



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# Elections in Egypt - the era of al-Sisi continues but in more difficult circumstances than before



In the next 2 days, Egyptians will decide in the presidential elections to continue the era of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, accepting his firm hand regarding political opponents, but also dissatisfied with increasing economic issues.

After marking **10 years** since coming to power this summer, President al-Sisi is on his way to securing another 6 years in office. There will not be any serious competition in the forthcoming elections.

Last July, al-Sisi's supporters celebrated 10 years since the first general of the Egyptian army at the time led a coup against democratically-elected President Mohamed Morsi, bearing "Yes, to stability in Egypt" banners.

Stability is the word the president offers as his programme for the next 6 years, devoid of political upheavals and marked by economic prosperity.

However, this stability also means the persecution of political opponents, which is how al-Sisi's rule started, with the arrest of thousands of supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and various other dissidents.

## A race without an opponent

The current president will have no real competition in the elections, including Ahmed el-Tantawy, a leftist from a younger generation of politicians who inherited ideas from the 2011 Arab Spring protests.

Due to pressure and wiretapping, he **announced** his withdrawal from the presidential race in mid-October.

There was a peak of support for al-Sisi in the 2 prior winning races. He received as much as 97% of the vote in 2014 and 2018, so nothing less is anticipated in this vote. His challenge, therefore, is not the elections themselves, but the period that follows. This period is much different from previous presidential stages.

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The population faces shortages, particularly in electricity and food. Sources claim that supporters of al-Sisi who showed up at his pre-election rallies and even on election day were given flour, rice, and other limited supplies.

In 10 years of rule, al-Sisi quadrupled the foreign debt to as much as \$165 billion, and its credit rating is at its lowest point.

A significant part of responsibility for Egypt's economic decline are the megaprojects undertaken by al-Sisi's government, primarily the construction of the new capital city, an administrative centre outside Cairo worth close to \$60 billion, and the expansion of the Suez Canal.

As a major food importer, Egypt was also a victim of the disruptions caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the blockade of grain exports. Even before that, the World Bank estimated (2019) that as many as 60% of Egyptians were close to or below the poverty line.

## "Stability" with international support

Al-Sisi's principal hope in solving the economic crisis in his new term will be the

support of international creditors to service its significant debts and relax the economy.

He has that support from the IMF, for example. However, in return, he does not meet the conditions to implement reforms that include, amongst other things, reduction of subsidies to state-owned and military companies on which the al-Sisi's regime relies.

The seasoned leader is fully aware that his nation's strategic value to opportunities in the greater Middle East and North Africa region is still his biggest advantage for holding on to power.

**The crisis in the neighbourhood and Israel's war against Hamas shook Egypt's "stability" but also put it at the centre of international expectations that it would play a constructive role**

The crisis in the neighbourhood and Israel's war against Hamas shook Egypt's "stability" but also put it at the centre of international expectations that it would play a constructive role. In the near future, Egypt under Al-Sisi will be an indispensable factor in the long-term solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the president will also extract dividends from that process for domestic use.

Regardless of the objections to the massive and severe violation of human rights of political opponents, the close US alliance with Egypt remained intact during the term of Joe Biden, even though he was a strong critic of Al-Sisi at the beginning.

US military support for Egypt during Biden's term surpassed what existed under Donald Trump, who called Al-Sisi "his favourite dictator". The current administration has approved \$6.3 billion in military supplies to Egypt, almost \$1 billion more than under Trump (\$5.8 billion).

If the president wins, this trend will continue after the November elections and until the end of Biden's term.

Tolerating al-Sisi's internal autocracy is the price the administration in Washington will pay for the guarantees that the largest Arab country will remain a long-term and reliable ally in preventing the spread of extremism in the Middle East and North Africa.