

# President Obama Boosted Muslim Brotherhood

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Dec 15—President Barack Obama has boosted the Muslim Brotherhood as a “moderate” force within “political Islam” from the beginning of his first term in office.

That policy grew, and continued, until late 2012, when the Mohammed Morsi/Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt launched a brutal crackdown on political dissenters and refused to create a broader ruling coalition.

Even after tens of millions of Egyptians turned out on the streets of Cairo and other cities to demand Morsi’s ouster in June 2013, the Obama White House continued to pursue ties with Muslim Brotherhood forces within the Syrian opposition, in Libya, and elsewhere in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region.

The Obama Administration, in pursuit of the President’s personal commitment to regime change in Damascus, looked to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood to anchor a post-Bashar Assad government, well after the

Morsi disaster had played out in Egypt.

Turkey’s ruling AKP Party, another Muslim Brotherhood-allied institution, has enjoyed Obama’s enthusiastic support for years, bolstered by the U.S. President’s intimate ties to current Turkish President Recep Erdogan. Erdogan and the AKP have been President Obama’s closest partners in the Muslim world in the drive to oust Assad.

## Dennis Ross Fudges

On Dec. 10, 2015, Ambassador Dennis Ross, who served on President Obama’s National Security Council during the first term, was asked a pointed question from *Executive Intelligence Review* about the Obama embrace of the Muslim Brothers. The exchange took place at a public forum, co-sponsored by Marymount Manhattan College and the American Iranian Council (AIC) in New York City.

*EIR* asked: “In 2010, when you were working at



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*Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi (at the microphone), and Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood’s Deputy Supreme Guide Khairat al-Shater (right).*



the National Security Council, you worked on implementing Presidential Study Directive 11, dealing with prospects for the coming instability in the Middle East and North Africa. This study began in the late summer of 2010, some months prior to the outbreak of what came to be called the Arab Spring. While the document remains classified, along with Presidential Policy Directive 13, which I understand was the final product from PSD 11, David Ignatius wrote a series of columns on the policy, indicating that President Obama viewed the Muslim Brotherhood as a moderate, possibly progressive force within political Islam, and that the Administration adopted a policy of closer cooperation with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Syria. FOIA documents released in the last two years show that you, along with Gayle Smith, Samantha Power, and Michael McFaul, were the four project coordinators for the PSD 11/PPD 13 work. What can you tell us about that process and the policy that emerged, and how would you view it, in hindsight today?"

Ross, clearly taken aback by the question, went into a long, evasive, roundabout explanation, claiming that the real objective of the Administration policy was to encourage "pluralism" and "reform" in the Middle East. He ultimately admitted that the policy did support working with the Muslim Brotherhood, if it was committed to non-violence and was willing to accept a "pluralist order" in the region; although he denied that PSD 11 or PPD 13 explicitly named the Muslim Brotherhood.

He admitted that there was a clear perception throughout the Middle East region during the height of the so-called Arab Spring, that President Obama had embraced the Muslim Brotherhood and was responsible for the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak. When President Obama hesitated to criticize President Morsi, Ross conceded, the impression that President Obama was "partial to the Muslim Brotherhood" took on a life of its own.

David Ignatius, writing in the *Washington Post* on March 6, 2011, just days after President Obama signed PPD 13, presented a somewhat more honest account of the Obama Administration's schemes for the MENA region. He quoted directly from PSD 11, as well as from Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes.

Clearly he had been given a White House script and access to at least portions of the classified Presidential Study Directive. Writing under the headline "Obama's

Low-Key Strategy for the Middle East," Ignatius reported that the Administration had quietly put through a dramatic policy change, in response to the events in Tunisia and Egypt, and the beginnings of ferment in Libya. The new Obama policy was to back the revolts against the former U.S.-allied regimes, to insist that the opposition be rapidly brought into the transition, that changes had to occur rapidly, starting with the release of political prisoners from jails, and that presidential elections should be held first parliamentary elections or work on constitutional reforms.

In the Egyptian case, Ignatius reported that the Muslim Brotherhood would be a clear part of the "reform" process, noting that the Brotherhood announced it would only run candidates in a third of the parliamentary districts, and would not run a candidate for president. The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party broke both of those promises early on.

### **FOIA Documents Tell Much More**

Through an ongoing Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) law suit against the U.S. State Department, *EIR* has learned a great deal more about the Obama Administration's policy shift. All told, 98 emails from a number of White House, NSC and State Department officials between August 2010 and February 2011, detailed the extensive deliberations that went into the response to President Obama's PSD 11. They confirmed that Dennis Ross, Gayle Smith, Samantha Power, and Michael McFaul, all at the time senior staff at the NSC, were in charge of the policy review.

While the Administration has refused, to date, to declassify PSD 11 and PPD 13, a separate segment of the FOIA suit seeking all State Department documents on the Muslim Brotherhood, revealed precisely how pivotal the Brotherhood was to the "new" Obama Administration policy towards the Arab Spring.

A State Department cable dated June 30, 2011 from the Near East Asia Office of Press and Public Diplomacy (NEA/PPD) acknowledged that the U.S. welcomed dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood, on the basis that they were part of the non-violent and peaceful opposition, and that the organization had a large number of women in their ranks. The document acknowledged that U.S. contact with the Muslim Brotherhood "has occurred on and off since the 1980s." But under the new policy, the document continued, the United States will now be in touch with Muslim Broth-



*Mohammed Sawan, head of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, and an interlocutor of the Obama Administration.*

erhood members who are not elected members of national parliament.

A second cable from the same day reported that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, while traveling in Budapest, Hungary, took questions from reporters and read from a newly produced State Department fact-sheet on the changed relations with the Muslim Brotherhood. The document stated “There is no U.S. legal prohibition against dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood itself, which long ago renounced violence as a means to achieve political change in Egypt and which is not regarded by Washington as a foreign terrorist organization.”

An internal email circulating the same day in the State Department’s press office made clear that the question to Secretary Clinton was planted, to allow for the policy change to be announced (“FW: MB-S got the question at her presser today”). The next day, another State Department cable distributed an article from the Turkish daily *Hurriyet*: “*Hurriyet* reports MB spokesperson Muhammad Saad al-Katani said, ‘We would be happy to set up such contacts with all, because such ties will lead us to clear our vision.’ Signaling the relationship between the MB and the US will grow more over the coming period.”

A heavily redacted State Department cable from Embassy Cairo dated March 2, 2012, “Subject: Muslim Brotherhood Businessmen Seek Common Ground with U.S. Investors,” detailed a Feb. 19 meeting hosted by U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Anne Patterson with “business and economic leaders from the MB/Freedom & Justice Party and major U.S. investors to foster dialog between the groups.”

On April 1, 2012, a ‘Sensitive but Unclassified’ cable from Tripoli, Libya, reported that the next day, a steering committee member of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood would be meeting with embassy officials in Benghazi, in preparation for a delegation of Libyan Muslim Brotherhood members traveling to Washington to attend a Carnegie Endowment conference on “Islamists in Power.” The cable noted that the Muslim Brotherhood had recently formed a political party, the Justice and Construction Party, and the State Department anticipated “they would likely have strong showing in the upcoming elections, based on strength of its network in Libya, its broad support, and its being a truly national party. 25% of members are women.”

Indeed, on April 4, Deputy Secretary of State William Burns met in Washington with members of the Muslim Brotherhood from Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, and other countries in the MENA region. A section of the memo, prepared for the Burns meeting, under “Points to Raise,” cited “Commitment to working with Islamists” on the basis of freedom of religion, noting “Islamists that win elections will have to work with liberal parties to write a constitution and govern in an inclusive fashion.”

In describing the Carnegie conference, the State Department cable, classified ‘Confidential,’ noted: “Twelve high-level representatives of and individuals affiliated with Islamist parties from Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, and Libya are attending the conference,” and “those from Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan + 2 Carnegie officials will come to Dept. for roundtable with Burns 4/4.” The remainder of the lengthy document was redacted.

One reason for the attempt to cloak the Muslim Brotherhood visit in semi-secrecy was that a number of the participants were on State Department and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) terrorist watch lists, barring them from entering the United States. In several instances, the State Department got DHS to over-ride the watch lists, and State Department employees met

the arriving Muslim Brotherhood delegates at the Customs stations when they arrived for the Carnegie event.

Cable 687 from Embassy Cairo to Secretary of State Clinton, dated May 10, 2012, detailed a presentation by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Deputy Supreme Guide Khairat al-Shater on May 7 at the American Chamber of Commerce. The State Department report characterized al-Shater as "a highly successful businessman despite 12 years in prison during the Mubarak era," who "remains one of the most influential MB/FJP advisors on economic and business issues." The cable concluded that his speech before the American Chamber of Commerce "reflected the inclusive and pragmatic approach the MB/FJP have sought to present in their effort to ease business and investor fears over an Islamist-led government."

On June 18, Ambassador Patterson sent a 'Classified' cable to Secretary Clinton, reporting that, while votes were still being tallied, the embassy was certain that Mohammed Morsi, the candidate of the Freedom and Justice Party/MB, had won the presidential election.

Two days later, in another 'Classified' cable, Patterson expressed concerns about security for U.S. embassy personnel, based on the widely held view that the United States had backed Morsi's presidential candidacy, and that there was a possibility of vote fraud and a deployment of the Egyptian military onto the streets to block Morsi's victory.

The Obama Administration took a similar approach to the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, with Deputy Secretary of State Burns meeting on July 14, 2012 with the head of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Sawan. The preparatory memorandum, labeled 'Sensitive but Unclassified' (it was subsequently classified 'Confidential' on Jan. 12, 2014, in the midst of the *EIR* FOIA suit), noted that "MB was banned for 3 decades, and returned last year after years in exile in Europe and US, selected new leadership, and began to plan for active role in Libya's political future. Libyan Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Peace and Construction Party, headed by former political prisoner Sawan, created in 3/12."

A lengthy cable 1098 from Embassy Tripoli to Secretary of State Clinton dated Sept. 11, 2012,—the day Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other American officials were killed in a pre-planned heavily armed attack on the U.S. mission and a CIA annex in Benghazi,—contained some stunning revelations about

the security conditions in the east of Libya. Under a subhead "Militia commanders discuss the Muslim Brotherhood, Jibril, their political aspirations, the economy and security," the memo described a series of talks that Ambassador Stevens had on Sept. 9 with local militia commanders who "discussed the very fluid relationships and blurry lines they say define membership in Benghazi-based brigades under the February 17, Libya Shield, and SSC umbrellas."

The militia leaders claimed to maintain control over the Libyan Armed Forces Chief of Staff Yousef Mangoush, who relied on them to secure eastern Libya, and in return, provided them with weapons, ammunition and other equipment. "Some or all support MB's JCP candidate, Electricity Minister Awad Al Barasi for PM because if elected he'd appoint Feb 17 Brigade Commander Fawza Bukatif as Def Min, which would open Def Ministry and other security ministries to plum-appointments for favored brigade commanders and give Feb 17 and Libya Shield tacit control of armed forces. Criticized US support of NFA leader and PM candidate Jibril."

The memo warned: "If Jibril won, they said, they would not continue to guarantee security in Benghazi, a critical function they asserted they were currently providing." It concluded, "Growing problems in security would discourage foreign investment and lead to stagnation in eastern Libya, but USG could play a role by pressuring US biz to invest in Benghazi."

It would be hours after that cable was transmitted back to Washington that al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorists from Ansar al-Sharia launched their assault on the U.S. compounds. Ansar al-Sharia had a seat on the Public Safety Committee of Benghazi, headed by the very militia officials and Muslim Brotherhood representatives who had threatened Ambassador Stevens just 48 hours earlier.

### **Still Covering Up Colossal Failure**

Even after the Egyptian fiasco of Muslim Brotherhood rule, and the cold blooded murders of Ambassador Stevens and three other American officials in Benghazi, President Obama continued to court the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly in Syria, where they made up a core element of the Islamist forces, armed by Washington to overthrow the Assad government.

To this day, there has been no Administration repudiation of that horribly failed policy,—just more of the same coverup and lies.

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