

The Commentator
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Morsi sweet-talks the West
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For decades, some of the Arab region's leading figures have sent sharply different messages to the West than to their own people, hoping to secure the best of both worlds from their rhetorical duplicity.

To U.S. and other Western leaders, they portrayed themselves as tolerant and peace-loving, interested in curbing violence and solving problems. To their people and the region, they ruled with iron fists, broached little dissent, pursued terror, and advanced a harsh ideological and operational anti-Westernism.

Palestinian Liberation Organization Leader Yasser Arafat was a good example. Starting at least with the Oslo process, he reassured U.S. leaders that he was committed to peace with Israel. But, to the Palestinian people, he preached jihad and portrayed peace as but a respite in an endless war with Israel.

Similarly, Syria's Bashar al-Assad suggested to U.S. leaders that, under the right conditions, he'd make peace with Israel and turn toward the West. But he said no such thing when speaking to his own people, his allies in Tehran, or the terrorist groups that he sponsored.

Now it looks like Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi is adopting a similar approach and, not surprisingly, his efforts are evoking the same optimistic reaction from his gullible Western suitors.

In a November 28 interview with *TIME*, Morsi was all Western in rhetoric, all moderate in style, all reassuring in tone. His responses were tailor-made for a U.S. audience that wants to believe that governance (by Morsi or, more broadly, the Muslim Brotherhood from which he hails) invariably leads to moderation.

Unfortunately, the beliefs that he professed with *TIME* contrast sharply with the words he utters and the activities he pursues at home and across the region.

Morsi told *TIME*:

“We're pushing in all directions, trying to say to the people of the world and convince the governments and the leaders that we should live at peace. Conflict does not lead to stability in the world... To have a new culture, international culture, respecting individual countries and people's cultures, their local ones... A culture of cooperation, a culture of stopping war, bloodshed.”

Really?

During the recent war between Israel and Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood “thanked Allah for the death of Israelis killed by rockets, and called for jihad against Israel,” according to the Middle East Media Research Institute.

One article on the Brotherhood website urged, “[W]e now have no choice but to take the initiative and attack [the Zionists] in their home... We have no choice but to give serious thought to how we can attack the Zionists and liberate Palestine.”

“The bloody and racist history of the Zionist entity is known to all,” another article on the website declared. The Jews, it said, “are warmongers who corrupt the land [and] murder prophets, preachers and decent people.” Still another article described “Zionists” as “the scum of the earth, akin to apes.”

Morsi told *TIME*:

“I’m very keen on having true freedom of expression. True freedom of faith. And free practice of religious faith... Egyptians are determined to [move] forward within the path of freedom and democracy... We are keen in Egypt, and I am personally keen right now, on maintaining freedom, democracy, justice and social justice. The Muslim Brotherhood do [sic] not say anything different from that.”

Really?

In response to the recent anti-Muslim video – Innocence of Muslims – that caused a stir, Morsi said he asked President Obama “to put an end to such behavior,” Egypt’s Cabinet asked Washington to take legal action against the perpetrators, and the Muslim Brotherhood called for laws against “assaults on the sanctities of all heavenly religions.”

Morsi told *TIME*:

“I know perfectly what it means to have separation between the three powers – executive power, legislative power and the judiciary. This is the main concept about a state based on institutions. The people are the original source of power. The President represents the executive power, and the President is elected by the people.”

Really?

In late November, Morsi decreed that his decisions are not reviewable by the nation’s judiciary, clearly elevating him above the other “powers” in Egypt’s system and making him what critics call a “new Pharaoh.”

This week, Morsi’s supporters blocked the judges on Egypt’s Supreme Constitutional Court from entering their building, preventing them from ruling on the legitimacy of a body that’s writing Egypt’s new constitution. Meanwhile, the Institute for Middle Eastern Democracy reports that “Egypt’s ruling party is paying gangs of thugs to beat up men who are protesting against

Mohamed Morsi and his latest decree giving himself sweeping new powers, and also to sexually assault women involved in the protests.”

We have witnessed this charade before, and we should not be fooled. When it comes to Morsi and other would-be authoritarians, pay attention *not* to what they tell the West. See what they say and do at home.

Lawrence J. Haas was Communications Director and Press Secretary for Vice President Al Gore. He writes widely about foreign and domestic affairs and is the author of ‘Sound the Trumpet: The United States and Human Rights Promotion’ (just out from Rowman & Littlefield).