

# COMMENTARY

No. 140

Thursday, 15 August 2013

## **Mohammad Morsi, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela: Is there a Comparison?**

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A feverish debate is taking place in Egypt and internet forums about characterizing President Mohammad Morsi, now in an undisclosed prison, as a “Nelson Mandela” or “Mahatma Gandhi” in the Egyptian context. Part of the strategy, which the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is most likely spearheading, is to render Morsi an iconic symbol of democracy and freedom comparable to Mandela and Gandhi.

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate from Yemen Tawakkol Karman has also been involved in the debate, supporting the notion that Morsi is a Mandela-like figure. She has published an article in *Foreign Policy* (FP), entitled “Morsi is the Arab World’s Mandela.” On her Facebook page the FP cover photo of Morsi appears with a halo over his head. Karman and I interacted online, and being a passionate Gandhian and someone who has lived in Egypt for four years, I decided to put the matter to rest. Mohamed Morsi is not the Arab world’s Mandela or Gandhi. Far from it.

Yes, he was democratically elected. Yes, General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi unjustly ousted Morsi and detained him. Yes, Morsi should be tried with due process, or released immediately. But, to call Morsi a Mandela or Gandhi is a very strenuous stretch, to say the least.

An important aspect of each individual’s vision, policies, and personal philosophies is inclusiveness, as opposed to exclusiveness, as well as the unwavering commitment to the holistic components of pluralist [secular] democracy. That means democracy is not just about elections. It must also encompass inclusive policies in a pluralist society, respect for human rights, judicial integrity and autonomy, freedoms and rights granted to citizens, civil society, and the media, and policies that unite, rather than divide the masses. Morsi’s administration fell extremely short of these criteria for a healthy democracy.

Below is a table that articulates each individual's – Mandela, Gandhi, and Morsi – education, environment of activism, time in jail and its symbolism, and track record in political and religious leadership. The comparative analysis speaks for itself.

## MANDELA

	<b>Education</b>	<b>Environment of Activism</b>	<b>Jail Time &amp; Symbolism</b>	<b>Political Leadership</b>	<b>Religious Leadership</b>
<b>Nelson Mandela</b>	Earned B.A.; aspired for law degree, tried three times, but failed due to intense political activism throughout his youth (to fight against Apartheid)	Lived in Apartheid-era South Africa; joined political activist groups since his youth to fight against Apartheid;  Apartheid-era South Africa (SA) was not a democracy: it was a brutally segregated rule of white minorities over an oppressed black majority, and a third category of "coloureds" (mainly Indians);  Mandela was a principal actor in facilitating SA's post-Apartheid democratization	Brutally oppressive Apartheid regime imprisoned Mandela for 27 years; he became an icon for the anti-Apartheid movement, central figure of the African National Congress (ANC), even while in prison	Mandela was elected South Africa's first ever black President AFTER he was released from prison in the early 1990s; he served one term then retired into private life;  Mandela has always promoted ethnic/racial unity, coexistence, and cooperation in post-Apartheid SA  This could not have happened without the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (forgiving the brutal crimes of the Apartheid	Mandela has <i>universal</i> appeal and respect, regardless of religious and ethnic/racial identity; his activism has not involved religion, and only focused on ending the Apartheid regime and structure in SA; he has fought for unity and harmonious coexistence of all religions and ethnic/racial groups in post-Apartheid SA;  ANC activism has involved people of all colours, genders, ethnicities, occupations, and religions, including Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus; in

police state)

general, it's a very *inclusive* framework

## MAHATMA GANDHI

	<b>Education</b>	<b>Environment of Activism</b>	<b>Jail Time &amp; Symbolism</b>	<b>Political Leadership</b>	<b>Religious Leadership</b>
<b>Mahatma Gandhi</b>	United Kingdom (UK) - educated lawyer, practicing attorney	British colonial India: Gandhi was educated in the UK, lived in India, and his first major assignment as an attorney was in South Africa; he began nonviolent activism against Apartheid (late 1800s) in South Africa; then he returned to India and fought against British colonial rule in India; Gandhi and the Congress Party leaders aspired to create a pluralist secular democracy in post-British India;  Gandhi was a principal actor in facilitating India's post-colonial democratization	British colonial power imprisoned Gandhi numerous times; he was always in and out of jail in India; his wife and personal secretary died while in "house arrest" (in Pune); Gandhi spent several years in Yerwada Central Jail (Pune); Gandhi even taught inmates the art of nonviolent civil disobedience and noncooperation;  *Watch the Ben Kingsley film "Gandhi"	Gandhi was a spiritual leader of India's Congress Party, which led the fight against British colonial rule in India, but he never accepted or desired a higher political leadership role;  He was a very shrewd strategist in politics, esp. against the British in India; but, he never held political office	Gandhi called himself every religious identity in India, and promoted human rights for Dalits ("Untouchables"), women, and minorities; he was a universalist, a peace activist, and embraced all religions; he studied all major Indian religions; and promoted religious unity and harmony; his vision and policies were always <i>inclusive</i> ;  He was assassinated by a Hindu extremist after the Partition of Pakistan

**MOHAMMED MORSI**

	<b>Education</b>	<b>Environment of Activism</b>	<b>Jail Time &amp; Symbolism</b>	<b>Political Leadership</b>	<b>Religious Leadership</b>
<b>Mohammad Morsi</b>	B.A. and Masters in Engineering from Cairo University; Ph.D. in Materials Science from University of Southern California	Morsi has been an active Muslim Brotherhood (MB) member in Egypt during Hosni Mubarak's presidency; Egypt has never seen true democracy, but the 2011 revolution changed this trend; Morsi served as member of Egypt's parliament (2000-2005) as an independent candidate (since MB was banned); he became president of the Freedom and Justice Party (MB-affiliated political party) in 2011; MB openly	Mubarak regime jailed Morsi and other MB members on 28 January 2011, but released 2 days later (30 Jan.), varying accounts of a jailbreak from the Wadi el-Natroun Prison; after run-off election in June 2012, Morsi won presidency in Egypt's first democratic elections; On 30 June 2013, a counter-Morsi government protest movement took to Tahrir Square (after grievances against Morsi's leadership); 3 July 2013, Gen. Abdel Fatah al-Sisi announced that Morsi has been	Morsi served as Egypt's first post-2011 revolution President; Morsi's domestic policies and political leadership have been characterized by: A revised constitution that promotes Islamic law and penalizes "insults" (i.e., stifles expression); Morsi sought to free 1990s World Trade Center bombing blind Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman; Morsi filled bureaucracies and the legislature with Islamists and purged secularists; he promised to appoint a woman and a	President of Freedom and Justice Party; Sunni Islamist; Morsi allegedly made comments that were anti-Jewish, anti-Israeli; endorsed Salafi clerics' sentiments at a huge public rally that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's supporters are " <i>infidels</i> ," and endorsed violent jihad against the Assad regime; Morsi is drowning in scandals including the "Descendants of Apes and Pigs" controversy, allegedly

<p>challenged Hosni Mubarak’s autocratic rule when the group joined secular protestors in Tahrir Square in Jan.-Feb. 2011;</p> <p>Mubarak was overthrown, Supreme Council of the Armed Forces held power until elections in June 2012</p>	<p>removed as President (and detained in an undisclosed location), and installed an interim president;</p> <p>Egypt is divided into a “pro-Morsi” (mainly MB) camp and a pro-Sisi camp;</p> <p>The pro-Morsi protestors remain steadfast in opposing his ouster and detention and demand his return as President; violence has been reported in clashes between the pro- and anti-Morsi camps</p>	<p>Christian as Vice Presidents, but never did; he annulled amendments that would’ve restricted presidential powers; he didn’t attend the new Coptic Pope’s enthronement;</p> <p>His policies increasingly resembled the Mubarak regime; his policies derailed democracy in Egypt; he marginalized many groups, and under his watch Shias were killed in Giza, and numerous violent attacks against Copts took place;</p> <p>Morsi’s policies have been politically <i>exclusive</i></p>	<p>calling Israelis “apes and pigs” – online video of this is available (later he qualified the statement by saying he was criticizing Israeli policy, not Jewish people);</p> <p>He tried to reach out to Iran, but Salafist constituents in Egypt pressured against it, and fierce anti-Shia sentiments surfaced,</p> <p>Morsi has been <i>exclusive</i> in terms of gender, religious and sectarian identities in Egyptian politics and religious discourse</p>
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The evidence clearly shows that Mohammad Morsi’s policies, vision, and philosophy consist of exclusiveness, and illustrate trends and tendencies that are antithetical to the spirit of a pluralist secular democracy. Morsi can’t hold a candle to Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi, despite the Muslim Brotherhood’s efforts to paint him in their light.

The hallmark of Mahatma Gandhi's legacy is his steadfast commitment to nonviolence. Mandela's legacy includes not only 27 years in prison, but also the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that he appointed afterward, with no sign of seeking revenge against his oppressors or the Apartheid regime in general. The Muslim Brotherhood seems to focus on Morsi's imprisonment as evidence of his iconic, halo-deserving reputation as Egypt's Mandela. But Morsi has no legacy of admirable, groundbreaking policies that embraced nonviolence, reconciliation, and inclusiveness.

At the same time, it is my contention that the Sisi regime is a dangerous direction for Egypt's future. If a civilian-led pluralist (that is, inclusive) secular democracy is not reinstated in Egypt as soon as possible, the Egyptian protestors who ushered in the unprecedented changes in 2011 will be back to square one. The struggle will have to start all over again. Maybe then the true Egyptian Mandela will finally emerge.

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