RADIO 4

CURRENT AFFAIRS

ANALYSIS
EGYPT'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD: WHY DID THEY FAIL?

TRANSCRIPT OF A RECORDED DOCUMENTARY

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FX: Crowds/shooting from coup

DE BELLAIGUE: The brutal soundtrack to Egypt's second upheaval of the Arab Spring, in July. President Mohammed Morsi overthrown in a military coup; his Muslim Brotherhood supporters killed in their hundreds.

Earlier this month, the same Muslim Brotherhood, the movement that Egyptians had elected in 2012, was effectively outlawed. Where did Egypt's experiment with democracy go so badly wrong?

To many casual observers in the West, Morsi was a power-hungry ideologue who couldn't be trusted with high office. His Islamising agenda was turning Egypt into another Iran.

I'm Christopher de Bellaigue and in this week's Analysis I'll offer a different reading of events. Speaking to Egyptians who were themselves involved, in some cases enjoying close access to the president, I'll show that the picture of a richly-merited defenestration is incomplete.

This isn't to say Morsi was the perfect leader for his country. He emerges as clumsy and naïve, erratic, occasionally domineering and not always true to his word. But a new Pharaoh? I don't think so.

President Morsi, the ideologue, in fact tried little in the way of Islamisation; he took a relatively relaxed approach to freedom of speech and he was forced to watch as unelected institutions leached authority from his elected government - a long way from his hopeful start in June 2012.

FX: Crowds chanting Morsi's name.

Morsi takes a bow in Tahrir Square - Egypt's first democratically elected president. It's a chance, after more than 80 years of living in the shadows, for the Muslim Brotherhood to exercise power.

One Brotherhood supporter, Abdul Mawgoud Dardery, had won a seat in earlier parliamentary elections, under the banner of the Brotherhood's political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party, or FJP.

DARDERY: By profession, I am a university professor. I finished my PhD in the year 2000, in the United States of America - University of Pittsburgh. Before I left Egypt, to do my PhD, people were asking me you need for your safety to walk next to the wall, meaning don't walk in the centre, don't speak loudly; don't speak your mind, just be silent. And I saw the freedom I enjoyed in my time in America.

DE BELLAIGUE: So you wanted to replicate that in Egypt?

DARDERY: I did, I did. And I could not do it publicly. And the good thing in Egypt is I teach English literature. I started looking for literature that teaches students critical thinking, public participation. So, I started searching for a novel called *Animal Farm*. Most likely you're familiar with it. And that was a *very* important novel for me

to teach, making out that the animal farm is Egypt and Mr Jones, the farm owner, is Mr Mubarak. So I used literature to help the students to understand the challenges we were supposed to solve in Egypt.

DE BELLAIGUE: But then the revolution came and you decided that the best vehicle for you to realise your aim was the FJP and President Morsi, as he then became.

DARDERY: I am a Muslim and Islam teaches me to be an activist, Islam teaches me to be concerned about human social justice, concerned about human freedom to choose whatever they want to choose. So I lived this in theory, but I wanted to live it in practice. So when the opportunity came, I did not hesitate to join the FJP.

FX: Morsi's acceptance speech

DE BELLAIGUE: In his inaugural speech Morsi promised to 'respect the law, the constitution, and the interests of the people.' A crowd-pleasing message, but the Brotherhood still had an image problem. At issue wasn't the Brotherhood's piety -most Egyptians, including those that we misleadingly call 'secular', or 'liberal', believe that Islam should be reflected in public life, even if they don't necessarily want to be governed by religious parties. The Brotherhood's problem was one of trust. The movement didn't help matters by announcing it wouldn't contest the presidential poll, and then changing its mind. FJP Member of Parliament Abdul Mawgoud Dardery defends the U-turn.

DARDERY: Concerning the candidate for presidency, it was a political decision, and we figured out the military council were trying to get Ahmed Shafik, the prime minister during last government of Mubarak, to run. We figured out that this was the plan from the military to take the election and this time to control the country "democratically". In a moment like this in the history of Egypt, when people trust you and gave you 47 per cent of the vote, you have an ethical responsibility to protect not only the vote but also the revolution. So, at that moment we decided to have a candidate. At the end of the day, this is an election. We did not impose ourselves on the people. The people vote for whomever they like.

DE BELLAIGUE: In the event, Morsi's mandate was far from resounding. Hisham Hellyer is a Cairo-based academic specialising in Egyptian society, and an associate fellow of the Royal United Services Institute. He's also a former pollster.

HELLYER: I wouldn't say that the Brotherhood were the first choice of most Egyptians because the presidential elections showed very clearly that the majority of Egyptians didn't vote for the Muslim Brotherhood for the presidential elections - not for the first round, and only just barely in the second round. That's not to say that there isn't a group of support, and there is. I would say that the base of Brotherhood support in Egypt is somewhere around 12-15 per cent. So when Morsi did win the presidential election a year ago, he did so in large part because many people who did not want the former regime to come back into power voted for Morsi as a way to keep that out.

DE BELLAIGUE: But Morsi's task was enormous. He needed to nurse an ailing economy. He needed to provide basic services: unclog the traffic, collect the rubbish; bake the bread. But there was a big structural challenge to contend with. There had been no purge of the Egyptian state after Mubarak's overthrow -no equivalent of the de-Baathification that took place in Iraq after the toppling of Saddam Hussein.

Abdul Mawgoud Dardery had been elected to parliament from Luxor, under the banner of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party.

DARDERY: He was in power, but not in control. Because when we went on January 25th Revolution, we went bringing down the whole system. When Mubarak left, the whole system stayed; it was just the head of the system that came down. So all the state institutions were almost intact from the time of Mubarak - the corrupt leaders of the military, the corrupt police force, the corrupt business community - and they do not want anyone to talk about reform.

DE BELLAIGUE: You have a president and he's unable to exert authority. That's the picture that you're giving.

DARDERY: Mmm-hmm, that is very true. There were so many blockers, so many people standing against the delivery of services to the people. These are facts. I know a police officer who was contacted by a family who was in need, and the police officer told them I am on vacation for 4 years. Meaning, until President Morsi leaves, he's not going to do his job.

DE BELLAIGUE: The police force was Egypt's most despised institution, synonymous with corruption and brutality. But its inactivity was not benign. Criminals sensed an opportunity and there was a rise in carjackings, abductions and rape.

Omar Ashour teaches Middle Eastern politics at Exeter University. In 2012 he was asked to advise President Morsi's government on ways to reform the police.

ASHOUR: The police force in the beginning felt that it was humiliated, and felt that it was defeated. And if it was defeated, then whoever thinks he is victorious must pay a price, and that price was we're not going to do our jobs - good luck securing the country without us. It seemed to me that there was a deliberate security vacuum going on in the country.

DE BELLAIGUE: What about the process of purging the police of unwanted elements?

ASHOUR: Security sector reform, as I understand it, is a political process. It has to do a lot with the balance of power within the state institutions and within the political structures. But he attempted it as a technical process and, therefore, he came to experts - he came to myself, he came to others for technical advice on how to build a new professional identity for the police force, on how to implement oversight by an independent ombudsman and so on. You can provide all this on paper without a problem, but good luck implementing it when most of the factions within the ministry

of interior are not only refusing the president but also refusing the whole idea of reform and change.

DE BELLAIGUE: Morsi's public profile was being pounded. Bumbling and chubby, a ponderous, bombastic speaker, the president was a gift to the satirists who had bitten their tongues under Mubarak. Now Morsi presided over a period of anarchic free speech.

Angy Ghannam works for BBC Monitoring in Cairo, where she analyses the country's news output.

GHANNAM: Early in the beginning of the year of President Morsi's rule, he was very popular and the media was covering him to a great extent in an unbiased way. And then President Morsi started having his own mistakes - some of them small, some of them big. The media started to focus on these mistakes - exaggerate many of them, many times; focus on rumours that were said about President Morsi and deal with them as facts.

DE BELLAIGUE: Give me some examples of that.

GHANNAM: Well, there was no limit to what can be said about Morsi. He was planning to sell parts of Egypt - like, for example, sell part of Sinai to the Palestinians to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; and sell some of Egypt's antiquities like the Pyramids to Qatar, or lease the Suez Canal to Qatar.

DE BELLAIGUE: And these had no basis in truth?

GHANNAM: There was no official documents or proof that this ever happened, or even that there is a discussion about it.

DE BELLAIGUE: Five months into his term came the first of two controversial decisions that tainted Morsi in the eyes of the very Egyptians whose support he needed.

The president had come to power without a parliament. A parliament had been elected - heavily Islamist - but the courts had dissolved it on a technicality. A politically-motivated ruling, the Brotherhood thought.

Now Morsi feared that the courts were about to launch a similar assault on the presidency and the country's other legislative bodies, emasculating him completely.

In November 2012 he issued a decree awarding judicial immunity to himself, the upper house of parliament and the Islamist-dominated body that had been working on a new constitution.

FJP member of parliament Abdul Mawgoud Dardery:

DARDERY: There was a plan to block President Morsi from moving forward. So they wanted to do it through the judiciary. That's why President Morsi had to go and

issue his presidential decree to block the judiciary from dissolving the upper house - the house of lords in Egypt - and the constituent assembly.

DE BELLAIGUE: Are you saying that President Morsi had to pre-empt what would have been a judicial coup d'etat?

DARDERY: Yes. Very much so.

DE BELLAIGUE: But critics viewed his counter-stroke as a power grab. It disregarded the sensitivities of a people that had just emerged from dictatorship.

Hisham Hellyer of the Royal United Services Institute.

HELLYER: At the time, he took that decision without informing even most of his own cabinet and many members of his cabinet actually said that they heard the decision on TV. What was quite possible was that the judiciary was going to declare the constitutional assembly as null and void because it hadn't actually followed the law in terms of its appointment, but the worst that happens in that situation is that the constitutional assembly is removed and then President Morsi is the one that gets to appoint a new one. It does set things back, but it's not exactly tying his hands either. And I don't really think that anybody can really defend that decree. That decree showed ordinary Egyptians that the highest office in the land - the presidency - was willing to suspend the law in order to proceed along the path that he thought necessary. And when you're trying to build a state based on the rule of law, that's a very bad message that you want to be sending.

DE BELLAIGUE: I'm Christopher de Bellaigue and on this week's Analysis I'm offering a revisionist take on the downfall of Egypt's Mohammed Morsi. Mohammed Morsi's second big blunder concerned the drafting of Egypt's post-revolutionary constitution. The body writing it, the constituent assembly, was dominated by Islamists - not only Brotherhood supporters, but also puritan Salafists. Those non-Islamists who were members of the constituent assembly had withdrawn from the process when they sensed the constitution would not be to their liking. They were demanding more input, more time to make changes, but Morsi pressed ahead. He hoped a constitution - any constitution - would give him unassailable legitimacy.

Abdul Mawgoud Dardery of the Brotherhood's political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party, or FJP.

DARDERY: It was not up to him, it was the road map. The road map gave him six months – finish it! If you don't finish it, then you have to start over in a country where the judiciary is trying to block you, and other institutions are trying to block you. Now, all political groups worked together, liberals, Salafists, FJP, everyone - Christians. Out of the 6 months, they worked 5.5 months. Almost drafted 95 per cent of the constitution, together. First time ever in the history of Egypt that the constituent assembly was representative to the people of Egypt.

DE BELLAIGUE: But it wasn't very representative of women, of Copts, of non-Islamists.

DARDERY: As far as women representation, I hundred per cent agree because we're coming out of a dictatorial system that did not give women a chance to participate in politics. So, in the parliament we had very few women - less than 10 - but most of them were members of the FJP. So this is regarding women … Copts were represented in the constituent assembly. So many liberals were there, and they withdrew in the last two weeks.

DE BELLAIGUE: Why do you think there was a sudden withdrawal from the constituent assembly?

DARDERY: I think it was because there was a plan to block President Morsi from moving forward.

DE BELLAIGUE: The constitution was passed in a deeply divisive referendum. The president's supporters claimed it as a victory for Islam, and indeed it allowed for an expanded role for Islamic scholars in the nation's life. But even under Mubarak, Egypt's constitution named Islamic law as the 'main source of legislation'; in this respect the new document was no different.

In fact, the constitution's true significance lay in another direction, revealing the president's ultimate political strategy.

Morsi was trying to woo the institution from which he had most to fear: the army. In this, he was guided not only by the army's historic influence over the country, but also by its popularity. A pious people also in love with the men in uniform? It's not as strange as it may seem. Many of the top brass are personally observant, and the majority of young Egyptian men must do military service. So the military-civilian bond is strong indeed - so strong that polls regularly show the army as being more popular than any political party. This was the hard fact reflected in Morsi's constitution.

Middle East security expert Omar Ashour of Exeter University.

ASHOUR: The constitution of 2012 had some clauses empowering the military in the political process. For example, one of the clauses meant that the defence minister will have to be an army officer, and the defence minister is the man who is in charge of the military courts, of the military tribunals - and you cannot hold an army officer accountable except under a military tribunal. This meant that the defence minister will always be from the institution and therefore it will be him the ultimate authority over his men even if they did something wrong.

DE BELLAIGUE: Did Morsi make any attempt to get control of that section of the economy that the military controls?

ASHOUR: Nothing was said in that constitution on the military industrial complex, which by some estimates ranges from 20 per cent to 40 per cent of the Egyptian economy. The state gets nothing from that - gets zero. That was the bribe, if you wish, to give the military in exchange for leaving politics.

DE BELLAIGUE: It all goes back to the innate caution of a movement that for decades has had to calibrate its every move to avoid repression. The Brotherhood simply wasn't cut out for the open transactions of modern politics. And it preferred making deals to acting decisively.

Wael Haddara had been invited by Morsi to leave home in Canada and become the president's communications adviser.

HADDARA: What the president was loathe to do was to take any kind of extra-legal decision. In his mind, that would make a coup more likely, and give the coup more legitimacy, if he himself initiated the process of working outside of the law. Well the problem is, you didn't have the judiciary on your side, so to take any kind of legal action was then subject to those decisions being overturned by the judiciary, which left only two possibilities. One was to take gradual decisions in terms of reform, or to go outside of the legal framework altogether and take revolutionary action. And whether it was right or wrong, the president consciously chose the first course of action. I would say this was one of our prime examples of failure to communicate, to communicate the difficulties that we had around those decisions, and people did not understand them. And that was our fault - not anyone else's fault.

DE BELLAIGUE: Egyptians were losing patience with the government. The opposition came into the streets; the Brotherhood responded with shows of force of its own. A vicious circle began to form: the more unrest there was, the less investors were inclined to bring their money to Egypt, and the sicker the economy, the worse the unrest.

Wael Haddara again:

HADDARA: The budget deficit, for the Egyptian budget, was around 210 billion Egyptian pounds, which is roughly around 30 billion US dollars. That amount of money could not come through loans, could not come through selling treasury bills. It had to come through foreign direct investment. And investment is contingent upon a stable political situation. And so when you had images of people throwing petrol bombs at the Presidential palace, which happened numerous times, it does not give investors a warm and fuzzy [feeling] about the stability of the country.

DE BELLAIGUE: There was also a mysterious shortage of fuel - the bane of every Egyptian driver.

HADDARA: At one point in time, for example, Cairo was receiving about 125 per cent of its requirements in terms of fuel, but there are still fuel shortages. We discovered that some 10 or 20 per cent of fuel stations, petrol stations, are imaginary. They don't exist. And so that the fuel that is received by those stations is funnelled elsewhere. We also became aware of individuals who were implicated in those schemes who are within the government and not outside of the government.

DE BELLAIGUE: FJP people?

HADDARA: No, previous regime people. When that happens you know in the fuel business, in the bread business and then some other ministries and it repeats over and

over and over again, you can argue it's not a conspiracy or it's not a concerted campaign, but the effect of it is the same thing. There are multiple attempts to disrupt the work of government.

DE BELLAIGUE: Maladroit; unfit to govern; these were some of the politer descriptions of the man occupying the highest post in the land. But could anyone else have done better?

The obvious alternative had been the former Brotherhood stalwart Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh. An Islamist, Aboul Fotouh is also a moderniser and a democrat.

Aboul Fotouh had picked up 18 per cent of the vote in the presidential elections - and he enjoyed the confidence of liberals. Now he was a government critic.

ABOUL FOTOUH ***(In Arabic)***

TRANSLATION FOR ABOUL FOTOUH: No elected and democratic president of a country can govern unless the powerful institutions respect and submit to his office; all this was part and parcel of rebellion by the state's powerful institutions against the orders and authority of the President.

But the blame should not fall solely on these institutions and organisations alone, but also on the weakness of the president. He was not frank with the people over the uprising of these institutions against him, and he failed to take the necessary measures against any official who refused to carry out his duty.

At the end of the day, this is what happened; the sole and final responsibility falls to him because he was the elected president. We didn't elect him to let matters get out of control.

DE BELLAIGUE: And as the government lost members to defection, Morsi's dependency on old comrades only increased. Confirmed Islamists were appointed to governorships and other senior posts. The opposition no longer believed Morsi when he spoke of inclusion.

Aboul Fotouh, again:

ABOUL FOTOUH ***(In Arabic)***

TRANSLATION FOR ABOUL FOTOUH: Dr Morsi did not engage others, this is true - he did not want to work with liberals like our party, which has a strong Islamic foundation. Nor did he approach the leftist parties. He did not genuinely engage them - his call for dialogue was a symbolic call, really and not based on any genuine feelings. We really wanted to help him, but he relied solely on his movement and party. He should have sought support from national expertise.

SEGUE

HADDARA: That's entirely, entirely, entirely, entirely unfounded, and it is a part of

this re-writing of the president's year in office to suit certain agendas.

DE BELLAIGUE: The ill-concealed frustration of the president's spin doctor, Wael Haddara. According to him, Morsi's good intentions were being turned against him.

HADDARA: The president made multiple attempts at reaching out and I was witness to some of those. Starting with the formation of government, he did not approach a single Islamist figure for Prime Minister's position, and he approached a number of so-called liberal candidates and they all flatly refused. So at some point in time people have to take responsibility. If you are invited to participate and you say no, that's your prerogative, you can reject whatever you want, but you're a rejectionist and you can't come around and say I wasn't asked.

DE BELLAIGUE: In under a year, Egypt had split. Morsi had assured Egyptians he was president of them all - including minorities. But now his supporters were attacking Christians; he failed to defend Egypt's small Shia minority. Again, Egyptians took to the streets, for and against the government. It all contributed to the impression of a nation sundered.

The Cairo-based analyst Hisham Hellyer:

HELLYER: What you particularly saw, which was more allowed by the Brotherhood as opposed to being actively promoted, was this discourse of incitement, this rhetoric of sectarianism that was allowed to proliferate so much. And the most serious example of that was when President Morsi himself, attending a conference where there was incredible incitement vis a vis Shia communities in particular, and he didn't object; he just sort of sat there and a few days later there was this lynching of Shia Egyptians. Now, I am not saying he was responsible for that rhetoric, but as President he would have been responsible for saying something against it, and he didn't. So that sort of discourse and that rhetoric, I think is something that people did feel strongly about.

DE BELLAIGUE: There's a strong sense in the spring of 2013 of a president out of his depth. Now it was the political opposition and the army who made common cause, an alliance that doomed Morsi's presidency.

Still he was unable to change course. As the country descended into chaos he wagged his finger at his opponents; he dismissed calls for early elections. And the very calamity he had spent his presidency fighting to avoid became inevitable. Middle East Security analyst, Omar Ashour.

ASHOUR: The main mistake of Morsi is that he did not use his sources of power. His sources of power was the revolution - the soft power of the youth going in the streets and mushrooming in Tahrir Square and elsewhere. And by losing those, I think he weakened himself quite significantly. And his attempt to go with the security services, to somehow co-opt them was a failure, was a blunder.

DE BELLAIGUE: Tell me if it's possible as the president of a newly democratic country, to have a degree of success without controlling the army and the police.

ASHOUR: The whole idea in the Arab Spring was to alter the pattern in the Arab world. That is the armed institution is above the state. This is the ultimate test of democratic transition. If the elected civilian government cannot control the armed forces and the ministry of interior, then it's not a democratic transition. Then the democratic transition fails.

DE BELLAIGUE: Was he naïve in making all these concessions to the military in the constitution? Was he hoping to win them over?

ASHOUR: He was hoping to win them over; it was very clear in his rhetoric. It cannot be clearer when on the 23rd of June the military gives you a week to reconcile with your political rivals, or else, and then you come out in a speech on the 28th June saying that the military are men of gold. It's a mutiny against you, and you're still praising them in your public speeches.

DE BELLAIGUE: When you heard that speech, did you sense a man desperate?

ASHOUR: I sensed he was desperate a while ago. When you go to the presidential palace and the coffee comes one hour late, and cold, you know that the president is not in charge.

POP SONG – BLESS THESE HANDS

DE BELLAIGUE: 'Bless these hands Bless you O army of my country...' This song, by some of Egypt's best known pop stars, was everywhere on the airwaves after the coup against Morsi, as the country filled with what some Egyptians have described as hyper-nationalism.

Today, Egypt is still wrapped in the flag. The army is overwhelmingly Egyptians' favourite institution. The Brotherhood's leaders are behind bars. In an atmosphere of almost hysterical denunciation, few dare defend Mohammed Morsi.

Could he have saved himself? I wonder. The task of satisfying the mountainous demands of the people and curtailing the deep state would surely have foiled any president of post-revolutionary Egypt. Mohammed Morsi's task was an impossible one.