

11-1-2015

**Institute, Middle East Research. Egypt: MERI Report. Middle East Research Institute Routledge Revivals: Abdingdon: Routledge, 2015.**

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## Recommended Citation

Carlisle, Jessica (2015) "Institute, Middle East Research. Egypt: MERI Report. Middle East Research Institute Routledge Revivals: Abdingdon: Routledge, 2015.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 7 : No. 1 , Article 30.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol7/iss1/30>

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**Institute, Middle East Research. *Egypt: MERI Report. Middle East Research Institute  
Routledge Revivals: Abdingdon: Routledge, 2015.***

This reissue of the Middle East Research Institute's report on Egypt is one volume from a series of separate, standardized reviews published in 1985 on the politics and economy of several Middle East and North African (MENA) states, also including Iran, Israel, Kuwait, Turkey, and UEA. Written by a team of social scientists based at the University of Pennsylvania, this book seems designed to clearly and accessibly provide information relevant to an English language readership interested in policy and investment. It would have been a useful primer for non-regional specialists in the mid-1980s. However, given the out of date information it contains and the brevity of its assessment of the political situation and future prospects in 1985, it is difficult to envisage it being of much use to scholars working on contemporary Egypt.

The book assumes no prior knowledge and opens with basic information about Egypt's geography and population, along with its political, religious, and military institutions before moving on to more factually detailed political and economic analysis. The final section consists of a lengthy statistical appendix of comprehensive tables on areas such as defence, demography, the economy, banking and finance, debt, and agriculture. The result is a broad, comprehensive (if not very in depth) depiction of Egypt in a period in which Mubarak was regarded – by MERI at least – as a competent, sincere, if uncharismatic president; the army was predicted to have a diminishing role in politics; Pope Shenouda III was still under post-Sadat house arrest in a desert monastery; and a gradual rapprochement was ongoing with other MENA states. Section II gives a concise overview of the major actors and power dynamics in Egypt's domestic politics and international relations since the 1952 revolution, including the structure of the executive and legislature, the role of religious institutions, and the influence of the military. The report offers a solid account of the major events and tone of the Nasser, Sadat, and early Mubarak eras, with particular attention paid to trends in public opinion and the executives' relationships both with the Muslim Brotherhood and other MENA states. However, none of the content of this section is revelatory.

Section III is devoted to a description of evolving economic policy and developments in specific sectors of the mid-1980s economy. MERI chart a boom in the construction industry brought about by the start of the Cairo Metro scheme and government pursuit of housing targets through a New Five Year Plan. The report notes that in the mid-1980s, the economy was largely reliant on the Suez Canal, oil exports, tourism, and remittances from Egyptians working abroad, and discusses the pursuit of policies designed to modernize, restructure, and increase use of technology in the economy. Some of the statistical information contained in the final section comes as a sharp reminder of seismic changes that were yet to come in Egypt and that have since transpired over the past three decades. In 1985, the estimated population of Cairo was only just over 5 million, and in 1981, average female life expectancy was 58.5, while in 2013, it was 73.8 years. Annual wheat imports have also leapt from 5.8 thousand tons in 1981 to a reported 16 million tons in 2010. It would have been interesting to have had a short discussion of patterns of land ownership in this section and an assessment of the remaining impact, or reversals, of Nasser's land reform policy.

Reading this report today, informed by current dominant norms supporting "rule of law" and governance, it also seems odd that there is no nod to the possibility of nepotism or corruption in the reported electoral results or in accounts of the private accumulation of wealth through expansion in some economic sectors. MERI do describe failures in state run industry and note the outcomes of poor capital investment. The section on relations with the Arab world also precisely outlines the diplomatic and economic regional implications of Egypt's 1979 Camp David treaty with Israel, notably forging stronger ties with the USA.

A major criticism of MERI's analysis, given the report's focus on risk analysis and the investment environment, is their lack of interest in the law, the judiciary, or the courts. There is no mention of the 1971 Constitution or the 1980 amendments of it (introducing the Shura Council, strengthening Mubarak's position and altering Article 2 to state that the *shari'a*—or Islamic law—is the principle source of legislation) nor of the considerable powers awarded to the Supreme Constitutional Court by Law 48/1979. This is an odd absence given the importance of the newly established Supreme Constitutional Court in signalling improvements in governance and the protection of private property during Sadat's post-1973 push for foreign investment and also given that by the mid-1980s, the SCC was already active in ruling legislation unconstitutional. Neither, apart from a mention of election law and the statement that the threat of court action against electoral fraud effectively supported democracy, is there any discussion of domestic legislation or the relative independence of the judiciary. Moreover, an explanation of the jurisdiction and working of Egypt's long established administrative courts might have been useful, while a short description of the parallel legal system of emergency and military courts would have added to the sections on state repression of dissent and Islamism.

This volume would perhaps be a useful addition to complete a library of texts on modern Egypt, as a basic introduction to developments leading to the establishment of Mubarak's presidency, or – conceivably – to a scholar requiring an overview of and easily digestible, simple statistics on Egypt's mid-1980s' economic situation. However, from the perspective of the mid-2010s, it is something of a curiosity rather than a historical document.

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