



Political Islam Online

Dangerous Liaisons

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A shroud woven by the Muslim Brotherhood is descending upon the Middle East. President Obama is tentatively gambling that the Brotherhood will produce stability in the region, particularly on the Gaza front with Israel, and make him the first U.S. president to establish a long lasting solution to the Palestinian problem. For that grand vision to become a reality, the United States, through the Brotherhood, must enable Israel to achieve its goal of retaining a larger portion of the West bank and East Jerusalem, where more than 400,000 Israeli Jewish settlers already live illegally. Those settlers are unlikely ever to move out, despite Western governments' periodic lip service to the contrary.

For most of those living in the Middle East, November 13, 2012 was a day like many others they had seen before; an Israeli air incursion into Gaza in response to rockets launched into Israel by Hamas. However, history will recall that day as the day when bitter enemies set in motion a plan thought to be unthinkable only a few years ago.

At the heart of this plan is one of the most important and closely guarded tenants of the Muslim Brotherhood – the irrelevance of national entities and the supremacy and internationalization of the Brotherhood's realm in the region. With that ideology, the Brotherhood is on the road to supplanting all previous nationalistic aspirations that has driven policy in the region since independence from colonialist power and the formation of Israel. Pan Arabism is slowly disappearing, the Arab league is becoming irrelevant and those calling for an Egyptian secularist state are being silenced with U.S. acquiescence.

The Brotherhood's core philosophy was in full display last year when their former leader, *Mahdi Akef*, appeared on Egyptian TV and underscored his opinion that a non-Egyptian Muslim could lead Egypt, by exclaiming “*toz fi Masr*” (loosely translated “to hell with Egypt.”)! In other words, the Brotherhood rejects Egyptian nationalism in favor of expanding their Caliphate power over other Arab countries and governing under a monolithic Brotherhood banner in the name of Islam. However, the usual Arab rhetoric about recovering “every inch of Palestine” is no longer part of the Brotherhood's message. Precisely when and where a Palestinian State would be created has become inconsequential for the Brotherhood and their followers. And, acknowledging the present military power of Israel, the Brotherhood has put the idea of the destruction of Israel on hold indefinitely. They can easily explain to their Muslim audience why they would accept an extended truce with their more powerful enemies – it was, after all, a strategy first practiced by the Prophet himself.

The time had come to convince their surrogates in Gaza, who were busy launching rockets into Israel with much fanfare -- but little effect -- to cover for their equally ineffective economic and political strategy, that an extended truce with Israel was in their best interest, if they were ever to be seriously accepted as a negotiating partner. Many observers, either naively or by design, opined that Hamas' rockets were dangerously reaching deeper into Israel. Israel cried wolf and the pundits ignored the fact that the rockets were creating little damage in Israel and that the Israeli military power could easily silence them, which they did.

Hamas' political leaders were well aware of their ineffectiveness and were already firm believers in the Brotherhood's ideology and their promise to extend Hamas's domination over Palestinians living on the West Bank. Thus, Hamas was ready to embrace the Brotherhood's plan. However, there was a major obstacle. The military leader of Hamas, *Ahmad al-Jabari* (nicknamed “the general”), was an ideological purist who refused any compromise with Israel, and he had ties with *Shi'a* Iran, which was supplying him with arms. It is believed that any deal with Israel, let alone a long-term truce between Israel and Hamas, was unthinkable while *Ahmad al-Jabari* was around. His elimination would serve both camps and Israel obliged on that November day. The wheels of a plan to implement a vision serving both the interest of Israel and the Brotherhood were being put into motion. A plan that the Brotherhood and Israel apparently sold, lock, stock and barrel to the *Obama* administration.

Israeli leaders came to recognize early on four important facts that could make the Brotherhood an important ally:

- the Brotherhood is more concerned with maintaining their newly acquired power in Egypt, and expanding their rule through their members in other Arab states in the region, than in confronting Israel, and
- the possibility of an Egyptian attack on Israel is remote given the much weakened Egyptian army, which has become more of an industrial complex than a fighting force, and relies on Israel's strongest ally -- the United States -- as its sole source of arms.

Given those two facts, Israeli leaders could conclude that an alliance with the Brotherhood would be much like their alliance with their predecessor: Mubarak. The Brotherhood, however, offered Israel and the U.S. a golden opportunity that Mubarak would never have been able to present. That opportunity was based on two much more important elements:

- the Muslim Brotherhood exercises enormous control over Hamas in Gaza, which is an offshoot of the Brotherhood; and
- most importantly, the Brotherhood's operatives in Jordan are mostly Palestinians, who represent sixty percent of the population of Jordan, and those operatives are fueling the revolt against king *Abdallah* under the guise of reform. That fits perfectly with Israel's longstanding contention that Jordan should be part of the solution for a Palestinian state. Israel could negotiate retention of larger portions of the West Bank territories, and a new Palestinian-Jordanian confederation could be formed.

On the Egyptian front, with the Brotherhood in full control of the country, the easing of the restrictions on Gaza with some assurances from Israel, the opening of the border to allow freer movement of Palestinians in the Sinai and the Egyptian mainland, were welcomed by both Israel and the Brotherhood, who seemed eager to cement the link between Gaza and Egypt¹. Palestinian militia were starting to play an important role in supporting the Egyptian government, particularly in intimidating opponents of the Brotherhood.

Meanwhile in Jordan, during the past two months Palestinian protests against the king have intensified. It did not go unnoticed in the Jordanian palace that the American embassy in Amman elected to meet with radical Palestinian leaders led by *Said Hamam*, who is a strong advocate for Hamas and antagonistic towards the Palace. It became apparent to the King of Jordan and the Palestinian President Abbas, that they were being sidelined by the U.S. and Israel.

Survival of the Brotherhood as a legitimate government following the sham events surrounding the recent election and referendum, also largely depended upon the U.S. remaining relatively quiet while *Morsi* crushed the opposition. The Egyptian opposition, which is comprised mainly of left-leaning intellectuals, was never a palatable alternative for the U.S. administration, the Saudis or for Israel. They evoke memories of confrontations with the socialist Nasser regime in the sixties. The current secular leadership in Egypt, represented by *Mohamed El Bradei* and *Hamden Sabahi*, is considered too independent, left-leaning and nationalistic to be acceptable to the U.S. or Israel.

That brings us back to the morning of November the 13, 2012 when Israel launched its so-called “Pillar of Defense” operation in Gaza. While Israel and the Western press reported it as an act of deterrence, the elimination of *Ahmad al-Jabari* and the disabling

¹ In 2012,, more than 210,873 Palestinians crossed into Egypt from the Rafah crossing while only 26,199 crossed in the opposite direction.

Source: <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/1387751>

of his military force was a much more targeted and essential part of the plan. It would have been impossible to establish a long-lasting truce between Hamas and Israel with him on the scene. Israeli preparations for invading Gaza in the aftermath of the attack were an insurance policy in case Cairo was unable to deliver on the truce or, more likely, a show to give Cairo and Hamas political cover from anger in the street.

November 13th also set the stage for the triumphant return to Gaza of the more pragmatic *Khaled Mash'al*, ushered in with public rhetoric against Israel, but serious compromises in the bag orchestrated by the Muslim Brotherhood leadership in Cairo. While *Abbas* played along and agreed to meet in Cairo with *Mash'al* this past week for a so-called reconciliation meeting, the strange absence of the Gaza prime minister, *Ismail Haniyeh*, was another indication that the Brotherhood is dictating changes within Hamas. It was clear to all observers that Hamas is already acting under the Brotherhood's banner. What was less evident was that it was simply a matter of time before the West bank first and then Jordan tilts towards the movement. The Brotherhood's goal was to prove to the U.S. that they are the only entity capable of guarantying results when negotiating with Israel. Orchestrating the truce a week after the assault on Gaza proved it.

Middle East analysts are familiar with how the Israelis and the Palestinians could haggle for months over small details, with Egypt acting as the go between during the Mubarak time. They were almost amused that, officially at least, it took only a week after the killing of one of Hamas' top military leaders and the pounding of Gaza for the Muslim Brotherhood to get Hamas to agree to a full cease-fire with Israel. It took six phone calls between *Obama* and *Morsi*, we are told. *Morsi* was executing the plan already synchronized behind the scenes and *Obama* was playing along, becoming a believer in the power of the Brotherhood to rearrange the cards. The supreme Brotherhood guide, *Mohamed Badie*, and his deputy *Khairat al-Shater* were effectively in control of the unfolding events. They got Hamas to behave and arranged a so-called reconciliation with their rivals in the *fath* movement. Their ultimate goal however was for their chosen front man (presently *Mesh'al* was filling that role) to represent all Palestinians while firmly under the control of the Brotherhood.

The U.S. administration came in on cue, with Obama praising the Egyptian president for arranging an already planned ceasefire between *Hamas* and Israel. In remarks to his aides afterward, Obama "sensed in Morsi an engineer's precision with surprisingly little ideology". Perhaps he was unaware, ignored or simply welcomed the fact that the Muslim brotherhood's modus operandi has always relied on pragmatism rather than ideology. But, never before was an American president presented with such a golden opportunity to solve the main problem of the Middle East on such a grand scale. For it to work, however, the Muslim Brotherhood had to project legitimacy on the international scene, a legitimacy that would be possible only if they could rule domestically unchallenged. To that end, Anne Paterson, the U.S. ambassador in Cairo, known as an experienced and seasoned diplomat from her days serving in Pakistan, attempted to forge an understanding between the liberal secular forces in Egypt and the Islamists running the country.

The splitting of Arab countries, an occurrence often observed in the past, is about to happen once again -- this time not by a colonial power, but through the political

maneuvering of the Muslim Brotherhood. While Qatar, a strong financial backer of the Brotherhood is siding with Egypt, other countries who feel threatened by the Brotherhood's power grab are fiercely resisting them. Although Saudi Arabia is standing on the sidelines for now, the Emirates, Kuwait and Jordan have closed ranks to combat the Brotherhood, arresting their members and officially condemning the Egyptian government for what they consider an intrusion into their internal affairs. On the Western front, the European Union at least seems more concerned than the U.S. about the treatment of women and minorities in Egypt.

It is unclear at this point how long the Brotherhood's plans for the Middle East and the Palestinians will color U.S. policy. For now at least, it is apparent that the U.S. is willing to back the Brotherhood to pursue what they perceive is a shared objective in the Middle East. This week there have been reports of virulently anti-Semitic statements made by the Egyptian president within the last couple of years. Nevertheless, while the headlines proclaim the White House's condemnation of the remarks, the White House renewed their support of the Egyptian President as a man who has "demonstrated a commitment to peace with Israel in words and deeds". Such support following on the heels of such harsh anti-Semitic words could not have been possible politically unless the Administration knew full well that Israel did not want to fuel tension with *Morsi*, as was reported by an anonymous Israeli official. More astonishingly was the statement by Michael Oren, the Israeli ambassador to the U.S., on the subject. While calling Morsi's remarks alarming, Oren added, "Morsi and his government played a constructive role in reaching a ceasefire [with Hamas in November], that's more important – because it actually saved lives."²

Many of those drawing up the plans in Cairo and Jerusalem to rearrange the map of the Middle East ignore the elephant in the room – not Morsi in U.S. Newsrooms as suggested by Richard Behar in *Forbes*, but rather the 90 million Egyptians. The Brotherhood may find it is easier to control Hamas, bring down the king of Jordan or convince Palestinians to move within or outside the territories than it is to control the Egyptian population. The rapid deterioration of the economy and the infrastructure in Egypt, coupled with the blatant trouncing of civil liberties, human dignities, and the rights of women and minorities may make the Brotherhood's rule one of the worst in Egyptian history. The U.S. had a choice to help prevent that by siding with those who defend these principles, which the U.S. advocates, by ensuring that an honest election and referendum take place in Egypt. We chose to simply watch the tragedy unfold. As an Egyptian friend said to me recently, "We have to depend only on ourselves to get rid of them. All U.S. presidents only think about the Palestinian-Israeli relationship; we were fooled to think that Obama would side with us. The Brotherhood leaders were not as stupid, they knew that as long as Israel was happy, the Americans will consider the trouncing of civil liberties in Egypt as simply – how do you guys call it – collateral damage."

² Source 1/11/2013

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/richardbehar/2013/01/11/news-flash-jews-are-apes-and-pigs-so-why-is-egypts-morsi-the-elephant-in-americas-newsrooms/>

The map of the Middle East is again about to be redrawn and we are supporting the wrong parties in yet another great game of dangerous liaisons. Egyptians however may surprise us once more, history will tell.

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