



*By Stanley A. Weiss and Raphael Benaroya*

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**GSTAAD AND CAIRO**--In the early 1990s, Robert Pelletreau, the United States ambassador to Egypt, met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Washington, D.C. Pelletreau had been asked by then-Secretary of State Warren Christopher to discuss the possibility of Egypt relaxing its repressive stance towards the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist political party with a long history of being alternately tolerated and oppressed by the Egyptian government.

"I'll never forget what happened next," Pelletreau told the journalist Robert Dreyfuss.

"Mubarak sat up sharply, rigidly. 'These people killed my predecessor!' Then he raised this huge fist, and he slammed it down on the table hard, and everything on the table jumped and rattled. Bang! 'When they come out, we have to hit them.'"

Visit Egypt today, as a group of American business leaders recently did, and you will see a similar dynamic playing out. Once again, Egyptians are enraged by the violence and extremist rhetoric of the Muslim Brotherhood. And once again, they are frustrated that the U.S. seems incapable of appreciating the gravity of the threat the Muslim Brotherhood poses to a stable Egypt and to a safe and prosperous Middle East.

For a brief moment, the Brotherhood had a chance to prove its detractors wrong. The Arab Spring had come to Cairo and, on January 25, 2011, a quarter of a million Egyptians flooded Tahrir Square to call for democracy in the world's most populous Arab nation. Following 18 days of protests--in which 900 people died and another 6,000 were injured--Mubarak stepped down after three decades in power. Jubilant Egyptians filled the streets, and in relatively short order, Egypt held its first democratic elections.

The victor? The Muslim Brotherhood and their presidential candidate, Mohammed Morsi. Egypt had made a transition to democracy. Or so it seemed.

After all, since its founding by an Egyptian schoolteacher in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood had spent decades establishing itself as a respectable and effective community organization. Despite remaining largely underground, the Brotherhood built schools and clinics, winning the support of many in Egypt's middle class. By 2005, the Brotherhood had captured a fifth of the seats in Egypt's Parliament.

All along, the Brotherhood's objective has always been clear: to implement Sharia law as a way to organize government and all aspects of life. It has operated under a five-part credo:

Allah is our objective; the Qur'an is our constitution; the prophet is our leader; Jihad is our way; death for the sake of Allah is our wish.

To that end, Brotherhood members targeted "imperialist" British operations in Egypt and traveled to Israel to wage *jihad*. They distributed Nazi propaganda. In 1948, a Brotherhood member assassinated Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi; Brotherhood members similarly tried to assassinate Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and were implicated in the assassination of Anwar Sadat, the predecessor Mubarak referenced to Pelletreau. In 1988, Hamas--recognized as a terror organization by the U.S. and recently by Egypt--was created as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood.

As Morsi and his party took power, the world waited to see which it would be: the Brotherhood of schools and clinics or the Brotherhood of bombings and assassinations?

Almost immediately, Morsi proved, as they say in Egypt, that "a dog's tail will never straighten out." With Egypt's high unemployment rate, soaring poverty and illiteracy rates, bloated and inefficient bureaucracy, and security threats on its borders and in the Sinai, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood instead concentrated on implementing harsh Sharia law in a previously secular political order. As garbage piled up in the streets, Morsi forced through a constitution--in violation of protocol--that limited religious expression, quashed press freedom, and granted himself legislative power with no judiciary oversight. With his party, he rejected election of women and Coptic Christians for the president's post, subscribing to a political platform warning against "burdening women with duties against their nature or role in the family."

Outside Egypt he drove the Brotherhood's pan-Islamic aspiration that would erase existing nation-state borders by supporting like-minded terrorist organizations. Instead of reaching out to political opponents, Morsi further polarized Egypt by trying to constitutionally ban former members of Mubarak's government from running for office or even voting.

Even Morsi supporters revolted. After a year of protests, the Muslim Brotherhood was unseated, Morsi was jailed, and the military took over, installing General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as President. The world--especially the West--moved on.

In the four years since the Arab Spring, the Egyptian people have lived through a four-year dissolution of parliament, three different presidents and over 9,000 protests. In 2014, the Brotherhood allegedly burned 40 churches, and Morsi allies were fingered for burning down an orphanage. Meanwhile, Sisi has accused the Brotherhood of sparking recent violence in the Sinai Province and the deaths of at least 30 Egyptians at the hand of the Ansar Bait al-Maqdis terror group with the collaboration of Hamas.

Today, with ISIS in Iraq; Russia in Ukraine; Boko Haram in Nigeria; Syria, Libya and Yemen in chaos; and Iran potentially on the brink of acquiring nuclear weapons, Egypt has

understandably receded from the headlines. But Egypt's anger toward the Muslim Brotherhood--and its dissatisfaction with the way the West has overlooked Egypt in the years following Tahrir Square--still festers.

"The Muslim Brotherhood is the mother of all evils," an Egyptian declared to the visiting business delegation in Cairo. "They hijacked our region." Added another, "They export their ideology around the world and are the ideological root of most Islamic terrorist organizations."

As the best-selling Egyptian novelist Alaa al-Aswany declares, the Muslim Brotherhood "are not the peaceful, democratic force that they said they were for 40 years. They are a group of terrorists and fascists."

What is the U.S. response to all this?

An ill-advised State Department meeting last month with representatives of the Brotherhood--only to have the Brotherhood, shortly afterward, call for "a long, uncompromising *Jihad*." The Egyptian government is understandably furious.

Furthermore, with U.S. suspension of military aid--even withholding scheduled deliveries--as well as seeming indifference to the vast regulatory, economic and education reform undertaken by the Sisi government, it is no wonder Egypt's officials question the clarity if not the logic of U.S. policy towards Egypt and the region. Thirty years of close alliance between U.S. and Egypt are now being put to the test. Other countries, friends and foes, are watching carefully.

So if meeting with an organization considered terrorists by the Egyptian people is presumably not the right approach, what would constitute good diplomacy? What can and should the U.S. do to repair relations with the Egyptian public and put Egypt on a path toward growth and freedom? What should the U.S. do to protect its vital interests in Egypt and in the region?

Here are three suggestions:

First, the U.S. should remain committed to peace and security in Egypt. That means declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group and fully acknowledging the very real threat that it poses to the future of the country and the greater region. As the world's largest and most populous Arab nation of 90 million, Egypt has influence and ties throughout Africa and the Middle East that are vital to U.S. interests. Just last week, Sisi called for an Arab coalition to unite against ISIS. Egypt's centrality in the Arab world; its large, U.S.-equipped military; and its strong will to defeat Islamic extremism will serve U.S. interests well. Accordingly, the U.S. should take steps to affirm and encourage Egypt's value and leadership in this regard. As former national security adviser Stephen Hadley puts it, "Egypt

is even more strategically important now than in the past because stabilizing the Middle East is crucial and we don't have a lot of partners to help."

Second, the U.S. should help Egypt help itself. Sisi's government is committed to boosting economic growth. He has announced major infrastructure projects, including a second Suez Canal, in an attempt to bring unemployment down to 10 percent in the next five years. He has announced regulatory reforms aimed at attracting foreign capital, including substantial projects in the energy, transportation, technology, manufacturing and education sectors. Egypt, it seems, is taking ownership of its economic problems and steps to address them. The U.S. can seize on this momentum by boosting economic aid (just \$150 million of the \$1.45 billion approved for 2015 goes for economic support), assisting in regulatory reform and encouraging American businesses to take advantage of the vast emerging Egyptian market.

Third, there is an opportunity for the U.S. to take on a leadership role as Middle East nations begin to converge on a series of interests. Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are focusing their energies on sustained security, peace and economic growth in the region. While offsetting extremism, terrorism and Iran as well as these nations' detractors and unifiers, even greater dividends await this opportunity if seized (for example, driving the much-coveted peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority).

This is a unique and unprecedented dynamic. Led correctly, it can change the face of the Middle East as we know it. The U.S. should step forward and lead this opportunity to the benefit of the entire world. In doing so, it should make Egypt its partner.

Accomplishing these objectives won't be easy. But as the journalist and foreign policy expert David Ignatius recently wrote in the *Washington Post*, "The way out of this blind alley isn't to ignore Egypt but to help it regain power and pride."

On March 22, Egyptians will flood the streets again. This time, millions will head to the polls to make their voices heard in a long-awaited parliamentary elections. The Egyptian people's commitment to democracy is as real and riveting today as it was during the Arab Spring, and they want our support. Egypt should not have to bang its fists on the table for the U.S. to realize that.

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