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Dr. Amr Darrag  
Testimonies and Reviews - 4



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## Dr. Amr Darrag: Testimonies and Reviews -4

### Introduction

In his introduction to this series of episodes, Dr. Amr Darrag said he viewed the invitation to introduce these reviews as, “a good opportunity for taking the first step to narrate and document the most important events that I have witnessed over nearly 60 years, the years of my life so far,” Dr. Amr said, adding that through these testimonies, “I was reviewing my most important experiences, successes, or failures, which, shed a lot of light, in a panoramic way, on an important stage of the nation’s history, through my modest narration.”

In [Part 3](#) of “Testimonies and Reviews”, Dr. Amr Darrag talked about his university education memories and the Sadat era. He said he witnessed the beginning of Islamist activity in universities when Sadat allowed Islamists to work freely in universities after the university activity had been completely dominated by the leftist movement. He said that he used to vote for the Islamist movement as he was convinced of their activity – though he was not a member of any Islamist group at the time. Dr. Darrag also talked about the charitable work that has been common among the Islamist movement, particularly the Brotherhood, and discussed the argument that it can be a means to win votes. Dr. Amr addressed Sadat's visit to Israel, where President Sadat had announced that he wanted to break the psychological barrier between the Arabs and Israel by delivering a speech in the Israeli Knesset. He also referred to Sadat's political openness which he presented through what he called “platforms”, which later evolved into parties.

#### Fourth Episode:

In the [Fourth Episode](#) of the series of episodes that the London-based Al-Hiwar TV has broadcast (within a program titled: “Reviews”), interviewing Dr. Amr Darrag, the Egyptian Minister of Planning and International Cooperation in the government of Dr. Hisham Qandil – Dr. Darrag talked about his post-graduate stage late in the seventies, when he was appointed as a lecturer at the Faculty of Engineering, Cairo University. At that time, Dr. Darrag was honored as one of the top university graduates. He referred to the relation between the head of the Egyptian Engineers Syndicate at the time, Eng. Osman Ahmed Osman, and President Sadat, referring to Osman’s political hypocrisy when he “described a president suffering from narcissism and paranoia – Sadat – as a wise man”. Osman’s comment came during the ceremony that was held to honor the top university graduates, including Dr. Darrag.

The year that preceded the assassination of Sadat was a turbulent year, where about 2500 people of Islamists and non-Islamists were arrested, including Pope Shenouda of the Egyptian Coptic Church, in September 1981. At that time, Sadat delivered an address to the Egyptian people, where he attacked his opponents, including Sheikh Ahmed Mahalawi – who opposed the Camp David Accords – and described him as “thrown in prison as a dog”. Dr. Darrag said he was bothered by that speech, adding that in that way “Sadat was digging his grave with his own hand”. He said the speech revealed contradictions between freedom, struggle against British colonialism, arrest of a Muslim scholar, and practise of “pharaohism” in power.

Sadat’s speech and the arrest campaign against his opponents caused a state of popular unrest, leading at the end to the assassination of the president during a military parade on 6 October 1981. Although the live transmission of the parade along

with the assassination of Sadat was interrupted on the local TV, yet the Egyptians watched the event later on European TVs.

However, Sadat's assassination was followed by another arrest campaign. Hosni Mubarak, who was appointed as vice-president in 1975, later became a president following a referendum. It is noteworthy that at that time Mubarak was exposed to a mocking campaign that was circulated among the Egyptian people.

Mubarak came to power after a popular referendum, as mentioned above, and began his era with the release of some non-Islamist detainees, receiving some of them at the presidential palace.

As many dictators, Mubarak started his era with opening up to the people and releasing detainees; although the Islamists were left in detention centers for a long period after the release of other detainees.

Mubarak held an economic conference to reform the Egyptian economy. During the conference, Mubarak was sitting among the audience writing down notes. Commenting on this, Dr. Amr Darrag said it was part of a process to create a positive mental image for the new president.

Dr. Darrag said that the assassination of Dr. Kamal al-Sananiri, a Muslim Brotherhood figure, in prison was a saddening matter, as Sananiri had played an important role in uniting the Afghan factions during their resistance against the Soviet Union at that time. Dr. Darrag said that one of Dr. Sananiri's relatives was the one who told him details of the assassination, adding that Maj. General Fouad Allam played a significant role in the assassination of Kamal al-Sananiri.

However, Dr. Amr continued his career as a lecturer at Cairo University for four years, during which his religious commitment has grown, influenced by the weekly religious



lessons and Friday Prayer sermons presented by Sheikh Omar Abdul Kafi in Mohandessin, Cairo. He said he learned to recite Qur'an in mosque at the hands of an elderly Sheikh that he did not even remember his name. It is worth mentioning that the mosque doorman, Amm Saad (The Arabic title "Amm", in English 'uncle', is usually given to elder people as a sign of respect, not necessarily a real uncle) used to attend these lessons with Dr. Amr.

About joining the Rotary Youth Club before 1984, Dr. Amr spoke about the experience and explained its reasons. He said he was introduced to a youth club that provides scholarships for studying abroad – based on sorting out young people.

In this context, he was later elected as president of the Cairo Rotary Youth Club. The young people there were engaged in charitable social activities such as the establishment of a library for the blind at Cairo University, the development of the fish park and the support of Abul-Rish Hospital for children. It was an opportunity for him to participate in public volunteer activity and gain valuable experience.

Dr. Amr pointed to the effect of this period on his administrative and societal experiences, influenced his personality, enhanced his openness, and strengthened his ability to deal with the other.

As for the Master's scholarship, Dr. Amr said that while he was looking for a scholarship to study abroad, an administrative decision was issued that provides for obtaining a master's degree from Cairo University before traveling abroad. Therefore, there was a kind of contradiction between this decision and the Dr. Amr's scholarship to study abroad, as he had to choose between accepting the scholarship and resigning from the university, or to concentrate on finishing the master's degree at Cairo University first. With advice and encouragement from Dr. Abdel Fattah Abul-Eid, a professor at Cairo

University at that time, Dr. Amr decided to finish his Master's Degree first, which he actually obtained in only one year, during which he also got married. Commenting on this, Dr. Darrag said that situation had a great effect on his whole life.

In 1984 Dr. Amr Darrag traveled to the United States for studying at Purdue University, a world-renowned, public research university that advances discoveries in science, technology, engineering and math, where almost half of the American astronauts have graduated. Dr. Darrag spoke about the austerity that he experienced during his stay in the United States, although he was accompanied by his rich and luxurious wife. In this concern, Dr. Darrag said he was proud of his wife referring to her patience and endurance, bearing such hard conditions. About his relationship with the Islamic community in the United States, Dr. Darrag said he used to go to the mosque for performing prayers, adding that he once met with Dr. Essam Sharaf, the Egyptian prime minister during the SCAF era after the January Revolution (2011) who was doing his PhD at that time, at the mosque. Dr. Amr said Dr. Sharaf occasionally delivered the Friday Prayer sermons at the city mosque.