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The New Republic: Is it a Branding Strategy?

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The New Republic: Is it a Branding Strategy?

A new hashtag on Egyptian national T.V. recently appeared, as follows: #TheNewRepublic. It referred to the President's latest announcement, that with the planned inauguration of the New Administrative Capital in August 2021, a new nation will be born and a New Republic will be declared.

Doing a quick search about The New Republic first revealed some amusing information. It turns out that the New Republic is an American political magazine and media organization that was founded in 1914 and is still ongoing. The New Republic is also featured in the movie series *Star Wars* as an important turning point in the events screened. It is also the brand name for a footwear marketed as being both comfortable and stylish!

More seriously, the New Republic has important historical connotations. The term was used in several parts of the world to refer to major turning points in the history of nations. The idea is said to have originated in France, marking the beginning of dramatic changes in the government structure, each time following the fall of kingdoms or empires. The last fifth republic was declared by President Charles de Gaulle in 1958 when he introduced constitutional amendments leading to direct popular Presidential elections and an end to France as a colonizing power. Similarly, in 1911 in China, the fall of the empire and the subsequent establishment of a republic were referred to as the New Republic. In more recent times, the term was used in 2013 by the President of the Philippines Lucio Kang to mark a new era where for the first time the Philippines had an elected Prime Minister, implemented a federal system and was freed from the Chinese invasion.

In other instances, the term "New Republic" was used more loosely. For example, in 2001 in Italy, when President Berlusconi won the elections by a vast parliamentary majority, his supporters claimed he was making history and starting a New Republic. It was just an expression of support for the populist leader; one who was later accused of corruption, sexual harassment and many other vices.

In Egypt, ever since the announcement by President Sisi of his plans for a New Republic, all officials have been more or less trying to justify the reason we need to start using the term. The Prime Minister talked about the National Rural Development project that will improve the quality of life for 60% of Egyptians. National media channels started associating the term "New Republic" with the wide expansion in infrastructure development by the State, especially the new roads, highways and bridges—the development of which was perceived as an essential pillar for national development and fighting poverty.

Other strong proponents and supporters of the idea took it a step further. They were no longer talking about a future happening, but were referring to the New Republic as a *fait accompli*. They explained how the first Egyptian Republic was declared on June 18, 1953, after Egypt denounced the monarchical rule, and how with the start of the Presidency of El Sisi on June 8, 2014, a new republic had started. They pointed to the many reforms implemented in all sectors since that date. Over a period of seven years, the claim was that the implemented reforms might be equivalent to those that took place over the past 100 years. Additionally, the new capital is planned to be the political, cultural and economic center for the Middle East and North Africa region. It will include the tallest tower in Africa, the biggest mosque and the biggest church in the Middle East, the longest green park extending over more than 1000 feddans (416 hectares), plus a very high-tech epicenter for all governmental data. All these developments and the widespread reform efforts were marked as sure signs of a "New Republic".

Meanwhile, opponents to the idea of using the term "New Republic" were of the view that the term should be reserved for structural changes in the form of government and to real improvements in its

governance. It should not be used to refer to mega national projects, or to a change in the geographical location of the nation's capital. Many countries have changed the geographical locations of their capitals, such as Brazil, Myanmar and Nigeria, but they found no need to refer to the start of a new republic.

Changes and massive reform efforts are definitely taking place in Egypt, which is a good thing. Improvements are on the way. The digital transformation process taking place in parallel with the move to the new capital will affect how work is done in the government sector. **The term “New Republic” may be part of the new branding campaign for Egypt. It may not fit the political science definitions. Lay people and officials alike seem unsure about what it means, but officials are trying to be as creative as they can by offering their own explanations. More attention to all the dimensions of what constitutes good governance is still called for, whether in a New Republic, or an old republic.**