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after the Coup

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Egyptian Expatriates after the Coup

Abdel-Hafez Al-Sawi

Egyptians have been linked (emotionally) to the River Nile; so most population is concentrated on the Nile banks. The sons of Egypt have not known of migration until recently due the wasting of the country's economic resources by the different governments after 1952 and the absence of a national development project. Also, the discovery of oil in Arab countries has been an important factor in increasing the demand for the Egyptian labor in Gulf countries.

The migration of Egyptians has not been restricted to Arab (oil producing) countries. Egyptians also headed to the United States and Europe, seeking education, livelihood, or a safe environment away from the regime's dictatorial practices and its political persecution.

It is noteworthy that the declared numbers for the Egyptian expatriates are only the official numbers for those who have registered in Egyptian embassies abroad. However, these figures do not include the illegal immigrants who are usually reluctant to deal with the Egyptian embassies.

The Egyptians' illegal immigration in the 1970s and 1980s was concentrated on Libya, Iraq and Jordan, including unskilled workers who used to quit across the land border with Libya or through tourist visas to both Jordan and Iraq. The number of this kind of immigrants was estimated at about 3 million at the time. However, Egyptian expatriates have often been subjected to expulsion and violation of their financial and moral rights due to political differences between Egypt and those countries.

Recently, Egyptians' illegal immigration to Libya has re-emerged despite the civil war there. Also, the illegal immigration of Egyptians to Europe has also been increasing due to the poor economic and social conditions in Egypt. Among those migrants, there

were poor children under the age of 18, some of whom were seeking money to pay for the medical treatment of their sick relatives.

According to data of the country's census for 2017, Egypt has a population of 104.3 million, of whom 9.5 million live abroad, by 9.1% of Egypt's total population, which is undoubtedly a significant proportion, taking into account that a large number of these expats are well-educated and skilled laborers, which makes migration a challenge to Egypt's development performance. However, these expats have been a source of hard currency for the Egyptian economy since the mid-1970s, where the remittances of Egyptians abroad have been a significant source of foreign exchange which comes in second place after commodity exports in terms of value. The remittances of Egyptian expats also far exceed other sources of foreign exchange, including the tourism sector, exports in general, and the Suez Canal's traffic fees. In the following table, there is data on the remittances of Egyptians during the period from 2010/2011 to 2016/2017, according to the Finance Ministry's financial report in July, 2017.

Remittances of Egyptians during the period (2010/2011-2016/2017)							
<i>(Value in \$ billion)</i>							
Year	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
No.	12.5	17.9	18.6	18.5	19.3	17	17.4

Source: Finance Ministry's financial report (July, 2017 - p. 75), Website of the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE), a press release on the balance of payment

There are many factors at the political and economic levels that have led to the migration of Egyptians. However, an examination of the number of expats shows that the January 25 Revolution, 2011 had a clear impact on the decline in the number of expats. On the contrary, the military coup in July 2013 led to the increase of numbers

of expats again, and even with larger numbers than ever before. The following table shows the migration movement between 2006 and 2017.

Numbers of Egyptian expatriates during the period (2006-2017)											
<i>(Value in million)</i>											
Y.	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2017
No.	2.3	6.7	5.7	6.3	9.1	7.3	5.3	06	6.8	7.4	9.5
<i>Source: CBE's statistical bulletin (August - 2017 p. 117), data of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) - 2017</i>											

The above figures show that the number of Egyptians living abroad reached its peak in 2010, estimated at 9.1 million, which is equivalent to 10.3% of the total population of that year (amounting to 87.8 million people).

During 2010, there were escalating political and social upsurges against Mubarak's negative economic and political practices, including the unfair distribution of wealth, the absence of social justice, the acquisition of wealth by a few wealthy people in Egypt, the widespread monopoly of goods, the spread of bribery, and the large-scale violations of the Egyptian police.

This led to the outbreak of the January 25 Revolution, 2011: starting with strikes by the labor movement, university students, and the youth in general. Therefore, the numbers of Egyptian expats has increased from 2006 to 2010; but the outbreak of the January 25 Revolution, resulting in overthrowing the regime, gave hope to many Egyptian emigrants abroad to return to Egypt, including businessmen who wanted to return to Egypt with their savings under a democratic atmosphere and the rule of law, as a fruit of the revolution, and others who preferred to work in various economic activities in Egypt in a dignified work environment, than to work abroad amid many violations of labor rights.

Therefore, we find that the number of Egyptian migrants declined significantly in 2011 and 2012 in particular, reaching 7.3 and 5.3 million migrants respectively for the reasons we mentioned earlier and their conviction of the possibility of the improvement of the situation in Egypt, particularly on the political and economic levels. The number of Egyptians expats declined during these two years also because of the media momentum talking about development in Egypt, the need to take advantage of its potential, eliminate corruption and monopoly, and bring many symbols of Mubarak's rule to trial; even Mubarak himself and his two sons, as well as many prominent businessmen figures who were a clear example of the mating of capital and power during Mubarak's era.

The Military coup implications

In mid-2013, General Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi, the defense minister at the time, led a military coup against the first democratically elected civil president, Mohamed Morsi. Accordingly, freedoms were confiscated, martial law imposed, police abuses escalated, physical liquidation of political opponents spread, the army controlled the capabilities of civil economic life, and many macroeconomic problems deteriorated. It was natural then that a large segment of the Egyptian society tended to quit the country, and accordingly immigration escalated. This was reflected by the results of the 2017 population census which showed that the number of Egyptians emigrating abroad jumped from 6 million in 2006 to 9.5 million in 2017.

During the period from 2013 to 2017, the number of expats increased by 53 million, more than the number of expats in 2006 by about 50%. Thus in 2017, the number of expats exceeded that of 2010, the highest migration rate in the history of Egypt by about 9.1 million expats.

Geographical distribution of Egyptian expats

According to data published in the 2017 census, we find that:

- The Arab countries absorb 6.2 million Egyptian expats, representing 65.8% of the total Egyptian migrants in 2017.
- The north and south Americas come in second place, with about 1.6 million Egyptian expats, representing 16.7% of the total Egyptian emigrants.
- Europe is ranked third with 1.2 million migrants, representing 13.2%. The decline in Europe's share in the absorption of Egyptian expats is due to the European plans over decades to stop the flow of Arab and African migration, and signing partnership agreements with Egypt and other Mediterranean countries to create a situation of economic development that limits migration from those countries to Europe.
- However, it is remarkable that after the empowerment of counter-revolutions in Arab Spring countries, the illegal immigration movement to European countries re-emerged due to the poor political, economic and social conditions in these countries as well as other countries in the region, which means that the European efforts to reduce the flow of Arab migration there through partnership agreements did not bring the desired fruit.
- Asian countries and Australia come in the fourth place, representing about 3.7% of the total number of Egyptian migrants, followed by the African region with the lowest proportion of Egyptian migrants, by about 0.5%. It is noteworthy that over years, Egypt has been facing real crises because of staying away from African countries economically, politically and socially, which resulted in threatening its most important natural resources, namely, the Nile waters.
- Among non-Arab African countries, South Africa alone absorbs 85% of Egyptian migrants. The high rate of Egyptians' migration to South Africa goes back to the

economic recovery experienced by South Africa, and the fact that Egyptian migrants seek jobs in a new society away from competition Asian labor in the Gulf region. In addition, it is easy to travel to South Africa through a tourist visa. However, the Egyptian Ministry of Immigration plays no role in taking the advantage of the presence of Egyptian migrants in African countries in general, and South Africa in particular.

Reasons for Egyptians' immigration

One of the most important reasons for the emigration of Egyptians is the deterioration of the economic situation, especially after the military coup in July, 2013, where many suffer from unprecedented political and security practices, amid the military's control of the civilian economic life. In fact, the Egyptian army competes with the private sector in the construction area, the infrastructure projects, as well as the export and import activities. Egypt's military even build private schools, pharmacies, medical colleges, and other activities that used to be open to the private sector.

It is expected that the tide of immigration will continue during the next phase unless Egypt is experiences improvement in the political, security and human rights fields. The Egyptian expats after the military coup of July 4, 2013, include a significant number of opponents of the coup d'état along with their families.

But in general, the Egyptian youth's desire for immigration - regardless of any political inclination – is due to the poor economic situation and the difficulty to start a stable life in light of the lack of employment opportunities and the low pay which make it difficult for them to build new families.

However, immigration of Egyptian youth will continue as long as the government continues to restrict development to investment in tourist and real estate projects that do not generate high value added activities, nor provide enough job opportunities.

After the coup d'état on July 3, 2013, the regime's perception of the employment of young people was disappointing and led to increasing the immigration rate.

However, there are new obstacles facing Egyptians wishing to immigrate, including the political and economic conditions in the Gulf countries which absorb, as mentioned above, about 65% of the Egyptian expats due to the collapse of oil prices. Moreover, there are austerity measures by the Arab oil-producing countries which now adopt the so-called job resettlement strategy, leading to dismissal of foreign workers.

This has prompted some Egyptians, especially young people, to look for new migration areas in Asian countries, East European countries, or South America, which may be a turning point in the geographical distribution of Egyptian migrants, if the experiences of expats there were successful.

Need to participate

The future of the country should not be exclusive to a particular category, especially if this category is the country's national army, whose expertise is confined to the fields of defense, armament and training; and lacks the capabilities and elements of civic life, politically, in the economic and social fields.

To deal with the problem of immigration in Egypt, the country's democratic life should be restored, allowing a free political practice, activating the state of institutions and the rule of law so that everyone can participate in shaping the future of the country, as well as managing the economic, financial, and human resources.

In fact, the lack of participation in the decision-making in Egypt is the most significant motive for the immigration of Egyptians. In addition, the dictatorial practices, waste of the country's economic resources, lack of economic vision, and expansion of public debt makes staying in Egypt an act of waste of time and loss of hope.