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# Articles

27 JULY  
2021

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July 27, 2021

## The Egyptian Media that Morsi Had Sought

Khaled Ashour

In the midst of the controversy about the Egyptian media during the reign of President Mohamed Morsi, it is significant to give my testimony as a coordinator of the media strategy team within the Presidential Advisory Body, one of the support and decision-making units at the Presidency of the Republic.

This article addresses Morsi's diligent effort to reform the Egyptian media, and shows how he prepared his professional team in the media file, although time was too short to reach the desired results.

This article is a testimony to highlight the will and approach to reforming the Egyptian media, within the framework of the vision of President Mohamed Morsi in this regard.

Of course, these limited words will not answer all the expected questions about the media in Morsi's era, refute all suspicions, or reveal all the mysteries. However, it is a testimony on the reality of what happened then, that sheds light on some aspects of the issue that have not been addressed before. It monitors the reality, facts and features that might be integrated with other testimonies in order to draw and analyze the media scene in the era of Morsi; and judgment of the whole matter is ultimately left to history.

Late President Morsi came to power in Egypt in the aftermath of a popular revolution in response to a people yearning for freedom. By virtue of his upbringing, Morsi loved freedom and believed that the right to expression and dialogue are among the highest values. Also, Egypt is not isolated from the world, which is governed by international charters and norms, making freedom of expression the most significant indicator of democracy. Taking the values of the January Revolution in mind, Morsi wanted to present a new model in the exercise of public freedoms worthy of the Egyptian people, their revolution and civilization.

Early after assuming power, he met with journalists, pledging to not break a pen or shut down a TV channel. He also secured protection for journalists, to integrate them into the battle of revolution and construction, and contain opponents, as well as drawing the political and media features of the nascent civilian rule.

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However, the fact of the rise of media professionals during the Mubarak era, the practices of pressure groups, and the flow of Gulf money, targeting termination of the revolution was stronger. In this regard, Morsi's media advisory team received confirmed information that \$ 6 billion entered Egypt for the benefit of five satellite channels to employ them in working against the revolution and the rule of Morsi.

He assigned his development advisor to form a team of media experts (more than fifteen experts and academics together with further advisory circles) that was given three assignments to fulfill and then submit to the Presidency and decision-making bodies:

**First:** development of a media strategy for the Egyptian state according to a new vision and the spirit of the January Revolution.

**Second:** Reconsidering the laws regulating the media.

**Third:** Development of a vision for structuring the state's media.

With the sharp polarization and hate discourse, there was a fourth assignment, namely, to deal with the media situation as a "crisis management" team.

#### Media System and Structure

The team held open sessions and workshops, and the team of experts developed a new media system, based on freedom of expression within the framework of the law, social responsibility, and media codes of honor, with a balance between the people and the state, where it supported the people's right to expression and protected their basic freedoms from the state overreach, and from the oppression of authorities. At the same time, it protected the state, its institutions, and the Constitution via the force of law.

The proposed media system was keen on restructuring the media, its maps, and its roles, away from focusing it in the hands of the power, and ensuring geographical extension, diversity and specialization, where it did not distinguish between the people of Upper Egypt, Sinai, Marsa Matrouh and Cairo in conveying their messages. This was aimed at empowering the people through the media, and sharing them with respect to rights and responsibilities. The advisory team also developed a

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vision for restructuring the media: via combating control of interest groups, with the aim of achievement of popular empowerment.

Thus, the media management system, for the first time, would empower the people, away from the one-way approach that had been adopted before, with respect to the media message, with permanent interactive communication process that produces constructive dialogues and raise level of awareness. Under the military rule in Egypt: Gamal Abdel Nasser completely controlled the media; Sadat only allowed a limited margin of freedom, to present himself to the West; and Mubarak allowed some businessmen to establish and own some media outlets but 'under the authority of the state', to diversify forms of the so-called "authority media". In fact, the media situation under Sisi completely exposed the military approach to the media, manifested in Sisi's words, "Do not ever hear anyone but me!" a slogan that has regulates the policy of controlling the media.

Since July 1952, the Egyptian media never saw the freedom that was provided by the proposed media system that was prepared during the democratically elected civilian President Mohamed Morsi's one year in power.

In addition to the new media system (that was aborted by the Sisi 2013 coup), and structuring the Egyptian media, Morsi's media team developed a vision for the National Media Authority, and developed a draft law to regulate audio, visual and readable broadcasting, which was submitted to the Shura Council's Media Committee for study before discussion and ratification.

The presidential advisory body had tireless work teams in several fields, such as decision-making and support, dividing work between urgent, medium-term and long-term duties; drawing up policies in accordance with development strategies and proposing operational procedures.

The people and the state alike had a balanced share in the media system within the vision of late President Mohamed Morsi, where the media had a great role in the battle for development, to help build a political system based on pluralism and alternation of power, and an economic system based on social justice and equal opportunities, with the aim of achieving national partnership in power and wealth.

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But the Egyptian media at that time abandoned its principal role and turned a blind eye to development, and chose to disseminate and exaggerate crises and stir up rumors created by its financiers, to destroy the first democratic experiment that was based on freedom, pluralism and diversity.

Today, the Egyptian people that revolted on 25 January 2011 in order to gain its freedom, are unfortunately suffering under the military rule that silences all opinions, kills and imprisons journalists and media professionals, prevents citizens from freedom of expression and imprisons them for the opinion they express.

Even in light of the Corona Pandemic crisis, doctors are imprisoned for criticizing the regime's policies in managing the crisis, and foreign correspondents and reporters were expelled simply for expressing opinions that do not conform to the whims of the authority, whether on social media or other media means.

In fact, Morsi alone paid the price of a weak civil society and a popular backer that did not possess any means of strength, nor the competencies needed for the transition from revolution to the state, due to the military's erosion of the civil society for decades, or the self-ruining practiced by political groups due to their failure of management and planning.