|  |
| --- |
| Thursday, 08 May 2014   * [**Multimedia**](http://english.ahram.org.eg/PortalM/13/Multimedia.aspx)   Jumping, not walking, out of Egypt's crisis: El-Sisi interview, part 2  The former military strongman speaks more about energy, foreign policy and economic issues on Tuesday, round two of a televised interview  *Ahram Online , Wednesday 7 May 2014*  El Sisi  Presidential hopeful ex-minister of defense Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi (Photo courtesy of El-Sisi official campaign)  http://english.ahram.org.eg/App_Themes/Black/images/line_re.jpg  http://english.ahram.org.eg/App_Themes/Black/images/line_re.jpg  In the second part of the first-ever media interview with presidential candidate and former army chief Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, aired on Monday on private-owned CBC and ONTV satellite channels, the ex-defence minister tackled many questions relating to his plans for Egypt if he was elected to the top executive post.  **The Economy**  El-Sisi spoke of his plans to eject Egypt out of its "circle of poverty." After surveying some of the country's major problems, which he said were present in all sectors of Egypt, he spoke of re-dividing Egyptian governorates through a plan he referred to on Sunday and Monday as the "development corridor" plan.  The idea includes providing infrastructure for increasing agriculture, which should reclaim over 4 million feddans (4.15 million acres) and facilitate ownership for Egyptians who will work on them. Each governorate's residents should easily acquire land within it and produce, El-Sisi said.  The LE160 billion plan will see Egypt divided into 33 governorates instead of 27. The presidential candidate has already talked to geologists and scientists about the project, he said, and is confident of the plan's feasibility.  Also part of El-Sisi's economic plan are 26 cities and tourist hubs, 22 mining cities and eight airports, he said. El-Sisi said financing such projects is a momentous task and thus he will rely on three financial sources: contributions from Egyptians abroad (even as little as $10 a year, he said), attracting domestic and foreign investors as well as foreign aid.  Many times during the interview, El-Sisi used the metaphor of Egypt "jumping" out of its crisis. "Walking and running" won't suffice for the task ahead, he said.  While asking many times for patience and endurance until improvement comes – which he said would be felt in two years – the field marshal (he retains the title despite retirement) expressed empathy with poor Egyptians. He said the removal of subsidies must be done gradually and can't be implemented without first raising Egyptians' income.  The poor are a priority, he said. He spoke of installing "parallel mechanisms" to control prices if the private sector wasn't capable of doing it alone and also urging the private sector to shrink its profit margin.  **Foreign Policy**  El-Sisi didn't shy away from tackling the sensitive question about relations with Israel, saying confidently that he respects the two countries' peace treaty and would even visit Israel if it showed progress on the Palestinian issue. Specifically he said he would visit if a Palestinian state was established with Jerusalem as its capital. He urged Egyptians to separate Hamas and the Palestinian cause, which he called a historic cause for Egypt.  The former defence minister – who visited Russia in that capacity for an arms agreement – refused to comment on relations between Moscow and Cairo, but stressed that Russia was "no alternative" and asserted that the military's relationship with Russia didn't end in the 1970s for the simple reason that many of Egypt's weapons are Russian-made.  Being reticent on the US and the west, El-Sisi assured that the US didn't ask him not to run for president and expressed understanding over the US's decision to cut financial aid to Egypt after president Mohamed Morsi was ousted in July.  "Their law requires it, if the army intervenes to remove a democratically elected president," he said, but he added that he "asked the US to look at Egypt through Egyptian eyes, as Egypt looks at the US through American eyes."  Answering a question about how he would deal with Ethiopia if he became president – the country's planned Grand Renaissance Dam is one of Egypt's primary foreign policy issues – El-Sisi said the problem is a result of long neglect of Egypt's relations with African countries, and insisted that the problem was resolvable.  "I feel it is very important that in strategic issues like this, there must be dialogue, and from an early stage. We must acknowledge other interests and must stress our own. The dam issue is one of life or death for Egypt. While I understand others' interests, I expect them to understand ours," he stated.  Of all foreign countries, El-Sisi gave Saudi Arabia most of the praise – describing its King Abdullah as a great and wise Arab and expressing immense gratitude for the Gulf kingdom's assistance to Egypt after the 30 June uprising. He said Saudi would be the first country he visits as president if he wins the vote.  His main antagonism was directed at Qatar – the Muslim Brotherhood's main backer – whom he urged not to lose the affinity of Egyptians more than it already has.  **Energy**  Voicing his plans for one of Egypt's most pressing crises, energy, El-Sisi cited figures of Egypt's energy needs and its consumption and proposed alternatives that he said would greatly reduce – and even eliminate – the problem.  Energy saving lamps in Egyptian households – who, he said, consume 6,000 megawatts (Mw) of the country's energy production of 30,000 Mw for lighting alone – would reduce them by a whole 4,000 Mw. Asked how the invasive plan would be implemented, he said it would be done through law and executive mechanisms.  He said the saved energy would save millions in fuel, funds that would be put to other uses in the state budget.  El-Sisi also spoke favourably of solar energy, which he had previously said would be one of his main energy projects if he was elected into office.  **30 June**  Asked by the anchors about details on the momentous events of 30 June – when Egyptians called for Morsi's ouster, which was led by El-Sisi – he said he had been sure of the Muslim Brotherhood's problem in March of that year, three months before Morsi's removal.  However, he vowed that he didn't make any plans at this time to oust Morsi. The army – according to El-Sisi – had prepared a statement on 3 July (the day Morsi was ousted) supporting a referendum that would have seen Morsi obliging the protesters' request for him to step down, but El-Sisi had to intervene when the Islamist president refused the offer.  Asked by Eissa whether Khairat El-Shater – the Brotherhood's second man – ruled when Morsi was in power, El-Sisi said that the group's Guidance Bureau had ruled throughout the one year he was in office. El-Sisi said there would be no such entity under his rule. The candidate promised he would not join a party or form one if he was in power.  Asked about whether he didn't answer Ann Paterson – then-US ambassador to Egypt – during the uprising, El-Sisi said that she had asked for something he wouldn't grant – extending the grace period the army had given Morsi for a few days.  **Elections**  El-Sisi answered confidently about his prospects to win the presidency: "I'm comfortable," he said, when pressed on whether he thought he'd win.  Responding to a question about his view of his opponent Hamdeen Sabahi, he said Sabahi saw in himself a capable man for serving the country, "a positive thing," he said. El-Sisi, however, wished there were more competitors in the race.  The popular candidate repeated his advice to Egyptians to choose well, in both presidential and parliamentary elections, dispelling fears that members of any previous regime rejected by Egyptians would return to power.  "The current Egyptian reality won't allow for practices of old regimes to be repeated," he said.  In the first part of the interview aired on Sunday, El-Sisi spoke of his upbringing, his decision to run for the presidency and the Muslim Brotherhood.  Egyptians will vote for a new president on 26-27 May. El-Sisi's only contender is Nasserist Sabahi, who finished third in Egypt's 2012 presidential elections. |