment, has been promised but remains feasible, but just beyond reach. The millions of unemployed youths that swell our cities were the prime artisans of our peaceful people-power movements, those human waves that surprised our rulers and impressed the world. Today many of them have been manipulated into becoming the spearhead of the forces of disruption of the Muslim Brotherhood and its Jihadist allies, wreaking havoc in universities and desperately trying to show that they can disrupt the pattern of normal life and activity, or even the cannon fodder of the acts of terrorism that punctuate the Brotherhood's campaign for political power after the removal of President Morsi.

The pain and the anger that spreads in Egypt like wildfire, is mobilizing the Egyptian people against the Brotherhood and its Jihadist allies and is strengthening calls for ever stronger actions against them. The calls are morphing from concern for stamping out terror into demanding a strong hand, if not directly an iron fist, to rule the country and crush them. And there's the rub. Such governments may well succeed in the appointed task of destroying the forces of terrorism, but they invariably limit our democratic processes, and challenge our conceptions of a state devoted to freedom and pluralism.

The pain and the anger motivate the calls for such actions. And the horror of terrorism and its destructive violence and the barbarism of its actions does require a state capable of providing basic safety for its citizens. But beware the vortex of violence and the slippery slope of necessary shortcuts. This is not just about Egypt, but about all states that have found, or will find, themselves confronted with the challenge of dealing with terror and those who choose violence as a means of advancing their political agenda.

### **The Vortex of Violence: the Downward Spiral of Repression:**

Political regimes dealing with opponents who have adopted violence as a means of pushing their political agenda have to be firm and use force. But that usually also puts them in the difficult position of having to gauge, monitor and judge how harsh their own forces should be. Violence by opponents turns to terrorism, and terrorism can never be justified, no matter what the political agenda. It must be dealt with firmly, for every citizen has a basic human right to safety.

But not all opponents of the regime, not even most of those who are active members in the opposing movement, are terrorists. Where and how does the decision-maker draw the line? It is tempting to justify harsh measures against that opposition by asserting that they were planning and plotting the killing and maiming of innocent citizens. Some undoubtedly were. Others may have sympathized with their cause but had misgivings about the methods they wanted to use. Others, doubtless more numerous, simply sympathize with the cause in very general terms. Still others were not involved with the cause but were opposed to the regime in power, and thus found themselves making common cause with those who advocated, and even executed, terrorist acts.

But just as rounds of cyclical violence between feuding tribes claims a basis in previous rights denied, or previous assaults by the “other party”, the regime and its opponents enter into that treacherous terrain at the risk of destroying that which they claim to protect and defend. Soon blood flows on both sides. Soon calls for harsh measures initially to stem the flow of blood, then to break the back of those who plan the violence are commonplace. Then the harsh measures begin. They initially are cheered on by crowds tired of insecurity and demanding law and order. But the violence of the opposition soon turns to terrorism, and the harsh measures of the regime soon extend not just to those caught in the act, but more broadly to those who support them. The deadly machinery of repression starts taking hold.

The decision-makers become embarked on a slippery slope where soon speed picks up and you can neither stop, nor slow down, nor get off. It takes a very able and self-assured hand to steer a course that balances the different concerns well, and gauges the dose of harshness to keep focused on where it will avoid the spilling of innocent blood, and to keep it bound by the norms of justice, and to mete out justice tempered by mercy and compassion.

Most regimes rarely succeed at that. Confronted by opposition that turns to violence and terrorism, they succeed in stopping the violence and in stamping out the terrorism, but they do so at enormous moral cost, and with a loss of the legitimacy of their actions by the excesses of their agents. Even when there is a watchful press and an active political opposition and a well-informed public, excesses do occur. Vast numbers are deprived of their freedom on the flimsiest of reasons, and worse, far worse, despite what the legal texts say, the merciless logic of the downwards spiral of repression takes hold. The prisoners are questioned, then abused and ultimately tortured.

### **Enlightened Despots and the Road of No Return:**

Whether or not those who control political power wanted it, they now find themselves at the helm of an increasingly autocratic and repressive regime. That paves the way to dictatorship. Dictators are sometimes claimed to be enlightened despots, but to me the emphasis has to be on the word despot. Despotism is the opposite of democracy, and it has never been compatible with respect of human rights. Soon the autocratic regime throws its net wider, captures more and more of the opposition that it can label as terrorists or terrorist-sympathizers. Soon all opposition is suspect.

Soon the numbers in the prisons increase. Their rights are violated in the name of national security. It is a road of no return. The forces of reason must stop the ship of state from embarking on that journey. If not, these violations, initially few, will become common, and then they become the norm.

Opposition, any opposition is soon considered unpatriotic and even treasonous. The dream of pluralism and inclusion and of building the mechanisms of democracy to allow a chorus of views to enrich public debate and engage the nation, fades away. Opposing views are censored. Discussion is derided as indecision and debate as obstruction. Instead, the pursuit of unification around national purpose is hailed as salvation. That national purpose is what the government says it wants for the good of the country. All those who oppose it are now not just suspect, but enemies to be crushed in the name of national security and society's interest.

### **The Horror of Repression:**

In invoking national security and the vague concept of the interests of society, the door is opened to moving from firmness in enforcing the law to repression. Opposing views are marginalized then outlawed. Dissent is derided then forbidden. Order has to prevail, and grey men who operate the machinery of the state start to wield enormous power that they never earned from the public they claim to protect.

Security services are the same everywhere. They look with suspicion at all who disagree as the potential fomenters of trouble, as the potential artisans of terror. Imperfect evidence is sufficient, due process is circumvented. Soon the innocent join the guilty in the prisons. Treatment in the prisons worsens, and confessions are extracted from the incarcerated to justify their incarceration.

The renunciation of what the prisoner believed in, the necessary breaking of the person's will to get him or her to admit the error of their ways, is the stuff of dictatorships based on political ideology. It was the stuff of Stalinism at its worst in the Moscow trials of the 1930s, so vividly depicted by Arthur Koestler's appropriately named "Darkness at Noon", where renunciation and self-denunciation was a necessary prelude to the inevitable execution. It is as if the tyrants needed to have confirmation that they were right in the murder of their opponent, or that at least they would use that final betrayal by the prisoner of all they had stood for as not only denial of self-worth, but a demonstrable proof to their comrades opposing the regime that they no longer deserved their support. No martyrs allowed.

But that is precisely why the approach to dealing with opponents driven by a powerful political ideology cannot be based solely on strength and coercion. Knowing this, the prisoners will find inner strengths to withstand psychological pressure and even physical pain, far longer than anyone would expect.

I once asked a colleague who, in his youth, had been imprisoned and tortured; why not just give the jailers all they want immediately. After all, everybody has a threshold, after which that confession or information would be torn from them, and the torturers, sadists all, would not tire out or give up before that threshold was reached. So it made eminent and rational sense to give them what they want and avoid the agony and the horror that was to come, or at least to minimize it.

His answer was compelling. It is not a case of rational argument here. It is an emotional response to an extreme situation. Refusing to give in is not a matter of bravado but a case of trying to deny the jailers their victory and maintaining the dignity of the prisoner. By affirming their political belief in the face of coercive force and brute power, the prisoners were screaming their rejection of that barbaric state that would do this to its own citizens, and deny its agents, the jailers, the satisfaction of hearing their positions "justified" by the self-incrimination of the prisoners. It was the last desperate attempt by those confronting the abyss to seek to affirm remnants of human dignity for the prisoner who has been stripped of everything.

Prisoners who have been abused and even tortured, do go back into society. They are never the same as when they went in. Some have been broken. A few have reflected and become wiser. Others are simply more cautious. Most are as headstrong as the day they were imprisoned, defiantly defending the worth of the cause they suffered for, and feeling more committed than ever because of the price



they have had to pay, and because of the horrors that they were forced to endure by the agents of the state they oppose.

### **The Legacy of Violence:**

Egypt's revolution has been claiming a number of young lives, and an even larger number ravaged, if not totally destroyed, by imprisonment, which not only creates a mark on their records that they will carry for the rest of their lives, but also – and perhaps more importantly – changes their outlook on life. Prison does that. It robs the interned of their idealism and their innocence; it destroys their dreams and leaves behind largely embittered souls. Seldom does prison result in socially rehabilitating a person of criminal inclination. All the more so, when that person is incarcerated for political reasons.

Whether they were incarcerated as part of the political confrontations or whether they are the hapless families of those who died at the hands of the terrorists or state agents, grief and sadness give way to a demand for settling scores.

The anger at past misdeeds, combines with the desire to wash away the anger through the pursuit of justice, and the two grow into a fern of a thousand leaves each promising redress, solace, and closure.

Yet with the passage of time, justice shows that it is not the same as vengeance. And the fern-leaves of the past wither, yellow and dry. The drive for justice is gradually replaced by the desire for revenge. The once bright green leaves become brown and lifeless.

And the anger and the desire for vengeance leave scars on the living that are fuel for resurgent hatreds.

O how mean the vengeful are.

O how embittered they become.

A sense of justice denied drives them to deny justice to those who hurt them.

The cycle of violence and of hatred feeds on such feelings

We need to learn from the noblest of our peers, those who were able to transcend personal tragedy to turn their hands and their energies at building a better future. For in truth there is no fulfillment in hatred and revenge. For revenge is an empty promise. The reason to seek revenge is sometimes lost in the fog of hatred of that unjust other, who once upon a time caused us pain and grief and even agony.

Punishment becomes the purpose of the quest. Let violence be rained upon the head of those who initiated the violence. Let them suffer as we, their victims, suffered once so long ago. The causes, the reasons, the justifications, are all there. Pressed like a dried fern-leaf in the pages of the book of memory, it is there, but when you return to it, it is dead, brittle, and crackles into dust... so do not be afraid to confront the memories, to transcend them.

Transcend them to what?

### **Listen to the Better Angels of our Nature:**

Remember the early days of the revolution. Remember the grandeur and nobility of the peaceful demonstrations that stunned the world and brought to life dreams of better tomorrows. It is now three years since we have launched our revolution. Many young people have paid with their lives for the pursuit of their dreams, whatever these dreams were. But the dead are still among us, not just in the grieving of those who loved them, but in the burden they pose to our memory.

This is a classical dilemma. Soyinka, a survivor of the Nigerian civil war, bears witness to this excruciating tension that comes to the sensitive ones who witnessed and participated in the events where comrades and enemies lost their lives. Soyinka wrote in his inimitable style of the “The Burden of Memory” and “The Muse of Forgiveness”. He showed how those who were present must bear witness to the sufferings of the victims of the conflicts.... It is almost criminal to think of forgetting them and moving on. To forgive and forget would be a form of treason. And yet, societies must be able to move on. They cannot live in the past forever. They must turn the page and create the new. The sins of the fathers should not be visited on the sons... and because of that Soyinka also writes of the “Muse of Forgiveness” and the tension that it creates with the necessary and unavoidable “Burden of Memory”.

And the two are there together. Frustratingly neither will go away. It is easy to succumb to the pull of memory with its rending call for closure and its siren’s song of justice and revenge. Yet we know that we must think of the future. We cannot live in the past forever. That innate dualism of all things will remain within us, but the better angels of our nature tell us that it is better to let the wheels of justice guided by the due process of law deal with the murderous few and to forgive the many who may at some time, or even now, have sympathized with them. That is the path of national reconciliation and the only path to build a future for our children. The path that the better angels of our nature call on us to follow.

Even more, the great figures in our history all tell us so: The muse of forgiveness that exists within each of us is awakened and strengthened by reflecting on their example. Jesus calling forth to forgive his enemies “for they know not what they are doing”. The Prophet Muhammad entering Mecca after years of conflict with its inhabitants declaring a general amnesty for all. And among our own too mortal politicians Lincoln freeing the slaves and covering with a blanket amnesty all those who caused and fought against the Union in the American Civil War. Gandhi reminding us that pursuing a policy of “an eye for an eye” will make everyone blind. Mandela despite the horrors of Apartheid, comes out of prison after 27 long years, not for revenge, but to dismantle Apartheid, establish democracy and bring about the reconciliation of his people. Restorative justice by having the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hear the victims and record their grievances, but allow for reconciliation and rebuilding a new “Rainbow Nation”.

Or the “dreamers” like Monet and Schumann, who a few short years after the massive slaughter of World War II could articulate a vision of a single Europe, where a community of nations would collaborate and prosper in peace and democracy, outlawing war among their people. And they succeeded, for within a generation, young people in France and Germany could not imagine that their countries would ever go to war against each other.

No action is complete, and imperfection is the lot of all our human attempts. But we know within our hearts that ultimately we in Egypt, like others who came before us and others to come after us, will have to transcend the violence and move on to national reconciliation. But is our public ready to listen to such thoughts now? Or is the war on terror taking its toll in our demand for a strong and muscular path to put an end to the chaos and the killing and bring about a return to normality and security?

### **The Seduction of Ambition, the Corruption of Power**

The political leaders of a country with a vast and powerful army, and a well-established police force and security apparatus, especially when called forth with a popular mandate to stamp out terrorism, bring back stability and launch the country on a road to prosperity, have all doors open to them. They often want to emulate the great leaders who have put their stamp on the history of their countries. Legitimate ambitions, no doubt, but that give an opening to the artisans of the black arts of conspiratorial politics, the Machiavellian grey eminences who can only flourish in the shadow of the leader. It gives such people, and there are many

of them, the opening to insinuate themselves around the leader, and to keep all other voices away from his ears. They control access to the leader. Praetorian guards or their modern equivalent, they create an iron circle around the leader controlled by gatekeepers from among themselves. They keep the leader in a bubble, harping on the historic moment that calls him to greatness, if only he would consolidate his power here, and pull in the opposition there. A nip and a tuck, and a consolidation of power here and a suppression of dissent there... all in the name of realizing their destiny to achieve greatness. The media, no longer a watchdog, but a propaganda machine, reinforces and magnifies that call that the leader is the indispensable man at the historic moment, and who really has no ambition for himself, only for the country. No personal gain, it is for the vast and underprivileged masses that he speaks. Ambition thus thinly disguised is still very seductive, for we all want to believe that we are acting out of noble motivations and for altruistic purposes to serve the public interest. And who does not want to leave a legacy of great achievements for his country and his people?

But the seduction of ambition is invariably followed by its twin: the corruption of power. As Lord Acton famously said: "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". And it does.

The persons who are corrupted by the process of ruling over others are not innately evil. They usually begin as honest men, with a desire to accomplish things that they believe to be in the public interest. And having power, they use it. Then they encounter opposition from equally well-meaning persons who have different views on how to serve the interests of the people, and sometimes it is difficult to find a common meeting ground. Sometimes it is difficult to have to explain and gain support of the many, especially in dealing with technical issues. Both sides may be motivated by purely patriotic and altruistic reasons, but the one wielding power has a shortcut way to enforce his views.

That is where the danger lies. The more the person in power finds that they can more easily get their way by imposing restrictions and compulsions on others, the greater the strain on their own morality. As the appetite for using force against people increases, the leader believes in the unquestionable wisdom of their desired course of action. Such leaders not only cease to become accountable in any meaningful way, they also tend to increasingly surround themselves with advisers who not only share their general viewpoint, but who must also be seen as slavishly loyal to the leader. Such advisors and assistants also seem to derive a peculiar pleasure from forcing others to obey their orders. Friends and supporters are appointed to easy jobs of questionable necessity.

Corruption sets in. Artificial jobs are created for those supporting the regime. Ventures are given monopolies or land transactions are allowed to benefit the well-connected who in turn share their ill-gotten gains with the Leader and/or his cronies. Loans from public entities are given and not repaid. Prestige projects take precedence over the basic necessities of the people, and in all this the opposition is silenced by the exercise of power, which prevents any meaningful accountability. Elections become rituals of reaffirming power to those who already possess it. The leader and his surrounding elite lose their ability to distinguish between what is morally right and what is politically expedient. The regime is thoroughly corrupt. That is how unchecked power corrupts those who wield it.

That is why the systems of governance we seek to construct are not those that are designed to make exceptional men shine, but those that ordinary persons cannot destroy. For it takes an extraordinary individual to come into power and resist the seductive call of personal ambition and reject the corrupting influence of the exercise of power. Sometimes, providence does send a nation such a man, as it did with George Washington at the time of founding the United States. His exemplary restraint made a government of laws possible, made the separation of powers a reality.

### **A Providential Leader?**

In its hour of anger and loss, Egypt is turning to General Abdel Fattah El Sissi, who has just been given the title of Field Marshal, and who is leaving his post as head of the Armed Forces to become a candidate for the presidency under the newly approved constitution. Barring some totally unforeseeable event, it is a foregone conclusion that he will sweep the polls in a landslide. He will become Egypt's next elected president.

He will face enormous challenges and he will need the support of one and all to deal with the violence in our streets, the corruption in our highest offices, the neglect of our institutions, and the shameless efforts to circumvent the law. Will he indeed be the strong and visionary leader who will surround himself with ability and talent and meet these challenges and guide Egypt beyond the current crisis in our land? I sincerely hope so.

Will he be the rare providential man, who will show the restraint of a George Washington, and allow a nation of laws to emerge, rather than succumb to the

seduction of ambition and the corruption of power that the autocratic state and its repressive machinery can so skillfully nurture? I sincerely hope so.

For the sake of Egypt and the Egyptian people, who have suffered much and still pursue that elusive dream of an inclusive pluralistic society, will he be the leader who can end terror and then lead our national reconciliation? I sincerely hope so.

Will he be able to deal with the deeper issues that have riven the body politic of Egypt, and which have created anxiety among our elders, aimlessness amongst our unemployed youth, and a vacuum of virtual despair among the many who look to religion not for political guidance but to give an inner meaning of their lives? I sincerely hope so.

### **Forever Renewed, Forever Young:**

But whatever happens, I am certain that Egypt has come to a cross-road. The tide of political Islam has been stopped. The Islamist project is receding, but the specter of the autocratic state and its repressive machinery is rising anew. It may be tamed by our new constitution, our new leader and our new parliament and a reinvigorated judiciary. The elusive dream of an inclusive pluralistic society may be ultimately at hand. But it may not. And another wave of youthful Egyptians will have to reignite the torch of freedom and lead the country anew, now or a generation from now.

Youthful dreams shape our views, our hopes and make it our purpose to create a better world, a world of beauty and of justice and dignity. I was myself a child of the sixties, where these dreams lit up the planet from Paris to Cairo, from the campuses of America to the lands of Africa, from the fields of Asia to the favelas of Latin America. Dreams that did translate into the end of colonialism, the end of apartheid and significant advances in human rights and women's rights everywhere.

Yet when we grow up, many of us find ourselves complicit in maintaining the conventional, the passé, and the bourgeois values that we once detested, despised or dismissed. Those who scoffed at the absurdity of bourgeois values see their own world transformed into bourgeois absurdity. Revolutionaries with beards and long hair, tie-died t-shirts and jeans, became the CEOs of corporations, bankers, political leaders and bureaucrats that they once despised and attacked. Rebellious youngsters become parents of rebellious youngsters. For such is the cycle of the

generations. And every generation brings forth its dreamers and its revolutionaries.

Our youth, are the real guardians of the values of humanity. They reinvigorate revolutionary fervor every generation and they dream new dreams suited to their times. They have shown their mettle in these three years of the Egyptian revolution. I have always had an abiding faith in youth, and I continue to do so. Like Robert Frost, I say:

Now I am old my teachers are the young.  
 What can't be molded must be cracked and sprung.  
 I strain at lessons fit to start a suture.  
 I go to school to youth to learn the future.

Youth, yes, but also the young at heart. Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up our ideals wrinkles the soul. The years may mark our face, diminish our physical vigor, whiten our hair and limit our eyesight, but we can remain young at heart... for you are:

As young as your faith, as old as your doubt;  
 As young as your dreams; as old as your cynicism;  
 As young as your self-confidence, as old as your fear;  
 As young as your hope, as old as your despair.

You will remain young as long as you believe in the beauty of your dreams, as long as you believe in hope, cheer and courage... Only if you give in to pessimism, and lose your heart to cynicism, then, and only then, are you grown old. And then, indeed as Douglas MacArthur said... "You just fade away."

And the Egyptian revolution itself is still young. It is only three years old. Much remains ahead, unwritten in the book of time. Whatever the future holds, I know that it is only by holding on to the values of human dignity for all, equality for all, liberty for all and creating the institutions of a republic of laws based on freedom and participation that the promise of the revolution will be redeemed, its dreams – at least partially – fulfilled. And I know that it is the Egyptian youth of today and tomorrow who will make it happen.

XXXXXXXXXXXX END XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

