

Executing Morsi, ex-President of Egypt, is not a good idea, believes Nehad Ismail

On Saturday 16th May an Egyptian Court pronounced death sentences on ousted president Mohammed Morsi and more than 100 other people over a mass prison break in 2011. Mohamed Morsi was deposed by the military in July 2013 during huge street protests against his rule and he has been imprisoned ever since. Morsi is already serving a 20-year prison term for ordering the arrest and torture of protesters while in power. Egypt's religious authorities will now have to give their opinion before the sentence can be carried out. Morsi's supporters from his Muslim Brotherhood (MB) movement have described the charges against him as "farcical". The Arab and Muslim worlds were stunned by the sentence. Even secular people opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood were shocked by the severity of the sentence. The court will pronounce its final decision on 2nd June 2015.

The European Union and the United States have denounced the death sentence. The EU said the penalty stemmed from a flawed trial and was "cruel and inhumane" "The court decision to seek the death penalty... was taken at the end of a mass trial that was not in line with Egypt's obligations under international law," the EU's top diplomat Federica Mogherini said in a statement. The US expressed "deep concern" after the verdict.

Human rights group Amnesty International said the trial was a "charade" and based on "void procedures". "Condemning Mohamed Morsi to death after more grossly unfair trials shows a complete disregard for human rights ... he was held for months incommunicado without judicial oversight and that he didn't have a lawyer".

In a further development Turkish newspaper Takvim reported that the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is seeking to save ousted Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi from the death

penalty handed down to him. The newspaper reported that Erdogan, with Saudi and Qatari mediation, is seeking to move Morsi from Egypt to Turkey. It remains to be seen whether a deal can be worked out between the parties.

To put the death sentence into some kind of context, we need to remember that the MB won the November 2011 elections by a nearly 50% of the vote. In the presidential election on 24th June 2012 Morsi picked up 13.2 million votes out of just over 26 million, giving him about 51 per cent of the vote. His competitor, Ahmed Shafik, the last prime minister under Hosni Mubarak, received 12.3 million. More than 800,000 ballots were invalidated.

Having been declared the fifth President of Egypt Morsi swiftly moved to get rid of the Army chief Field Marshall Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, and replaced him with the younger General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. Morsi cancelled a constitutional declaration aimed at curbing presidential powers. To most secular and liberal Egyptians, Morsi was another totalitarian dictator. Morsi made many wild promises but failed to deliver. He promised to achieve many of them in his 100 days. Many observers noted at the time that Morsi was acting as the boss of a political party rather than a president of the entire country. The writing was on the wall.

In November 2012 he stripped constitutional court judges of all powers. Secular and liberal Egyptians felt excluded and disenfranchised. Once again the people protested and denounced Morsi as the new Mubarak. The economic situation got worse, prices of essential commodities shot up, the country suffered repeated power cuts and fuel shortages. The protests grew and grew culminating on 30th June 2013 with millions of Egyptians assembling in Tahrir Square. According to Koert Debeuf in his book "inside the Arab Revolution" between 15 to 30 million Egyptians took to the streets. The army intervened backed by the liberals, the Copts and Al-Azhar Authority (the highest religious authority in the Arab and Muslim Sunni world). Morsi was removed from office by the army.

The Egyptian and foreign activists and politicians were outraged by the death sentence and warned of dire consequences if the death sentences were carried out. A number of Middle Eastern journalists warned that a civil war would break out in Egypt. It would lead Egypt into the abyss. Islamists warned of a violent backlash and nationwide protest. Such warnings might succeed in forcing the government to back down.

Even ISIS (DAESH) has entered the fray by denouncing the death sentences and urged the followers of Morsi to take up arms and launch a Jihad against Al Sisi. According to a recent report by Middle East Monitor, members of the Sinai branch of ISIS have been reported as pouring scorn on the members of the Muslim Brotherhood in the aftermath of the court's decision to sentence Muhammad Morsi and other Brotherhood leaders to death by publishing two pictures next to each other one of them features the leaders of the Brotherhood standing behind bars while the other features elements of the Sinai branch of ISIS standing over the body of an army soldier they had just killed. The combined pictures bore a caption saying: "The might of Jihad versus the subservience of peacefulness. You choose".

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi is facing mounting pressure to pardon Morsi or at least to commute the death sentence to a term of imprisonment to save Egypt from a long period of instability and bloodshed, and avoid a gigantic PR disaster.

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