

From Revolution to Coup: US Turbulent Diplomatic Relations with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, 2011–2013

من الثورة إلى الانقلاب: العلاقات الدبلوماسية المضطربة بين الولايات المتحدة وجماعة

الإخوان المسلمين في مصر، 2011-2013

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Abstract:

The study aims to examine the diplomacy between the US and Egypt from the 2011 revolution to the military coup of 2013 against the democratically elected President Mohammed Morsi. It focuses on the role of Political Islam portrayed through the Muslim Brotherhood in influencing US policies toward Egypt. The research also explores the climb of the Muslim Brotherhood to reach the presidency in 2012 in the most legitimate ways recognized by the US. Upon the election of Morsi, the US welcomed him, and that gave him legitimacy worldwide despite being a representative of Political Islam. The article highlights the inconsistencies and the unclear path Obama undertook toward Egypt, which caused the relations to be disturbed. The study concludes that it was challenging for the US to deal with an Islamic government that it had to recognize because it was democratically elected, but remained a threat. Barack Obama sent mixed messages to Mohammed Morsi and ended up turning a blind eye to the military coup that ended the short-lived experience of democracy in Egypt, as it brought a safer choice to the US's interests.

Keywords: Obama Administration, Political Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood, inconsistent Diplomatic relations.

الملخص:

تهدف الدراسة إلى دراسة الدبلوماسية بين الولايات المتحدة ومصر منذ ثورة 2011 وحتى الانقلاب العسكري في 2013 على الرئيس المنتخب ديمقراطياً محمد مرسي. ويركز البحث على دور الإسلام السياسي المتمثل في جماعة الإخوان المسلمين في التأثير على السياسات الأمريكية تجاه مصر. كما يستكشف البحث صعود جماعة الإخوان المسلمين إلى سدة الرئاسة في عام 2012 بأكثر الطرق شرعية باعتراف الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. وعند انتخاب مرسي، رحبت به الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية وأعطته الشرعية على مستوى العالم رغم كونه ممثلاً للإسلام السياسي. يسلط المقال الضوء على التناقضات والمسار غير الواضح الذي اتخذه أوباما تجاه مصر والذي تسبب في اضطراب العلاقات. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أنه كان من الصعب على الولايات المتحدة التعامل مع حكومة إسلامية اضطرت للاعتراف بها لأنها منتخبة ديمقراطياً، لكنها ظلت تشكل تهديداً. وقد

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أرسل باراك أوباما رسائل متضاربة إلى محمد مرسي وانتهى به الأمر إلى غض الطرف عن الانقلاب العسكري الذي أنهى تجربة الديمقراطية التي لم تدم طويلاً في مصر، لأنه جلب خياراً أكثر أمناً لمصالح الولايات المتحدة. كلمات مفتاحية إدارة أوباما، الإسلام السياسي، جماعة الإخوان المسلمين، علاقات دبلوماسية غير متسقة

Introduction

The Arab Spring that sparked in 2011, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), redefined the region's political landscape. Firstly, the uprisings brought high hopes for the people of the region, promising a better life. Moreover, the events persisted as an opportunity for the Muslim Brotherhood organization to resurface the political scene in these countries, including Egypt, the main concern of this article. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB), an Islamic organization founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. The organization aimed at fostering Islamic principles socially, it also aimed at participating in politics. Inevitably, the Arab Spring in Egypt influenced politics not only on a national level but also on an international one. Consequently, the US-Egyptian relations were remodeled after the coming of the Al-Ikhwān to politics. The US considers the Middle East (ME) the hotspot of its foreign policies, as it has several interests in the region, most importantly, Israel. That's why the US shows interest in ME politics. Simultaneously, Political Islam resists any form of interference from the US. Therefore, the US interests in the region brought it into direct confrontation with Political Islam. Under President Barack Obama, US-Egyptian relations experienced significant turbulence, particularly during the 2011 uprising and the 2013 military coup, leading to strained ties and a complex interplay between US values and strategic interests.

The aim of this article is to tackle the Obama administration policy towards Egypt from 2011-2013, focusing on the Muslim Brotherhood rise to power. Additionally, it assesses how American leaders and politicians framed and dealt with Political Islam through public statements, policies, concepts, and measures to promote US interests. Furthermore, the article highlights the inconsistencies in the Obama administration policies. Finally, the article is intended to highlight the historical path of the Muslim Brotherhood and the evolving concepts of that organization over time. Mohammed Morsi the MB president failed in his attempts to rule the country, pointing the failure of MB as a party and an organization.

The article is presented in three parts. The first part goes through the historical background of the MB to provide an understanding of the movement's development. The second part, highlights the Arab Spring in Egypt, its causes and outcomes, and discusses Morsi's presidency and fall. The third part examines the relationship between Obama and the actions taken by him to deal with the predicament of Political Islam in the presidency. The article gives insight into the entanglement of US-Egyptian relations from 2011 to 2013.

The present paper aims to answer several questions, including: How did the Obama administration's policy toward Egypt evolve during 2011- 2013 in response to the rise of Political

Islam? What factors shaped US diplomatic responses to Morsi's presidency and subsequent overthrow? What approach did President Obama advocate for towards the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt?

The study employs a set of conceptual, quantitative, and qualitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The conceptual method is adopted to describe key concepts such as "the Muslim Brotherhood" and "the Arab Spring" to establish a framework for the present research. The quantitative method is used to provide a comprehensive picture of US-Egypt diplomacy, taking into account the ups and downs of the relations between the two countries. This study also employs a qualitative case study approach, analyzing primary sources including official statements, diplomatic communications, and media coverage, supplemented by secondary scholarly analysis. The research triangulates multiple data sources to examine the complex interplay between US strategic interests, democratic values, and regional stability concerns in shaping American policy toward Egypt during this critical period.

1- The Muslim Brotherhood: Origins and Ideologies

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) movement was founded in 1928. It was born to remain under the spotlight since then. Today, the Muslim Brotherhood, or "Al-Ikhwan," is the advocate of Political Islam in the Arab countries. It is considered to be one of the most controversial and mistrusted organizations in the Arab countries. For many, it is regarded as an extremist organization, a threat to any established democracy or hope for an established one. Secularists argue that Islam, like any religion, should remain separate from politics, suggesting that attempts to merge the two could lead to disaster. The Muslim Brothers have always been exploited by every established regime in Egypt and other Arab countries. The organization is used as a distraction for the people to direct their interests to religion and forget about their economic, political, and social problems.

Hassan al-Banna is a name that does not need much introduction. He is known as the founder and godfather of the Muslim Brotherhood organization. He is a controversial figure because of his ideas. Al-Banna had a Quranic education and was tutored by Sufi Masters. He also attended governmental schools. During his youth, al-Banna was very influenced by the Islamic movement "Islah" of the 19th century, with figures such as Djamel al-Din Afghani, Mohammed Abdou, Rachid Reda, and others. Politically speaking, Al-Banna was a nationalist and anti-colonial. He did not appreciate the monopoly of government and economy by the upper class at the expense of the majority, he was quite vocal about this point (O'Donnell, 2005, pp. 1-2).

As a teacher, al-Banna focused on Islamic education. He emphasized what he labeled "correct Islam." In 1928, 22-year-old Al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood organization to spread his version of Islam. So, what is this correct version of Islam? Al-Banna accentuated Islam as: "an

encompassing system that covers all areas of life.” Islam undertakes economic, political, and social issues. This concept of Islam is contrary to what is called “traditional Islam,” described by Al-Banna to be “submissive and serving colonial interests.” (Lagervall, 2021, p. 74)

Hassan El Banna grew up under the cloak of Sufism, but with time his ideas evolved to get rid of Sufism that supported traditional Islam; focusing on worship away from any interference in politics. He established a set of characteristics for his version of correct Islam. First, he called for an Islamic state. Second, he proclaimed an Islamic Constitution (Sharia Law) that would prevent secular rulers from making laws violating Islamic rules. A correct version of Islam means providing social justice and an equal distribution of resources, which would limit the power of the upper class. The image seemed beautiful but certainly ambiguous (O’Donnell, 2005, p. 3).

When the Muslim Brotherhood contested the elections for the first time, the Egyptian government obliged Al-Banna and his fellow candidates to withdraw. “Al-Ikhwan” lost trust in the government. Later, Al-Banna agreed to bargain with the Egyptian regime that stood against everything the Brotherhood stood for, such an act made him lose the trust of many members of the Brotherhood. In the 1940s, a new wing was created in the party, a revolutionary one (known as the armed wing). The armed wing was gaining momentum and was challenging its leaders and creating a gap between the two wings of the party. Due to increasing tension between the government and the party. The Egyptian government dissolved the party in 1948. Two months later, in February 1949, Hassan el Banna was assassinated. He knew he was going to be killed, after the arrest of most members of the Muslim Brotherhood. His death signaled the end of an era (Aljazeera Arabic, 2007).

Sayyid Qutb was another prominent figure of Al-Ikhwan, known for his radical thoughts and writings, especially those he wrote in prison. He was the head of the armed wing of the organization. In 1953, upon his return from the US, Qutb joined the Muslim Brotherhood organization. Even though he joined the MB, he did not see eye to eye with it on several matters. He advocated change even if it meant using extremist or radical ways; violence was not off the table, something that was not shared by the Muslim Brotherhood organization. Sayyid Qutb emphasized that the concept of secular government separate from religion is a Western concept that does not belong to Islam and that it should be abolished. Any Arab government should be an Islamic state, governed by Sharia Law (Lagervall, 2021, p.76). Qutb had serious differences and conflicts with El Hedaybi, who was the leader of the organization. The latter denied any belief or association of the Muslim Brotherhood with Qutb’s ideologies. *Duat La Qudat (Preachers, not Judges)* is a book written by AL Hedaybi in which he attacked Sayyid Qutb’s ideas vigorously without referring to him directly. Ummar El Tilmisani came as the new head of the MB after the death of al-Hudaybi. He did not bring new things to the MB; he just emphasized the policy of non-violence and gradual Islamization of society (Soage, 2009, p. 198).

Political Islam reflects the ideologies of the Muslim Brotherhood. Political Islam has its share of exploitation and harassment by the different political regimes in Egypt. Starting with President Djamil Abdel Nasser (1956-1970) who was very hostile towards the MB since his early presidency. He advocated that the MB used Islam as a religion to seize power. He accused them of being terrorists and unpatriotic. The Muslim Brotherhood members were massively arrested during his presidency (Kandil, 2008). When Anwar Al Sadat came to power (1970- 1981), he continued on the same path as his predecessor. Early in his presidency, he freed many Islamists from prison. He also allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to resume activity. A few years later, Sadat changed his attitude and accused them of plotting against the state, leading to a massive arrest of the members of the Brotherhood (Gresh, 2018).

The 1970s witnessed a religious awakening at the level of Egyptian universities, paving the way for the foundation of Islamist groups to emerge, most of them were influenced by Sayyid Qutb (some of them even formed Jihadist groups) (Lagravell, 2021, p.77). Nonetheless, many adhered to the Muslim Brotherhood organization with its principles of peace, a multi-party system, and the rights of religious minorities. The majority of Muslims in Egypt were moderate; they aspired to political and economic improvements that would allow them to have a better life (Pierce, 2013, p.71). In the following decade, due to the poor conditions, the number of people joining Islamic organizations increased, finding Islam as a refuge. In the 1990s, the Brotherhood did not achieve great success or presence. Hosni Mubarak allowed the brothers political participation, but certainly, not under the umbrella of the Muslim Brotherhood. Harassment was part of Mubarak's rule. The Mubarak regime particularly targeted Muslim Brothers and submitted them to arbitrary arrests. At the same time, the government supported the proliferation of Salafists (Pierce, 2013, pp.72-73).

Today, the Muslim Brotherhood is the most important international political Islamic organization in the Arab world. Nearly a century after its establishment, the organization did not succeed in winning the hearts and minds of Egyptians. The same organization is widely regarded with mistrust and suspicion. It has its weaknesses that helped in the process of suspicion; like the lack of a clear path, and the divisions within the party are key loopholes. The organization has spent years disassociating itself from its radical wing, calling for non-violent means. Trying to stay away from Qutb's image of the Islamic state. "Al-Ikhwan" failed in the refinement of political Islam in people's minds.

2- The Arab Spring in Egypt: The Streets' Awakening

Major events in Egypt brought the Muslim Brotherhood back to the political scene in 2011. Tensions escalated in the country. The year 2011 marked the sparking of demonstrations across the country against the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak. The Arab Spring in Egypt was part of a

wave of protests and revolutions that swept many Arab countries against the existing authoritarian regimes, due to the miserable conditions people underwent. Egyptians went out against the oppressive 30 years of Mubarak's regime. People called for reforms, democracy, better economic conditions, the end of corruption, and the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. In February 2011, Mubarak announced his resignation from office. It was the end of a dictator and the beginning of a new era of politics, not necessarily a better or a stable one. The 2011 uprisings in Egypt painted a beautiful painting of how long oppressed people were able to revolt and succeed. But in reality, and according to many the revolution was stolen when Hosni Mubarak resigned, he underwent a military coup by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and all that happened since was staged (Mansour, 2014).

The line of action the MB undertook during the Egyptian Spring passed through different stages. Primarily, the Brotherhood preferred to avoid any type of confrontation with Mubarak's regime. They did not even participate in the Day of Rage protests on 25 January, 2011. On the 28 January, 2011 with the intensification of the manifestations and due to the pressure of the young members of the MB, the organization decided to voice its stand on the revolution by showing full support to the will of the people. They played an active role through mobilizing supporters, and providing logistic support. The third phase began after the resignation of Mubarak, when the Muslim Brotherhood embraced a political role and was able to form a political party called the "Freedom and Justice Party." Instantly, the party gained momentum. They won 43.3% of the votes in the election to the Constituent Assembly (Lagervall, 2013, pp. 77-78). In January 2012, Islamists won 72% of the seats in the lower house of Egypt's parliament. The MB won 235 out of 498 parliament seats (Sharp, 2013).

The army stood with the revolution. They did not attack people; they respected people's will; that is what was claimed by the army. But the army had interests in the Egyptian Arab Spring. Djalal Mubarak (son of the Egyptian president) was awaiting to inherit the presidency. His ideas were not welcomed by the army; as he promised to liberate the economy of military control (Pierce, 2013, p.70). Egyptians lost trust in the regime and the army altogether; they craved a better life. Political Islam seemed the perfect answer to all the problems of mistrust, as religious groups enjoyed "credible electoral commitment." Voters were looking for political parties that had a credible image to fulfill their promises after the elections. Just after the ousting of Hosni Mubarak. They found that kind of political trust within the MB party. Not all Egyptians welcomed the MB, but they seemed like the best choice as the best-organized existing political party then (Rohac, 2014).

Mohammed Morsi, the presidential candidate of the Freedom and Justice Party, was not the initial choice of the party. The initial choice was Khairat al Shater, who was later disqualified because of a legal technicality. "Al Stebn," or the "spare tire," was a nickname given to Morsi when he

replaced Al-Shatter. Morsi was never considered a knowledgeable politician. Ahmed Chafik, the opponent of Mohammed Morsi, did not offer a bright future. The Brotherhood was the most organized party by the election; they had a clear vision or an existing agenda (Hessler, 2019). The Big Day arrived on June 24, 2012, the Egyptian Election Commission announced that the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi won the presidential elections fair and square and via what may be described as the most democratic and transparent elections in the history of Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood won the election with 51.7% of the vote. The rise of political Islam to the head of the executive was an unexpected turn of events (Pierce, 2013, p, 78).

Upon the election of Mohammed Morsi as Egypt's first elected president, fireworks were launched celebrating the triumph of democracy. Simultaneously, danger alarms were triggered across Egypt, the Gulf countries, and across the Atlantic Ocean. Many Egyptians were not thrilled with Morsi's elections because of his Islamic background. They were afraid that Morsi was going to apply Sharia Law and would jeopardize other social groups in Egypt. Morsi was accused of being president of Muslims only, ignoring secularists and Copts. Although he made it clear on several occasions that he was the president of all Egyptians (Pierce, 2013, p. 77).

Political Islam was able to reach the top of the political pyramid through legitimate and democratic ways. Still, the consequences of that democratic process were not well welcomed by many people. So, what seems to be the problem with democracy in Arab countries? Bill Kristol, an American neo-conservative commentator discussed the idea of democracy and Arab countries, he said: "I think they prefer the military rule to the Muslim Brotherhood ruling. I think an awful lot of people in the region prefer that an awful lot of the Arab governments prefer it. And it is not clear to me that we should not prefer it." Arabs, including Egyptians, seem to prefer authoritarian army regimes rather than democratic ones (qtd in. Rohac, 2014). Authoritarian regimes have ruled Egypt for decades, oppressing and harassing people. Then, the Arab Spring came as hope for a breakthrough to a long-awaited democracy. Something went wrong later when the same democracy was not welcomed by many because it came under the cloque of political Islam.

3- The Toppling of Political Islam

Egypt has always been under a military regime. It was not easy to relinquish control to a civil president, and one with an Islamic identity. There was no smooth passage of power to the civil body. The relations between the Army and the new president varied between corporations and struggle and conflict most of the time, through the brief presidency of Morsi. It is today acknowledged that Morsi's fatal error was his relations with the military that ended up with Abdel Fattah El Sisi, the army leader back then, toppling him on July 3, 2013, following protests against Morsi's rule. El Sisi claimed that he intervened in the name of the Egyptian people (Gresh, 2018).

Mohammed Morsi's rule was brief; one year was a short period to judge his skills as president. The first experience of Egypt with democracy failed too early and was cut short. Morsi's one-year presidency did not prove to be a success as expected. The question worth asking here is: Why did Morsi fail in his role as president? There are national and international causes that can be attributed to the downfall of Morsi as head of state.

As president, Morsi was accused of being a coward, a president with no prior experience in politics that made him weak and even naïve. Despite all the violations committed by the Army against the president's authority, the president never took action. Moreover, Morsi wanted to strengthen the power of the Muslim Brotherhood in the government, his prime minister Hicham Qandil was from the MB. Morsi appointed only one Copt to his government. Human rights groups estimated that more than 100,000 Copts left Egypt since the revolution. Morsi issued further decrees consolidating the power of his government, decrees restricting the press, downsizing the opposition, and increasing discrimination against minorities (Pierce, 2013, p. 78- 81).

It was claimed by many people that Morsi did not make improvements in the lives of most Egyptians. One of the famous accusations faced by Morsi was allowing Islamists to monopolize the political scene at the expense of other social groups. There was massive pressure on the government to bring about change in a short period. On June 30, 2013, many Egyptians went out to protest against the government they elected before. Morsi lost the trust of many social groups. As head of state, he faced several accusations, like ignoring human rights and constitutional freedoms, disastrous handling of the economy, and the failure to address people's concerns (Gresh, 2018). In 2012, Morsi tried to negotiate a US \$ 4.8 billion loan from the international Monetary Fund (IMF) but failed because he refused to implement the required economic and political implications required in the next elections (Fabbrini, &Yossef, 2011, p. 70). The Army intervened on behalf of the people; later, El Sisi announced Morsi's ouster, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court was sworn in president. That was the end of the Muslim Brotherhood Experience with politics. It was a short-term democratic experience. The downfall of political Islam was a relief for both national and international powers.

Mohammed Morsi died in court on June 17, 2019, because of medical negligence. He faced charges of torture, detention, and espionage. He refused in his first hearing the authority of the court and asserted he was the president of Egypt and he was the victim of a military coup. Morsi's supporters did not surrender; they went out to the streets, calling for his release and return to power. The protests ended violently when El-Sisi ordered the massacre of protestors on August 14, 2013, where almost 1000 people were killed. The ousting of Morsi caused a wave of violence against Islamists in Egypt, the MB was declared a terrorist group in Egypt (Walsh, & Kirkpatrick, 2019).

4- Egyptian Foreign Relations

We can never talk about Egypt without tackling its foreign policy. Egypt has three pillars when it comes to its foreign affairs. All these pillars influenced the Arab Spring and its consequences in Egypt in one way or another. The first backbone is the American-Egyptian relations. The second pillar is the honor of the Camp David Treaty with Israel, and the last of the three pillars is promoting good relations with the Gulf countries. All three of Egypt's partners did not appreciate the democratic outcomes that brought Al-Ikhwan to power. They were careful in dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood while Morsi was president, and they participated in the coup against democracy in Egypt in 2013 (Farooq, 2019).

Egypt is the strategic partner of the US in the Middle East. The country enjoys US protection and annual military aid to keep peace in the region, being a neighboring country to Israel. The US keeps Egypt under its umbrella to keep Israel safe. The foreign relations between the two countries are complex; mostly positive. With the US pumping money in the veins of the Egyptian government, Egypt is keeping its part of the deal by preserving US interests in the region.

independence from Britain. Djamel Abdel Nasser did not have good relations with the US as he chose to side with the Soviet Union. When Anouar El Sadat became president, he decided to lean over the Americans. He even evicted the Soviets who were in Egypt. The Camp David Treaty of 1978 between Al-Sadaat and Israel with the blessing of the US, was a turning point in US-Egyptian relations. The treaty guaranteed peace between the two (El Shaimi, & Mahmoud, 2017). The Camp David made Egypt the strategic partner of the US in the Middle East. Since 1978, the US has provided Egypt with over \$50 billion in military aid and \$30 billion in economic assistance. It was in 1987 when the US increased military aid to \$1.3 billion in. And in 2009, the Congress appropriated \$250 million to the economic sector development in Egypt. it comprised 16% of the total US foreign assistance to Egypt (Sharp, 2013). In 2021, trade relations between the US and Egypt reached \$91 billion dollars. Egypt is the largest export market in Africa for the US (US Department, 2022). During the period between 1946 and 2011 the US provided Egypt with a total of \$71.7 billion in bilateral foreign aid (Sharp, 2013).

With Mubarak promising the commitment to Camp David, he kept very stable relations with the US. Prior to the Arab Spring, there was a kind of tension between the US and Egypt due to the oppressive regime of Hosni Mubarak. George W. Bush tried to push the Egyptian president to introduce democratic reforms (Pierce, 2013, pp. 69). During the Arab Spring, the US position changed from supporting Mubarak to calling Mubarak to implement reforms, then to denying Mubarak's presence to implement the reforms. It is claimed by many that the reason why Mubarak resigned just after 18 days was the fact that he lost US support (Fabbrini, &Yossef, 2011, p. 67).

The US welcomed Morsi with great suspicion and mistrust even though he was brought to power through the democratic process celebrated much by the US. There was one problem with the first elected president of Egypt, he was an Islamist calling for the implementation of Political Islam, much feared by the US. The relationship between the US and the MB has fluctuated over time. During the 50s and 60s, the US embraced the Brotherhood activities, they were regarded as an ally against Communist ideologies in the Arab countries. After the 9/11 attacks, the US waged a war against Islam. The MB, among other Islamic organizations, were blacklisted. Up until the Arab Spring, the US had no relations with the Muslim Brotherhood (Al Abdoullah, 2019).

5- US-Egyptian Relations under Obama and Morsi's Administrations

During his presidency, one of the frequent criticisms Obama faced was that he was too lenient towards Islam. Some Americans alleged that he had a personal bias toward Islam. The US was prudent and avoided any type of connection with Al Ikhwan until the coming of Barack Obama. Obama's administration was for the Egyptian Spring. A Spring that risked jeopardizing US interests in the region (Gresh, 2018). It seemed that Obama started sending positive vibes to Islamist groups just upon his election in 2009. The House invited the Islamic Society of North America to the presidential inauguration even though the Justice Department blacklisted the Brotherhood (Pierce, 2013, p.73). Also, during his famous speech in Egypt (2009), Obama invited the MB despite Mubarak's refusal. During his speech, Obama advanced a new approach to US-Egyptian relations. He said, "I have come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the US and the Muslims around the world; one based on mutual interests and mutual respect." During the transitional period, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt (SCAF) 2011-2012 ruled the country. The SCAF was encouraged by the US to promote the Democratic process. The US had little to no effect on the Egyptian political system during that period (Fabbrini, &Yossef, 2011, pp. 68). During the Egyptian revolution, Obama welcomed the Muslim Brotherhood's participation in the political dialogue. If the MB was willing to respect the democratic process, it should be allowed the chance to participate in the making of the healthy democratic process. The US openly supported Al-Ikhwan. Newspapers wrote, "Clinton Welcomes Muslim Brotherhood Participation." (qtd in. Adraoui, 2018)

Many American scholars posed the question of why the US would approach the Muslim Brotherhood with a positive attitude. By the time of the Egyptian elections, the MB party was the most organized party with a clear and promising agenda. It was also a moderate Islamist group against any form of violence. Hillary Clinton emphasized that "what parties call themselves is less important than what they do," meaning adherence to the democratic process is the most important (qtd in. Pierce, 2013, p.76). If Al-Ikhwan played by the book, why would the US opt for a negative attitude towards them? That led to the support of the American executive to the Muslim Brotherhood. US support for Morsi's administration gave the Muslim Brotherhood more legitimacy in the world. Morsi in turn called for a pragmatic, or rather positive, attitude of the US towards his party.

To conduct a study of the American vision of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, focus shall be put on official statements and actions from US officials. In an early statement made by Hillary Clinton about the Muslim Brotherhood, the Secretary of State stated that the rapprochement the US made towards the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was part of US policy that began in 2016. Such a statement led to speculations about the involvement of the US in the Arab Spring, and the role played by the US to help Al-Ikhwan reach governance (Al Abdoullah, 2019).

State Department Spokesman Mark Toner expressed a clear stance on the Muslim Brotherhood, stating that they are welcome in the political process if they are committed to democracy. Americans, did more than voice their opinions publicly. State Departments' special coordination for Middle East Departments William Taylor and his office provided training for MB for the election (began on Nov 28th). When the story was exposed by the US media, it was claimed that support was offered to all parties (Pierce, 2013, p. 78). Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns met with Mohammed Morsi in Washington, indicating a high level of outreach to Islamist leaders. In July 2012, Clinton visited Cairo after Morsi's election. She emphasized the protection of the rights of all Egyptians (Fabbrini, & Yossef, 2011, p. 69). The US gave Egypt an annual aid conditioned with an improvement in human rights and civil liberties and a recognition of the state of Israel. In 2012, Egypt received approximately \$1.55 billion in aid including \$1.3 billion in military and \$ 250 million in economic aid (Sharp,2013). The White House indicated that Clinton used her authority to release part of the aid to Egypt. Obama claimed that Islamists should learn to deal with the political and religious complexity of Egyptian society. Many American politicians did not favor the way Obama was handling his relations with Egypt. General James Matt, chief of Central Command, responsible for all operations in the Middle East, believed that the MB and El Qaida were two faces of the same coin. Michael Flynn, head of intelligence, called Islam "a cancer,," Flynn kept very close relations with El Sisi (then Minister of Defense). There was a clear division within the American Administration (Gresh, 2018).

The Obama administration supported the democratic process in Egypt. They recognized Morsi's election as a significant milestone in Egypt's transition to democracy and endorsed the idea of engaging with Egypt's new government. The US administration did not fully support the Muslim Brotherhood's political agenda. Even if the Egyptian MB was moderate, Political Islam considers political institutions vehicles of Islamization. American politicians had to manage through the complexities of dealing with an administration that was elected democratically and had a platform and policies at odds with US interests (issues of human rights and approach to ruling the country).

When Morsi sent his foreign affairs advisor Essam El Haddad to Washington, he was surprised by a long meeting with President Obama, during which he endorsed the MB, which signaled a good start between the two. Barack Obama invited Mohammed Morsi upon his election to the US (Gresh, 2018). He wanted to pledge a new partnership with the Arab nations, as part of his policy of repairing US-Arab countries relations, following the disastrous consequences caused by the presidency of George W. Bush.

George W. Bush had disastrous relations with the Middle East. His policies ruined US-Middle East diplomacy. Barack Obama came up with a new approach to deal with Islam and the Middle East. Obama wanted to integrate Islam into international society. Socializing Islam, or taming Islam was the new approach. Obama wanted to tame radical Islamists and make them moderate. If Islam had become moderate, it would never have caused trouble for the US (Ardaoui, 2018). The new Islam would be compatible with Western democracy. That explains the new wave of Sufism that swept the Arab world in recent years.

Mohammed Morsi met with William Burns, during which Morsi received a letter from President Obama. By the end of the meeting, Morsi declared that Egypt could rely on US support to fulfill the Egyptians' aspirations. He proclaimed his desire to remain a strategic partner of the US. Washington, from its angle, aspired to see more progress toward democracy in Egypt (Williams, 2012).

September 2012 witnessed a major setback in the US-Muslim Brotherhood government relations. The attacks on the US embassy in Cairo by some Egyptians, who attacked the embassy and set fire, put down the American flag and replaced it with a black one in anger over a video mocking the Prophet Mohammed. Morsi was accused of not acting immediately. In response, the Egyptian president claimed that the situation should be dealt with carefully; the situation was pretty sensitive. Morsi received a call from President Obama expressing his anger (Fabbrini, & Yossef, 2011, p. 70).

One of the major questions when it comes to US-Egyptian relations was the question of whether democracy or US interests are more important. It was clear that the US favored interests' preservation over democracy and human rights; political stability in Egypt is very important to preserve Israeli security. Morsi was committed to the Camp David treaty. He later received praise from Obama and Clinton after he helped in a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza in November 2012 (Aty, 2023, p.139). Robert Satloff, the legal executive director of the Washington Institute, explained that Egyptians had a deal with Obama; as long as peace is maintained in the Middle East region, the US would support the Brotherhood government and would keep the flow of the help provided by the US, regardless of the policies adopted by Al Ikhwan (Al Abdoullah, 2019).

Morsi praised the values of democracy and freedom to the international press and promised the honor of international treaties. Still, he had a list of more troubling statements. Morsi was interviewed by the New York Times. During that interview, he tried to introduce himself to the Western world. For 90 minutes, Morsi answered several questions and caused a lot of controversy. Morsi was never ashamed of his roots as part of the Muslim Brotherhood. Once he was elected president, he left the Muslim Brotherhood, but he never denied the fact that he learned everything about politics from Al Ikhwan. Moreover, upon his election, on the eve of his trip to the US, Morsi called on the US to change its perspective towards Islam and the Arab countries, calling on the US to respect the differences in principles between the US and Arab countries. Furthermore, he advocated for Obama to find a solution

to the Palestinian state. The Egyptian president also praised Obama's attitude towards the Arab Spring and the support he showed to support democracy in the Arab region (Kirkpatrick, & Erlanger, 2012).

The relations between the governments of Morsi and Obama were quite wavering. As much as Obama was supportive of the MB government and the process of democracy, he was always suspicious of Political Islam. Obama kept boosting good relations with Egypt. Simultaneously, he was sponsoring programs to promote democracy in the Arab world. Programs such as Democracy Assistance (POMED) had the real aim of promoting a secularist perspective and preventing Islamists from ruling. The US government is very secretive about the amounts spent on democracy, POMED executive director estimated that Washington spent \$65 million in 2011 and \$ 25 million in 2012 and 2013. Democracy Assistance was far from being an innocent program; it has more hidden aims than shown ones. The US provided Egypt with information, interviews, and public records that signaled a violation of Egyptian law, which prohibits foreign political funding (Mekay, 2013).

Among the Egyptian opposition figures who were funded by the US for the ousting of Morsi was Colonel Omar Afifi Soliman, an ex-police officer. He was a refugee in the US. From 2008_2011, Soliman received funds that ranged from \$10 to \$50 thousand from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which is the branch responsible for the financial sector of POMED. Those grants had no legal foundations. Soliman targeted Hosni Mubarak first, and then Mohammed Morsi. He was active on the level of social media to incite violence in Egypt against Egyptian officials. The US claimed that Soliman spread only non-violent literature and provided legal advice. The interviews conducted by Soliman, his social media posts, and YouTube videos agitated people to go out against Morsi and use violence to achieve their target and topple the president. Colonel Soliman is only one of many figures working under the cloak of the Democracy Assistance program (Mekay, 2013).

6- The End of US-Political Islam Ties

The culmination of the US-Egyptian Brotherhood relations came with the military coup against Mohammed Morsi. Barack Obama remained neutral about the coup. He did not intervene to stop the coup in defense of democracy. Obama did not inform Morsi about El Sissi's intentions, although he knew what was going on. January 2013, Chuck Hagel US Secretary of Defense was sent to Egypt to EL Sisi to warn him of his intentions of effecting a coup against the president. He threatened him of cutting the military aid if such an action took place. When the coup took place, the US intentionally turned a blind eye to the event (Gresh,2019). The president refrained from using the term "coup" to describe what happened in Egypt to dodge Section 508 of the Foreign Assistance Act which prohibits any form of aid to any country whose elected president is disposed by a military coup or decree. That gave legitimacy to El Sisi's new regime (Gresh, 2018). Later, Obama expressed his displeasure with what happened in Egypt. Tension characterized the relations with Egypt after the ouster of Morsi, but not for a long time. There was a sensation of relief in the US when political Islam was taken out of the picture in Egypt. US Secretary of State then, John Kerry stated that the Egyptian army under the leadership of General Abdel Fattah Sisi

was just repairing what was wrong and restoring democracy. The aid provided to Egypt was suspended temporarily because of human rights violations. Later, the aid was poured again into the veins of the Egyptian economy and army (Aftandilian, 2013, p. 12). The US congress could not cut the military aid for a long time, simply because it would threaten Israeli security. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) addressed every Senator arguing that the suspension of the aid to Egypt would impact the major ally of the US in the MENA, Israel; the Senate voted not to suspend military aid by 86 to 13 (Gresh, 2018). Later, the Obama administration approved over \$3.2 billion in arms sales to Egypt (Hoffman, 2023).

The American-Egyptian diplomacy from 2011-13 was inconsistent and unclear. There were divisions among the administration of Obama; not everyone was happy with the way the US president was handling the relations with Egypt, headed by Mohammed Morsi, the Islamist president. One of the accusations Obama faced was the fact that he did not use the US leverage to impose human rights, religious liberty, and the impartial rule of law. The US according to many, could have used the economic difficulties faced by Egypt to pressure Morsi to implement real reforms on all levels. The aid provided by the US to Egypt was a winning card, that Obama did not even use (Pierce, 2013, p. 70). Another accusation against Obama was his failure to address foreign affairs because of his inexperience in this area of expertise. He was accused of handing foreign affairs to his secretary of states and vice president (Fabbrini, & Yossef, 2014, p. 66).

Conclusion

Due to the importance of Egypt to the US interests, the Arab Spring in Egypt and then the election of Mohammed Morsi, MB candidate as president of Egypt, were pivotal in shaping the American-Egyptian relationship (2011-2013). The Obama administration faced a predicament when Morsi became president. The US approached Morsi's administration with a careful but rather positive approach. However, not all members of the Obama administration were on the same page with his policies. Many expressed their concern about the positive attitude of the US towards Political Islam. Obama aspired to tame Political Islam to integrate it into the international world order.

A general assessment of US-Egyptian relations, 2011-2013 would lead to disclosing the failure of Barack Obama to trace a clear path with Al-Ikhwan. Obama gave Morsi a false sense of security when he praised him and showed the US willingness to work with an Islamist government. Later, Obama distanced himself from Morsi allegedly conspired against him, and failed to support him before and even after the coup, even though he embodied the democratic values that the US often champions. Obama's relationship with the MB was full of uncertainties and contradictory positions. Obama was unable to define whether Morsi was a friend or a foe.

In 2011, Political Islam achieved unprecedented success when Mohammed Morsi was elected president of Egypt, through democratic ways. Again, the success of al-Ikhwan did not last. Just one year after his election, Morsi was ousted by General El Sisi, in January 2013, which signaled the end of the MB

as a political party in Egypt. Al-Ikhwan fell from grace after the military coup. The MB will survive no doubt, but it will re-emerge in the form of religious and social groups rather than a political one.

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