

Adam Hannestad

Journalist, Politiken (Denmark's 3rd-largest daily)

AWR-subscriber

It has now been my great pleasure to subscribe to Arab-West Report for six months, and in this time it has proven itself a both unique and valuable resource.

As the Danish newspaper Politiken's correspondent in Cairo, the capital of the Arab world, one of my most important duties is to report and explain religious issues. This demands an overview not readily available in Egypt's media maelstrom of diverse newspapers, magazines and specialized publications.

AWR provides this overview. I have not yet heard of a single important story on religious issues which it has missed. But it is not only the fact that the stories are registered and translated that provides the overview. AWR supplements the stories with cross-references and sober evaluation of context, content and style.

It is this sobriety and accessibility which makes the AWR stand out. And its focus on religion makes it a must for anyone interested in this sensitive subject in the heart of a region marred by religious disputes.

For me, it greatly expanded my knowledge of both the diversity of the religious landscape and the intensity of the religious debate. Not only does this help me follow and explain difficult issues for my native readership. It is my distinct impression that it also has an incalculable effect here in Egypt.

Firstly, through the reports provided by my many colleagues and myself – these being greatly helped by the AWR reports – it helps our Western audiences understand the situation in Egypt in particular and the Muslim world in general (Cairo being the world's largest and culturally most important Muslim city).

This is of course, important for our home countries. But it also has a feedback effect on both Egypt and the region. Since the AWR-assisted coverage provides information for politicians, organisations and others interested in religious affairs, it enables these professionals to affect the situation in Egypt through aid and political dialogue. (One cannot affect change without knowing where and how to push.) On top of this, balanced reports on the religious scene in Egypt has a limiting effect on unfounded 'hate' debate in our native countries. We know that this debate sometimes spills back into Egypt through Arab media, polarising local debate even further.

Secondly, it is my distinct impression from conversations with several media people in Egypt that AWR's reports also are being increasingly noted here. A few media will continue to fan the religious flames no matter what. But most of the others are now aware that there is Western focus on this issue. In recent years, there has been much more top-level attention to matters of religious freedom – both from the political and religious elite. It is my belief that the situation would not have changed much without Western focus, of which AWR is an important part. But there is yet far to go, and the moderating and analytical voice of AWR is yet sorely needed. It is my great hope that it will not be silenced.

