

THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION AND EGYPT'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD (2010–2016): ALLY OR PREDICAMENT?

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***Abstract.** The Muslim Brotherhood¹ has always been very controversial. Since its creation in the late 1920s, it has been at the heart of Egypt's most important upheavals and struggles. As a Pan-Islamist religious and social movement, its self-stated aim is "Islam is the solution". During the early days of the so-called "Arab Spring," the movement was the readiest political power to go through the electoral process and achieve victory far more than any other party. This was due to its long history in charity and social services and the well-organized preachers who are deeply rooted in Egyptian society. The sharp victory in the 2011 Legislative Elections was not enough for the movement. Backed by his Islamist allies and most of the youth who participated in the "Revolution," Mohamed Morsi ran for president and won in 2012. One year later, he was ousted after a "second uprising" in the streets of Cairo and many other Egyptian cities. Another crackdown was inevitable and the movement went back to clandestinity. Amidst all these events, the United States under President Obama could not distance itself from what was going on. In the beginning, the US administration was divided over the popular uprisings in the whole region and in Egypt in particular. In Egypt, the Obama administration backed Morsi during his presidency although his movement was known to be traditionally against Western interests in the region. Many Egyptian politicians were into the idea that the cabinet was compromised and officials with connections to the Muslim Brotherhood were influencing the decision-making process. When it was time, the US government has leaned into the army which is the only institution that guarantees the peace treaty with Israel. The aim of this paper is to provide an understanding to the blur in the US stance before and during the period when the army took over. It explains the major interests which did not make the issue of democracy a priority and led to the disposal from the Muslim Brotherhood.*

Keywords: Arab Spring, Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood, Obama Administration

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INTRODUCTION

The Muslim Brotherhood (Muslim Brothers, Muslim Brethren) has always been controversial domestically as well as overseas. Since its creation during the twenties of the last century, it has played a key role within Egyptian society. Its role was also crucial when it comes to the Arab World. As a pan-Islamist movement, it was a driving force with spiritual leadership during the 1960s through the 1980s all over the region. The revivalist organization preached in favor of strict Islamic ideals in all aspects of life including the perception of how politics should be tackled. Thus, the struggle with Egypt's consecutive regimes marked this relationship till the present.

¹ By the ruling of the Supreme Court of Russian Federation of 14 February 2003, The Muslim Brotherhood was designated a terrorist organization and its activity prohibited within the territory of Russian Federation.

At the local level, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) dealt with a variety of social activities ranging from charitable works to setting up business firms. As a transnational movement, its activities witnessed a widespread support within Muslim countries all over the world. Within this frame, several affiliates adopted these same ideals and consequently the same tools in spreading the MB ideology and preaching. The confrontation with the secular Arab Nationalist regimes was inevitable. The widespread of the MB teachings presented its offshoots as the most organized political power in the Arab World and consequently helped them to provide an immediate alternative to the falling regimes after the 2011 popular uprisings.

The 2011 Uprisings marked a new era in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Be they set up or spontaneous, the upheavals were presented as the ultimate opportunity that should be well seized by the Brotherhood. After Tunisia and Libya, the protests reached Egypt and were decisive in ousting President Hosni Mubarek. Amidst this turmoil, the US administration under Barack Obama was considering the Muslim Brotherhood as an ally with whom it can work closely. The Americans relied on the signals sent by the MB to maintain Egypt's international commitments and obligations including the bilateral agreements, mainly the peace treaty with Israel following the Camp David Accords. The Americans believed that the MB was an alternative to the nationalist regime which was no longer popular among Egyptians who suffered from social and economic fragility.

Through the dataset analysis, this paper aims at framing the seesaw US foreign policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood's Egypt which kept swinging between the openly addressed moral idealism and the deeply rooted realism. The Americans were between taking stands against human rights breaches and backing participatory democracy or focusing on the US national interests in the region. In other words, it was between how the situation on the ground is and how it should be. Amidst all this, Islamism is an important variable that should be framed and consequently well analyzed and discussed. Drawing on the overall analysis, several conclusions are going to be stated.

This paper is presented in three main sections. It goes through the background of the Muslim Brotherhood to provide an understanding of the movement's crackdowns and breakthroughs along its history. It then moves to the US stance towards the organization during and after its rule in Egypt. It closely examines and explores the relationship between the Obama administration and the *Ikhwan* ruling elites who were in power. It also shows how a Pan-Islamist movement that struggles for the revival of Islamic ideals since its creation came close to the Americans although the interests seem to be divergent. It critically discusses the key inclinations in clarifying the dominating trends in shaping the Obama administration's stance(s) towards the Muslim Brotherhood. The paper provides an overall perception of the US-MB relationship's complexity in light of the emerging anti-revolutionary regimes and powers.

1. MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD: BACKGROUND AND RELATIONSHIP TO THE EGYPTIAN POLITICAL REGIMES

The Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest political Islamist movement in the MENA region. Nowadays it is banned from political activities by several Arab states. The movement was established by the schoolteacher Hassan al-Banna in March 1928 in the city of Ismailiya, Egypt before moving to Cairo for a better membership-building (Mitchell 1969). Al-Banna perceived the whole idea of his organization as a global system of governing which can be achieved through the promotion of Islamic ideals. Reforming the long-standing political regimes in the region was a necessary step. Later, interpretations of al-Banna's teachings

made the movement swinging from being a nationalist pragmatic group to operating in clandestinity after resolving to violence in order to enforce its ideology. (“What is the Muslim Brotherhood” 2017). Over the years, the core value did not change despite the fact that the means ranged from pacifist to violent. The adherents were actively aspiring for the rule of Islamic ideals and principles.

The Islamization of the society has always been the motive for the Muslim Brothers through politics and social welfare. As being an Islamic scholar, he aimed at the promotion of Islamic values and morals. The tools for that were the engagement of the whole community by offering social services. Along with charitable works, political activism was also an important means to the ultimate aim. This consistency laid the ground for a well-earned legitimacy among the lower-middle class. It was very efficient in organizing the resistance against the British colonization in Egypt. Along with the Free Officers², the Muslim Brothers took part in the nationalist efforts to get rid of the Egyptian monarchy which was fully supported by the British. After the July 1952 coup d'état against king Farouk, the MB was considered as a rival to the Free Officers who took over. The MB refused the militarization of the country under a pan-Arab, secular and socialist regime like that of Nasser. The latter was target of a failed assassination attempt; therefore, thousands of suspected Brotherhood adherents were jailed (Laub 2019). This new chapter in the history of the Brotherhood made its leaders lean to violence, and the country plunged into an era of conflicting interests that would later spread to the whole region.

When it comes to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Muslim Brethren through its founder Hassan al-Banna had made the Palestinian cause popular in the Arab World since the 1930s. The MB published accounts on the suffering of the Palestinians under British rule. Unlike other leaders in the region, al-Banna perceived the cause as a religious rivalry. The leader of the Palestinian resistance Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam who was killed by the British in 1935, was introduced by al-Banna as a fighter for *jihād* (holy war). In the 1948 war, Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian MB adherents volunteered and participated in the struggle to prevent the establishment of an independent Jewish state on the Palestinian territories. The present-day resistance factions such as the Liberation Party, the Islamic Jihad, and the Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS), all of them have connections to the Muslim Brotherhood (Haddad 1992: 273).

The 1940s were the years of consolidation for the Muslim Brotherhood, the movement focused on strengthening its different networks. After the 1952 coup d'état, it was the most organized among all the other political factions, and this was itself a major challenge to the newly established regime of President Nasser. After Nasser's assassination attempt in 1954, an MB adherent was indicted and the movement was accused of aiming at seizing power by force. The regime's response to the attempt was through the dissolution of the organization. During Nasser's rule, the MB had no influence on decision making for it was almost excluded from the political scene (Jaraba 2014: 66).

Contrary to Nasser, Sadat went for a peace treaty with the Israelis and liberalized the economy by encouraging individual initiative and the private sector on one hand and relying on Western assistance and technology on the other. Therefore, the United States got involved in Egyptian politics. Sadat was *Time* magazine's man of the year while his wife was labeled as the Arab World's “first lady” (Baker 1991: 41). During President Anwar Sadat's rule many of the MB members were set free. Sadat's vision was relying on Islamism to hinder the allegedly rising communism. In this regard, he ordered the resumption of the group's activity and consequently tolerated many of their tendencies. At this particular time, the movement

² A group of Egyptian nationalist officers who led the 1952 military coup d'état against King Farouk.

shifted its strategy from being confrontational to infiltrating the official institutions (qtd. in Jaraba 2014: 66). Based on Sadat's tolerated policies, the organization strongly entered the political scene and dominated almost all of its aspects. The movement was not only getting involved in political life, but also in the economy thanks to the openness adopted by the new president.

Hosni Mubarek's era was not different from Sadat's. The successor to the office after Sadat's assassination kept almost the same measures vis-à-vis the Muslim Brotherhood. The Mubarek regime opted for an appeasement policy starting with the release of their *Murshid*³, Omar al-Tilmasani, along with several members who were arrested during the "Autumn of Fury" in September 1981. The MB leaned into non-violent approaches when compared to other fundamentalist groups which existed during the 1980s (Campagna 1996: 281). The movement in turn restrained the usual criticism of the government and carried on its grassroots services. The political regime approved this trade-off since the MB would be competing against secular opposition parties openly. Therefore, this openness would lessen the movement's acceptability compared to its teachings under clandestinity (Campagna 1996: 282).



Source: *Council on Foreign Relations*. 15 Aug 2019.

<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/egypts-muslim-brotherhood#chapter-title-0-6>

The Muslim Brotherhood's ideology spread all over the Arab World, there were affiliates almost in every state in the region. The map below explains the ties to several countries. It shows that besides the banning of the movement in its country of origin Egypt and in Syria, many of the Gulf countries also did prohibit any of its activities namely: Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain. In Kuwait and Qatar, the MB enjoyed total freedom. The Qatari rulers have always adopted the MB teachings while in Kuwait the major parliamentary force is of an MB ideology. In Turkey, the AKP has been in power for the two last decades after a long struggle with those who stood for the Kemalist ideals of secularism. In the Palestinian territories, most of the resistance Islamist groups are fierce defendants of the MB ideology as a means to defeat the Zionist occupation. MB-related political parties in the three Maghreb states of

³ Murshid: Arabic, means guide. It is the supreme leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, usually vested in one of the movement leader's iconic figures.

Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco enjoy enough freedom to reach the parliament and even hold the premiership office like the case in Tunisia and Morocco despite the difference in the powers granted to each. In Tunisia, the al-Nahdha enjoyed total freedom while in Morocco and the Justice and Development Party did not breach the lines already settled by the royal establishment.

2. THE “ARAB SPRING” AND ITS IMPACT ON THE BROTHERHOOD’S POLITICAL BREAKTHROUGHS

The 2010 upheavals across the Arab World were labeled “Arab Spring”. The wave originated in Tunisia and then spread to almost all the states in the region. In Tunisia, the whole thing started after the incident with Mohamed el-Bouazizi due to police brutality. The days were tough on the Tunisian regime and ended up with President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali fleeing to Saudi Arabia. In Libya, the case was different after the NATO-backed French interference to change the balance of power to the militias it supervised closely. The outcome was the capturing and the execution of the Libyan leader Muammar Kaddafi (Aty 2022: 72). The wave of popular uprisings throughout the Arab World left the region destabilized with enduring ramifications. The collapse of the Libyan regime was a geopolitical disaster mainly for neighboring Algeria and the other states in the Sahel. The gains throughout the region were modest when compared to the disastrous situation in countries like Syria, Libya and Yemen.

The case in Egypt was not better than in neighboring countries, Mubarek was forced to leave office. Aljazeera’s account for the events during the 18 days came as follows:

January 25: On a national holiday to commemorate the police force, thousands of Egyptians took to the streets of downtown Cairo, calling it a “day of rage”. Similar protests were reported in other towns across the country.

After a few hours of relative calm, police and demonstrators clashed with police who fired tear gas and used water cannon against demonstrators.

January 28: Internet and mobile services were disrupted across the country before a new wave of protests planned after Friday prayers.

Thousands of police were ordered onto the streets of Cairo, Suez and Alexandria to quell anti-government demonstrations. Riots continued throughout the night.

January 31: Protesters continued to defy the military-imposed curfew. About 250,000 people gathered in Cairo’s Tahrir Square and hundreds marched through Alexandria.

Mubarak named his new cabinet on state television.

February 2: Preparations began for another day of demonstrations against Mubarak’s regime. The army was still deployed with tanks throughout different positions in and around Tahrir Square in central Cairo.

Up to 1,500 people were injured, some of them seriously, and by the day’s end, at least three deaths were reported by the Reuters news agency, quoting officials.

Pro-democracy protesters said the military had allowed thousands of pro-Mubarak supporters, armed with sticks and knives, to enter the square.

February 4: Hundreds of thousands of anti-government protesters gathered in Tahrir Square for what they termed the “Day of Departure”.

Chants urging Mubarak to leave reverberated across the square, as the country entered its 11th day of unrest and mass demonstrations.

February 10: Amid rumours that he would be stepping down that night, Mubarak gave a televised speech that he said was “from the heart”. He repeated his promise to not run in the next presidential election and to “continue to shoulder” his responsibilities in the “peaceful transition” that he said would take place in September.

Protesters in Tahrir Square reacted with fury. They waved their shoes in the air and demanded the army join them in revolt.

February 11: After 18 days of protests, Omar Suleiman, the vice president, announced that Mubarak would resign as president and hand over power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. (“What happened during Egypt’s January 25 revolution?”)



Source: *Council on Foreign Relations*. 3 Dec 2020.

<https://www.cfr.org/article/arab-spring-ten-years-whats-legacy-uprisings>.

The popular upheavals which hit Egypt had an immediate impact on the political life. The Muslim Brotherhood which was an important player in mobilizing for the demonstrations and pushing its members along with average Egyptians to Tahrir Square showed up as a dominant political force. The movement had a second-to-none organizational capacity. Nevertheless, its electoral triumphs were marked by rivalry with the judiciary and the army. Issues like drafting the country’s new constitution were the beginning of a long and bloody struggle. During the 2012 legislative elections, the movement’s political arm was the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). It took around half of the seats in the lower house called the People’s Assembly while Islamists in general won 84 percent of the seats in the upper house called the Shura Council (Laub 2019).

FJP won the majority of votes in the first freely elected parliament in sixty years. Therefore, the main role in drafting the new constitution was supposed to be in its hands. The general results showed the dominance of Islamist parties in general, they had a two-thirds majority in the assembly. The movement through its FJP took 38 percent of the seats allocated to lists and surpassed its hardline Salafist opponent, Al-Nour Party which won 29 percent of ‘list seats’. The liberal New Wafd ranked third while the Egyptian Bloc coalition came fourth.

The Revolution Continues coalition composed of youth groups, however, took only 7 out of 498 seats in the lower chamber. This sharp victory represented a monumental step from the years when the legislative body was a mere compliant body full of members of the National Democratic Party. (Awad and Noueihed 2012).

In order to stop the rise of the MB, the Supreme Constitutional Court which is considered to be the Mubarek regime's legacy, dissolved the assembly in June 2012. Simultaneously, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) granted the military absolute control over defense and national security policies and limited the president's prerogatives (Laub 2019). The SCAF seized the opportunity in an attempt to slow the MB on its way to dominance over the political scene.

Mohamed Morsi viewed himself as a bulwark in the face of the guards of the old regime. In June 2012, he was elected president after a slight majority victory and engaged to be president for all Egyptians. During his year in power, he was accused of tolerating Islamism which reached all aspects of the political life. In addition, he was accused of mishandling the same economic issues which led to the uprising against the old regime. Opposition to Morsi's rule started around November 2012 before the Constituent Assembly could finish the preparations for the new constitution. During this period, he issued a decree giving himself far-reaching powers. Opposition increased, but Morsi issued another decree for the military to protect national institutions and polling centers until the 15 December 2012 referendum. According to critics, this decree was a form of martial law and thus events that opposed his opponents to his supporters left more than 50 casualties. Morsi's first anniversary in office was marked by mass demonstrations all over the country. After the 48 hours warning, on 3 July 2013, the army took over ending the MB rule in Egypt ("Egypt's Mohammed Morsi" 2019).

The Muslim Brotherhood's failure in Egypt might be explained following three major factors. Firstly, the burden of conservatism to which the movement was related in addition to the absence of a revolutionary and progressive agenda. Secondly, the organizational inertia and rigidity. Thirdly, the leaders' incompetence and lack of ruling experience (Al-Anani 2015: 529). The abovementioned factors depicted the movement's major drawbacks and provided an understanding of the overall situation within the MB itself. This analysis however neglected the external elements which were as important as the internal factors. The mounting pressure on President Morsi and the MB in general, was basically coming from the anti-revolutionary powers which were once the backbone of his predecessor's regime. Egyptian and Arabic media outlets were the spearhead of the anti-Morsi/MB campaign and their role in shaping some factions of the public opinion was flagrant.

3. THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD: ALLY OR PREDICAMENT?

The Obama administration was divided over the situation in Egypt while two different trends with different proponents prevailed. In the beginning of the crisis, the choice was between backing the Mubarak regime till the end and urging him for some reforms or leaning towards a democratic alternative. The question was which of these two safeguards the US multifaceted interests in the region? The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood presented them as a potential alternative to protect the American interests in the region including ensuring Israel's security. At some point, the anti-MB campaign targeted the US administration and President Obama in particular given that there were several signs of a growing rapprochement between both.

The first US contact with the Brotherhood was made during the spring of 2011. Before that, the US State Department did not reach out by any means. "Why were we not talking to these people?" a member of the White House national security staff said, "We didn't know

anything!” he added (qtd in. Kirkpatrick 2018: 126). The National Security Council’s Egypt Desk issued a cable to instruct the US embassy in Cairo to initiate contact with the MB. During that period the Americans were one step behind the British who already got in touch with Egypt’s next rulers. The US embassy diplomats were under too much pressure afraid of being seen with the MB members, they were not sure of who exactly among the movement they should have initiated contact with (Kirkpatrick 2018: 126).

After the movement’s sharp win in the parliamentary elections, Saad al-Katatni, the long-term Brotherhood official who served in the old parliament as an independent member clearly considered the new assembly to be reconciliatory (Awad and Noueihed). A Post-elections FJP statement urged that this would “Uphold the principle of democracy and consolidate the rules of political participation,” (qtd. in Awad and Noueihed). The FJP statement can be understood within its domestic and international contexts. It sent signals to the public opinion that the MB will respect the core values of participatory democracy contrary to what its local and foreign opponents claimed. The statement can also be explained in light of the anxious perception of the region’s totalitarian regimes which saw the MB’s victory as a direct threat to their rule. The situation was the same for Israel which saw the worst of its fears coming true through an Islamist government in neighboring Egypt.

After the 2012 presidential elections, President Obama who did not openly support any of those who were running congratulated president-elect Mohamed Morsi in a phone call. In these elections, Morsi could beat General Ahmed Shafiq who was previously selected by Mubarak for the position of Prime Minister. The outcome of the elections took four days to be announced. During this period there were assumptions that the SCAF which controlled the government would illegally change results. The government which was under the control of the army wanted the Mubarak-related Shafiq to be head of the state instead of the MB candidate. The fact that Obama did congratulate Morsi on his election should not be surprising given that he openly expressed his support to the demonstrators one year earlier (Paulson 2012).

The US National Security Council was closely monitoring the situation afraid that Egypt might go through turmoil again. Different components of the US intelligence community reported that the electoral commission hoped for invalidating the results to declare Shafik president and the army leaders were supportive. Both KSA and UAE backed the idea given that they feared Islamism and regime change. Several agencies of the American intelligence community were frightened by the idea of Egypt having an Islamist president. The White House was for the recognition of Morsi as winner of the elections. The then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, urged that it was imperative for the army leaders to transfer power to Morsi for he was the legitimate winner. The US administration issued a threat on canceling the \$1.3 billion in yearly military aid. US diplomats also reached out to the Emiratis and the Saudis urging them to back off. Osama el-Ghazali Harb from a non-Islamist coalition accused the Americans of forcing the SCAF to hand power to the MB (Kirkpatrick 2018: 157). Obama’s closest aide and deputy National Security Adviser who took part in the National Security Council meeting said: “You could tell a lot of the people in the room were sympathetic to the Shafik play. But even those people just could not sustain knowing that the other guy [Morsi] won a free election and we were acting against it.” (qtd in. Kirkpatrick 2018: 157).

The Obama administration’s reliance on the MB was soon challenged during the November 2012 Israeli offensive on Gaza. Obama urged Morsi to broker a ceasefire in the conflict between Israel and Hamas. Amidst the Israeli assault on the strip, Morsi pulled Egypt’s ambassador out of Israel and called for an urgent Arab League summit. The Egyptian foreign ministry strongly condemned the military attacks on Gaza in a letter handed to the

Israeli embassy. The White House, however, put the blame on Hamas and the armed Islamic movements for the attacks on Israel (McGreal and Sherwood 2012). In a statement about the call Obama had with the Israeli Prime Minister, the White House said: “the United States’s support for Israel’s right to self-defence in light of the barrage of rocket attacks being launched from Gaza against Israeli civilians” (qtd in. McGreal and Sherwood 2012). Morsi argued that Egypt would maintain the peace treaty stressing that Israel failed to fulfill its obligations. This raised the White House’s concerns about the peace treaty itself. By saying so, Morsi warned about the American failure in ensuring Israel’s compliance with the agreement’s terms which insisted on the withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories (McGreal and Sherwood 2012).

Earlier in August 2012, Morsi told *Reuters* during his first interview with a Western media that “Egypt is practicing its very normal role on its soil and does not threaten anyone and there should not be any kind of international or regional concerns at all from the presence of Egyptian security forces.” (qtd in. Nakhoul and Blair 2012). This came in reference to the deployment of extra police and army personnel in Sinai while the peace accords with Israel impose limits on that. Morsi depicted Israel as a country which promotes racism and works for expanding its territories. He insisted, however, on Egypt’s stance to carry on abiding by international accords, including the peace deal with Israel (Nakhoul and Blair 2012). Despite the different declarations on the US and the Egyptian sides, the ceasefire was brokered and Clinton headed to Egypt in person where she announced it and commended Egypt’s role saying: “This is a critical moment for the region. Egypt’s new government is assuming the responsibility and leadership that has long made this country a cornerstone for regional stability and peace.” (qtd in. Beaumont et al. 2012).

David D. Kirkpatrick in his 2018 book titled *Into the Hands of the Soldiers: Freedom and Chaos in Egypt and the Middle East*, went through the details of the brokered ceasefire. He quoted Ben Rhodes who recalled “The cease-fire talks had been going nowhere before Morsi stepped in. And he delivered. He kept his end of the bargain.” (183). Kirkpatrick said on that:

Now, days later, on November 19, Obama had skipped dessert in Phnom Penh for an 11:30 P.M. phone call with Morsi; Morsi stepped out of a funeral service for his sister to take a call from Obama.

Before Morsi, Mubarak, too, had also blustered against Israel in public. But he kept an open line to his Israeli counterparts. Since the United States designated Hamas a terrorist group, the only way that Washington could negotiate with it was through Mubarak, who delegated the outreach exclusively to his spies.

Obama realized that Morsi changed the dynamic. Egypt’s generals and diplomats were still talking to Israel. But Hamas was the Palestinian offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, inspired by the ideas of its founder. Morsi himself was wired to Hamas.

...

In his call with Obama that night, Morsi neither railed against Israel nor defended Hamas. He understood the Israeli perspective. He wanted only to end the fighting. Obama promised to send Clinton to Tel Aviv and get Israel to the negotiating table; Morsi pledged to bring Hamas. Obama fell asleep in the royal suite’s four-poster bed and told Rhodes to wake him up at any hour if Morsi rang back.

At 3:00 A.M. in Cambodia, Morsi called to say that Hamas was on board. The two presidents spoke again later the same day, November 20, to fill in

the details – their third call in twenty-four hours and their sixth call that week. (Kirkpatrick 2018: 183)

The pre-coup media campaign which targeted the Muslim Brotherhood along with Morsi was coordinated in a way it helped framing the so called “Second Revolution”. With the exception of *Al Jazeera* during the days of the Morsi ouster, Egyptian channels along with Arab media like *Al Arabiya* and *Sky News Arabia* preached in favor of the “Second Revolution” frame. Such framing caused reactions from the Egyptian people. *Al Jazeera* team was fired from Tahrir Square, while *Al Arabiya*’s was asked to leave Rabaa Square by Morsi supporters (qtd in. AlNajjar 2016: 157). On this media campaign Kirkpatrick said: “By April 2013, the Emirati-based satellite network *Sky News Arabia*, Saudi Arabia’s *Al Arabiya* and other Emirati-linked Egyptian media were all railing against a supposed American plot to bring the Brotherhood to power, with Ambassador Patterson as its ringleader.” According to Kirkpatrick, the Gulf-based satellite networks targeted the ambassador and accused her of being a “Brotherhood lackey, an old hag, or an ogre.” The claims were that she “had pressured the Egyptian government to rig the election for Morsi and then pushed its institutions to bow down before him – all in the service of the larger American plot to weaken Egypt. It was a conspiracy to benefit Israel, of course.” Kirkpatrick argued that Ambassador Anne Patterson, like Obama, considered Morsi better for long-term stability (218). These accusations were part of the whole strategy to undermine Morsi’s legitimacy in the eyes of the people showing the paradox of him being an Islamist who should not have ties to the Americans.

The military had different views on Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood. General James Mattis who was back then in charge of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) considered that the MB and Al Qaeda were “swimming in the same sea.” Additionally, General Michael Flynn, the then director of the US Defense Intelligence Agency who was later fired due to mismanagement, considered that the Brotherhood shared the same ideology as Al Qaeda (Kirkpatrick 2018: 219). “The splits within the American government were becoming obvious to diplomats and soldiers around the region. Obama and part of the White House hoped Morsi would succeed; many in the Pentagon, like Mattis and Flynn, agreed with their Egyptian and Emirati counterparts that Morsi was a danger. The American schizophrenia was so open that Egyptian generals complained about it to their Pentagon contacts.” Kirkpatrick wrote (221). It is worth mentioning that both of James Mattis and Michael Flynn served in the Trump administration. Mattis was the Secretary of Defense, while Flynn was the National Security Advisor.

Amidst the rising opposition to Morsi and the criticism to the US administration of backing him, Ambassador Anne Patterson delivered a speech in which she said “This is the government that you and your fellow citizens elected. Even if you voted for others, I don’t think the elected nature of this government is seriously in doubt. The United States took the position that we would work with whoever won elections that met international standards.” (“U.S. Envoy Under Fire” 2013). Kirkpatrick argued that during this same period, Ambassador Patterson had warned that after meeting with Sisi she believed that a military coup was imminent (240). “On the night of June 29, American intelligence reports showed Egyptian army troops moving to positions surrounding the palace, the state media building, and other strategic locations around the capital. At least some on the staff of the National Security Council believed that night that a coup was in motion.” Kirkpatrick said (240-241) ““It was coup 101,” a staff member on duty at the time later told me. But no one in the Pentagon, the State Department, or the White House told Sisi to stop moving. No one told Morsi that Sisi had turned against him, or that a coup had begun.” (241).

During this critical period, the Obama administration started distancing itself from what it kept calling the democratically elected president of Egypt. On 2 July 2013, one day before the coup, *CNN* reported from what it called “senior administration officials” that “The United States urged Egypt’s President Mohammed Morsi to call early elections with anti-government demonstrations intensifying and the Egyptian military pressuring him to resolve the situation.” The source who did not want to be identified said “We are saying to him, ‘Figure out a way to go for new elections’”. “That may be the only way that this confrontation can be resolved.” the senior official said (Labott 2013).

During this period SCAF issued a 48-hour ultimatum to Morsi to meet the protesters’ demands. On 3 July 2013, SCAF, led by Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, the then Defense Minister ousted Morsi and suspended the constitution (Laub 2019). David Kirkpatrick wrote in detail about the 4 July 2013 meeting of the National Security Council. One day after the coup d’état, Obama surprised all those who were around him in the room saying “Of course, we cannot call Morsi’s ouster a coup d’état, Obama announced at the outset of the meeting. Everyone else had come prepared to argue over the application of the “coup law”: the statute that required cutting off aid to any military that toppled an elected government.” (252). Kirkpatrick quoted Obama who addressed General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff saying: “If Marty deposed me and then another country cut off relations, Marty would not have to restore me before the other country restored relations?” (252). Given the critical situation and the historical context, this statement by Obama explains his mindset and shows how pragmatic he was. Apparently, he did not want to jeopardize the US interest with its other allies in the region, be they Israel, SCAF or even the Gulf states which already made their point vis-à-vis what they have always referred to as Political Islam.

With the exception of General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Ben Rhodes, the Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications, all those who were present that day were in favor of Morsi’s ouster. The return of the army for them was some sort of familiarity that brought some benefit. Michael Morrell, deputy director of the CIA was among those who were in favor of the military takeover. He expressed his support to the move in a phone call to one supporter of Sisi who happened to be a senior Arab ambassador to Washington. Morrell labeled the coup as a good thing as the country was being led to ruin, instability, and extremism. (Kirkpatrick 253).

The ramifications of the military takeover were immediate. Despite the fact it witnessed less terrorist attacks compared to other African regions, Egypt suffered the most when it comes to fatalities due to the fact that President Mohamed Morsi was ousted and his supporters were under intense security measures. Along with Somalia, Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel, Egypt was one of the main regions where the militant Islamist groups’ activities boomed during the period from 2010 through 2018 according to data from the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) which is affiliated to the US Department of Defense. (Aty 2022: 78). The implications of the “Arab Spring” in general and those of the coup in particular had turned the whole region very attractive to militant Islamist groups.

Despite the fact that President Obama and most of his cabinet supported the military takeover, some of his senior officials kept openly supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. On 31 October 2013, Mohamed Elibary tweeted “America and yes I do consider the United States of America an Islamic country with an Islamically compliant constitution. Move On!” (Elibary). This tweet raised many questions on the Obama administration’s real stance towards the Muslim Brotherhood in general and the 3 July 2013 coup d’état against President Morsi in particular. Elibary was a senior official at the Department of Homeland Security Advisory Council in charge of defining counter-terrorism policies.

On his foreign policy philosophy being labeled realist by his team, Obama himself said two years after the takeover that between the idealist camp and the realist camp, he does think that “what is accurate in describing my foreign policy is we don’t have military solutions to every problem in the 21st century,” and that “the biggest challenge that we have right now is disorder.” In this same interview, Obama also told *Vox* that “The goal of any good foreign policy is having a vision and aspirations and ideals, but also recognizing the world as it is, where it is, and figuring out how do you tack to the point where things are better than they were before.” (“Obama on the Goal of his Foreign Policy” 2015). Obama’s words explain well his policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood before, during and after the takeover.

CONCLUSION

The seesaw US foreign policy towards Egypt during and after the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood was no exception to the overall approach that the Obama administration had adopted in the region. Obama addressed the whole Muslim world from Cairo University in his famous speech which was titled “A New Beginning”. The latter was characterized by being idealistic. The common principles of justice, progress, and the dignity of all human beings were soon tested all over the region. The US policies towards the Israeli aggression and abuse of human rights in the Palestinian territories did not show any improvement and so were all the other issues when it comes to safeguarding US interests. The case in Egypt was a real test to the Obama administration which relied on having the Muslim Brotherhood as a proxy in the region in case they stood in the face of the forces which rejected their presence not only in the Egyptian political life but also in the whole MENA region for the transnational influence they have.

The fact that the US administration under Obama leaned towards the Egyptian military after the takeover shows that it had been into a wait-and-see policy to preserve its interests. This provides a clear image on why the State Department kept backing President Morsi and the Brethren in its official discourse. The US diplomatic representation in Cairo preached for promoting and maintaining democracy when several factions among the Egyptian political elite along with some regional state actors advocated for ousting Morsi. These same arguments were invalid when the US official discourse shifted towards a totally different paradigm. Amidst all the signals of a potential implosion, the new agenda aimed at avoiding any negative impact on the allies. No sanctions targeted the SCAF although threats to cut military aid were issued. The ruling Egyptian military junta did not fear the cuts as it feared not having the political recognition and approval of ousting President Morsi. The reason was that several Gulf monarchies provided economic aids and full support to the SCAF. Given the power-balancing context, Russia and China would have also attracted the SCAF easily. The Senate eventually voted not to suspend the aid after the Israeli extensive lobbying. Between taking stands against the military takeover and urging for the reinstatement of the legitimate president on one hand, and backing the SCAF decision to safeguard its interests on the other, political realism prevailed and the Obama administration chose not to alienate its traditional allies in the region.

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АДМИНИСТРАЦИЯ Б. ОБАМЫ И «БРАТЬЯ-МУСУЛЬМАНЕ» В ЕГИПТЕ (2010–2016 гг.): СОЮЗНИК ИЛИ ПРОБЛЕМА?

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Аннотация. «Братья-мусульмане»¹ всегда отличались большой противоречивостью. Со времени создания этой организации в конце 1920-х гг. они были в центре самых важных потрясений и сражений в Египте. Как панисламистское религиозное и социальное движение, они провозгласили лозунг: «Ислам – это решение». В начале так называемой «арабской весны» движение в гораздо большей степени, чем любая другая политическая сила, было готово идти на выборы и достичь победы электоральным путем. Этому способствовала долгая история благотворительности и оказания социальных услуг «Братьями-мусульманами», а также хорошо организованные проповедники, глубоко укорененные в египетском обществе. Движению было недостаточно яркой победы на выборах 2011 г. в органы законодательной власти. Поддерживаемый исламистскими союзниками и большей частью молодежи, участвовавшей в «революции», Мухаммед Мурси принял участие в президентских выборах 2012 г. и выиграл их. Год спустя он был свергнут в результате «второго восстания» на улицах Каира и многих других египетских городов. Очередное подавление «Братьев-мусульман» стало неизбежным, и движение вернулось к подпольной деятельности.

Соединенные Штаты, возглавляемые в тот период президентом Б. Обамой, не могли дистанцироваться от происходивших в Египте событий. Вначале американская администрация была разделена по вопросу народных восстаний во всем регионе и в Египте, в частности. В Египте администрация Б. Обамы поддерживала М. Мурси во время его пребывания на посту президента, несмотря на то, что возглавляемое им движение было известно своим традиционным противостоянием интересам Запада в регионе. Многие египетские политики полагали, что в кабинете существовал компромисс, и чиновники, связанные с «Братьями-мусульманами», влияли на процесс принятия решений. Когда пришло время, правительство США положило на армию, которая является единственным гарантом соблюдения мирного договора с Израилем.

Цель данной статьи – дать представление о размытости позиции США до и в период, когда армия захватила власть. В ней объясняются их основные интересы, из-за которых вопрос демократии не стал приоритетным и произошло избавление от «Братьев-мусульман».

Ключевые слова: Арабская весна, Египет, «Братья-мусульмане», администрация Б. Обамы

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¹ Решением Верховного Суда Российской Федерации от 14 февраля 2003 года организация «Братья-мусульмане» признана террористической, ее деятельность запрещена на территории России.