



# Comparative approach to Islamism in Egypt and Turkey from theory to Practice

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## Abstract

*Egypt and Turkey have many similarities and differences in political, social, and religious fields; however, they are both important and influential states in the Islamic world of the Middle East. It means that the evolutions they experience affect other region's countries included in the Islam world. In other words, these two countries are the beginners of Islam world evolutions especially Middle East evolutions. The purpose of this article is to study Islamism evolutions in Egypt and Turkey from viewpoint of Islamic thinkers' theories to Islamic characters' and parties' practical ways. Moreover, it discusses the fact that to what extent today's important political leaders such as "Muhammad Morsi" and "Recep Tayyip Erdogan" in Egypt and Turkey are faithful to Islamism based on "the Muslim Brothers society" and "justice and development party".*

**Keywords:** Egypt, Turkey, Islamism, The Muslim Brothers, justice and development party.

## Introduction

Egypt in Fatimid period and Turkey in Ottoman kings period had the authority of Islam world and they ruled over lots of Islamic regions. Then, with the turn of twentieth century and decline of Ottoman Empire and the beginning of World War I, Ottoman Empire was finally destroyed in 1922 and young Turks with the leadership of Kemal Ataturk possessed the power, Ataturk was the founder of secularism in Turkey and he ignored the position of Islam<sup>1</sup>. However, Islamic thinkers and parties attempted to take the power and destroy secularism. At that time, Egypt was the colony of western countries, but the society of Muslim brothers with the leadership of Hassan al-Banna emerged in Egypt in 1928. The society of the Muslim Brothers is a paradigm in the world for Islamism.

The ideology of the Brother Muslims society was created by Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad Qutb, Muhammad Ghazali and so forth<sup>2</sup>.

Finally, as a result of Islamic awakening in Arab states especially Egypt and with the decline of Hosni Mubarak, Muhammad Mursi won the election and possessed the power. In Turkey, beside the existence of some parties such as "national health", "the Turkish original homeland", and "welfare", at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century "justice and development" party also entered the political scene and took the power in 2002 based on a democratic and peaceful strategy<sup>3</sup>. According to this introduction, it is clear that the purpose of this article is to study Islamism evolutions in Egypt and Turkey. Moreover, it discusses the fact that to what extent today's important political leaders such as "Muhammad Morsi" and "Recep Tayyip Erdogan" in Egypt and Turkey are faithful to Islamism and against secularism<sup>4</sup>.

## Turkey: opposition of secularism and Islamism

In 1922 Ottoman Empire was declined and Kemal Ataturk founded the republic of Turkey and took the power of this country. He aimed to modernize the country, therefore, instead of following religious organization, he followed western culture, and over the years he transformed the religious system into a secular system<sup>5</sup>.

He closed the majority of religious schools, changed the dressing (Hijab) of people and formed independence courts and destroyed a large number of mosques. Later, in 1989 Hijab was forbidden at universities. In fact, decline of Ottoman empire along with these acts could have been an important factor for making an opposition against Turkey's new organization and the start of an attempt for bringing about an Islamic authority. In this period, lots of the world Islamic thinkers declared that they were against abolition of Caliphate, and thinkers such as Rashid Reza, Alammah Eqbal Lahuri and so forth wrote books related to this issue. Rashid Reza in his treatise declared his anti Ottoman Empire thoughts; his book reveals the opposition between Arab and Turk nationalists, and Islamic characters faithful to Islamic values and Empire<sup>6</sup>.

Feysal Abunaser believes thought Laicism is widespread in Turkish society and followers of western life style are very tyrannical, people have kept their Islamic awareness and they are proud of being Muslim as much as being a Turk.

In relation to the emergence of religious signs Lewis Bernard says, "in the beginning of 1945s, national assembly of Ankara conducted a meeting in which the issue of religious training at schools was discussed and reviewed... finally, in 1949 religious training at schools began for the second time<sup>7</sup>. Moreover,

Theology College was founded in Ankara and the meaning of *izan* was translated from Arabic language to Turkish language. After power shift in 1950, these religious signs emerged more in the society more than the previous decades. For instance, more people participated in religious ceremonies held in mosques, more religious quotes appeared on walls of public places, more religious researches were done, and the most fundamental event was the foundation of an Islamic party titled "national organization party" by Najm al-Din Arbakani. Therefore, political, financial, cultural fields were the most important fields of the emergence of opposites of laicism and Kemalism<sup>8</sup>.

## Religious parties and populations in Turkey

**National organization and national health parties:** Njm al-Din Arbakani who was previously the advocate of justice party, founded "national organization party" in 1970. This party explicitly defended religion (Islamic religion), however, this party's activities were forbidden in 1971 as a result of military intervention of laic parties. Later, in 1971 Arbakani founded national health party, this party was accepted through a public election, then it sent 12 representatives to the parliament, hence laic parties had to accept this party and grant the position of vice prime minister to Arbakani<sup>9</sup>.

Arbakan's "national health party" aimed to make Turkey's political and cultural institutes Islamic. Based on the viewpoint of this party, the main reason of Turkey's cultural and political and financial decline was laicism and westernization. National health party included an ideology called "national insight" based on which it was necessary to industrialize Islamic countries. This party was against the entrance of Turkey to the European economic society, moreover it accepted the existence of bank interests. Based on national health ideology, the key of national salvation and development was return to traditional values of Islam. From 1973 to 1980 this party had an important role in the politics of Turkey. The political activities of this party ended as a result of 1980's (September 12<sup>th</sup>) coup d'état led by General Kanan Ören. Therefore, the national health party was disbanded, Arbakani was jailed for 10 years and he was also forbidden to do political activities for 4 years<sup>10</sup>.

**Welfare party:** A group of previous national health party members founded a new party in 1983 called "welfare party". Arbakani during the period of being forbidden to do political activities led the party indirectly. Then in 1987, he explicitly directed this new party. Welfare party made Islamic slogans and won the votes in a public election in 1995, then it entered parliament as the first party. This party paid attention to religious schools, research groups and brotherhood assemblies, in this way it found lots of advocates supporting it<sup>11</sup>. Hence, for the first time in the republic history of Turkey, welfare party got the greatest religious party in Turkey. welfare party advocated industrialization and keeping distance from western countries in the political and economic fields. Moreover, it valued a society ruled by Islamic values<sup>12</sup>.

**Religious populations:** There are religious populations in Turkey that have important roles in determining the fate of this country, religious populations such as the Naghshbandi, the Soleimani, the Ghaderi, the Khalvati, the Refayi, the Molavi, Mazharjilar, Yazijilar, Manzeljilar, Alamjilar, Mad Zahra jilar, and also Islamic armed groups such as "Islamic party of Kurdistan" and "Allah party of Turkey". Some researchers believe that religious populations have made the Turkey's Muslim society; therefore, recognizing Islamic movements in the political society of Turkey is impossible without getting aware of these populations. These various populations had caused the religious lack of integrity in Turkey; however, all these populations value the main conceptual beliefs common in all populations not the differences among them<sup>13</sup>.

Some of the leaders of these populations had participated in the independence war; however, after a short period of time they turned against Atatürk's secularism. Their activities were forbidden in 1925, but this act did not limit their activities in the social scenes. From the last years of 1940, these populations entered cities and developed their political activities<sup>14</sup>.

**Followers of Nursi:** The Nursi is one of the well-known religious populations in Turkey which has had about one million followers, the Nursi leader is "Sheikh Said Nursi" known as "Badi- al- Zaman". He lived at the same time with Atatürk, his important book was titled "Risale-I Nur collection" which determined the main principles of the Nursi. In this book he maintained that contemporary Muslims' duty was to restore their faith in confrontation with science and philosophy. Nursi movement had a lot of followers among the youth especially secular educated population of Turkey. Nursi declared that there was no contrast between religion and science. He emphasized the relation between Islam and logic, science and modernity<sup>15</sup>.

His activities started from the period of the Young Turk and continued up to 1960's coup d'état. During the independence war, he joined national forces, however, because of the new regime laic policies; he turned against Atatürk in 1952. Later, his unity with Kurdish rebellions was revealed and he was exiled to the west of Turkey. He was fond of the performance of traditional Islam rules and he was also against laicism in Turkey<sup>16</sup>.

The followers of this movement supported Democrat party in 50s, justice party in 60s, national salvation party in 70s and salvation path party in 80s. Moreover, during the cold war, they were strictly against communism; therefore external entities supported them financially and non-financially. The branches of Nursi movement emerged in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, US and Germany. They had 24 pensions and 570 institutes and schools; however, publication issue was very important for them. They published the magazines titled "Zolfaghar" and "Okhovat", but their important publication was the publication of "Yani Asia" newspaper. This newspaper started its activity from 21<sup>st</sup> of February, 1970 and it always supported Democrat party, Justice

party and salvation path party. After 1980's coup d'état this newspaper was hold up. Instead of the previous newspaper, followers of Nursi, published a new newspaper called "Yaninasil" and it criticized military policies of the government. In a nutshell, this movement always advocated democracy<sup>17</sup>.

**Justice and development party:** Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Abdollah Gol founded justice and development party in 2001. It was the first Islamic party of Turkey which won the majority of parliament's votes from the very beginning of Turkey's republic foundation; it also formed the government without needing the help of other parties. As soon as it entered the parliament, it gained 34 percent of votes and turned to the master party in the parliament. Therefore, it started new Islamic political activities in Turkey. However, today this party introduces itself as a conservative party rather than a religious party. This party is obliged to protect the unity of republic of Turkey, secular-democratic government, gradual development, non militarism, democracy, freedom of opinions and equality of opportunities. This party's slogan for entering the parliament was "everything for Turkey". Moreover, this party supports Kemal's principles and emphasizes the traditional policy of Turkey related to advocating western ideas especially supporting membership in European Union. The function of justice and development party shows the tendency of this party to the combination of traditional values and modern Turkey. This party is in favor of social equality and it is against discriminations based on racial, cultural and religious characteristics. To them, social equality is necessary to achieve democracy<sup>18</sup>.

The development of Islamism in turkey has happened in different fields in the last two decades. Turkish people love Islam and the number of Islamic forces in the form of different parties and populations has increased. Moreover a new class of the intelligent is also found<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, justice and development party won 2002 parliament election through its good functions and slogans<sup>20</sup>. In fact, this party owes its existence to Arbakan.

**Ideology of justice and development party:** Although this party owes its existence to Arbakan, because of the presence of the army in the political scene of Turkey, Erdogan and Gol has always tried to clarify the party's goals and activities for the army. Furthermore, in the economic field, in order to improve foreign policy and economy of the country especially those which are in relation to Europe union, Nato, America and regional issues of Turkey, they have attempted to gain the trust of the army and laic parties of Turkey. In fact, justice and development party is dependent on a religious intellectual movement in Turkey. The main feature of this movement is the introduction of "the compassionate and the merciful" Islam in which all humans have equal rights and they have human dignity. In this sort of Islam, violence and terrorism have no place. Religious intellectuality in Turkey has been successful in making a balance between Islam and modernity. Gradually, Turkish people got convinced that it is possible to be both a

Muslim and a real Turkish nationalist; moreover it is possible to accept modernity principles in the realm of policy and economy<sup>20</sup>.

This party is obliged to protect the unity of republic of Turkey, secular- democratic government, gradual development, non militarism, democracy, freedom of opinions and equality of opportunities. This party's slogan for entering the parliament was "everything for Turkey". Moreover, this party supports Kemal's principles and emphasizes the traditional policy of Turkey related to advocating western ideas especially supporting membership in European Union. This party is in favor of social equality<sup>21</sup>.

This party is made based on social liberty, in fact the party is formed based on the idea of human rights. Its programs emphasize the new liberal economy and the avoidance of government from intervening in economic activities. Nowadays, this party which has religious background is the master party of Turkey and has a lot of followers. Beside this party, Nur movement (the greatest public movement in Turkey) is also derived from central Anatolia and supports a non- political Islam which is in favor of peace and creating a civil society, it also emphasizes the role of education. These two groups make the new generation of Anatolian elites who are compatible with Islamic background of Turkey and try to be considered as part of European Union; however, they also try to protect their Islamic identity as well<sup>22</sup>.

Though there are similarities between Arbakan's welfare party and justice and development party, there are differences between them from viewpoint of strategies.

Both parties put emphasis on Turkey's leadership in the international field, however, the role of leadership in welfare party is defined generally, and in justice and development party this role is defined as solving crisis and conflicts.

Both parties confirm the Islamic identity, the difference is that Islamic welfare party considers it as a means of creating an opposite group against west, but justice and development declares that Islamic identity is limited to cultural issues and has nothing to do with political issues.

Welfare party tries to make an Islamic organ against European Union, while justice and development party tries to be a member of it, in fact justice and development party considers national benefits of Turkey as its criterion of foreign policy.

In confronting the internal opposites, welfare party acts more ideologically, while justice and development acts more realistically and logically<sup>23</sup>.

**The main bases of justice and development party are represented here:** Playing a fundamental role in the region: Paying attention to Arab states and Muslim states. Acting based

on the policy of solving problems with the neighbors. Taking the role of interagency in regional issues. Attempting to create balance between regional policies and European policies. Being a paradigm for Muslim states and Arab states of the region<sup>24</sup>. Egypt and the Muslim Brothers. The Muslim Brothers is one of the most vital contemporary Islamic movements which have had a great impact on Egypt and other Arab states of the world. In fact, knowing the Islamic awakening movement is really hard without recognizing and understanding the roots of the Muslim Brothers thoughts and its evolutions.

**The foundation of the Muslim Brothers society:** The Muslim Brothers society was founded by Hassan al- Banna, an Egyptian Islamic thinker in Alexandria (1928). This society was the result of cooperation between Hassan al- Banna and six people of his friends. First, there activities were done implicitly; they distributed letters, pamphlets and had personal meetings in order to develop the movement. his attempt was to perform Islamic education in the social and political life, and also he aimed to make Islamic beliefs dynamic<sup>25</sup>. At this time, there was a hard situation in Egypt from viewpoint of political, social, religious and economic issues and four main political movements were active in this period: The first movement was the Egyptian nationalism and Arabi pasha, Mostafa Kamel, Mohammad Farid and Saad Zaql were the leaders of this movement. Alazhar contrastive movement was another movement; it rejected any change and evolution in the society, and religion. The supporters of modernization, they believed that in the society, religion and politics should be separate from each other. Followers of Rashid Reza movement who wanted the return to the first generation of Islamic beliefs and acts.

Hasan al- Banna had a tendency to the third movement. In this situation, Al- banna advocated the return to Islam basis and he invited people to the Islamic principles, finally he could change Islamism from a static state into a general and organized movement. He attempted to make Islamism a general and comprehensive phenomenon, this idea was influenced by Rashid Reza, however, Al-banna also tried to bring about an Islamic organization as well.

**Plans and purposes of the Muslim Brothers:** In clarifying the plans and purposes of the society, Al-Banna addressed the society's advocates and said," this society is not a charity assembly or a local organization with limited goals. In fact, we are the new spirit in the heart of a nation which is alive via recourse to Quran. You should introduce yourself as people in charge of a great responsibility not undertaken by others. When you are asked about your responsibility, tell them that Islam is your responsibility, Mohammad's prophecy is your responsibility, the responsibility of a religion in which liberty exists. If they asked whether you are political, your answer to them should be this; there is no separation between Islam and politics, if they accused you of being revolutionary, you defend yourself and explain that you just shout for peace and you believe in peace, and tell them if you try to stop us, God has

allowed us to defend ourselves against injustice".

Moreover, in clarifying the ideology of the Muslim Brothers we can also talk about Sayyid Qutb's opinions. Based on the concept of ignorance in Quran, he divided the world into two groups, theists and atheists and then he generalized this division to the contemporary period. Qutb believed that the world of ignorance is completely different from the world of Islam, and it is impossible to bring about an agreement between them. He believed that the truth is one and everything rather than the truth is absolutely wrong. It was impossible to combine the truth with the falsehood. Therefore, he said that the ultimate goal of Muslims is to make an Islamic government via invitation and jihad.

**According to the above thoughts and opinions, the most important plans and purposes of this society are mentioned here:** Making an Islamic government: this is one of the most vital goals of the Muslim Brothers. Hassan al-Banna encouraged his followers to achieve this goal. Omar Telesmani was another leader of this movement, he believed that the Muslim Brothers did not want the government for itself, it just supported people being able to manage such a government based on Quran rules, however, if there was not such a person, making an Islamic government would be one of the responsibilities of the Muslim Brothers.

**Trying to keep the unity of the world of Islam:** another purpose of the society is to keep the unity of the world of Islam based on Quran rules. The society believes that the achievement of this purpose leads to the establishment of an Islamic caliphate and the reestablishment of role of an Islamic leadership in the world. The only way to achieve this purpose is to get free from colonizing powers through recourse to Islamic educations such as Jihad and brotherhood<sup>26</sup>.

**Freedom of Palestine and protecting Islamic lands:** It was a belief that all Islamic lands made a unified Islamic land; therefore invading an Islamic land meant invading the whole Islamic land. Islam had emphasized that it is the duty of Muslims to determine their own fate and fight against those who invade their lands. Therefore, the Muslim Brothers started its attempts to help Palestine in 1935. These attempts started with the travel of Hassan al-Banna's brother to Palestine, and then he sent groups to Palestine to have military education<sup>27</sup>. They also sent public helps to Palestine and tried to make the world's people aware of the Palestinian requests. Later, the society entered a fight against Israel in 1948. This process is continued up to the present time and Islamic Jihad movement and Hamas are the most important branches of the Muslim Brothers society.

**The continuation of Hassan al-Banna's movement by his successors**

Hassan al-Banna was assassinated in 1949 as a result of conflicts between the society and the government. Then in 1951, Hasan

Hazibi was appointed as the successor of Hassan al-Banna. He said "Islam is the religion of kindness; it is against violence and terrorism"<sup>28</sup>. he asked the government to start its movements in the society based on Islamic purposes, while the government believed that religion is separated from politics and religion should not intervene in the society. Finally, in January 1954 the law of parties disbanding disbanded this society and declared that membership in this society is illegal; Hazibi was also sent to jail<sup>29</sup>.

After Hasibi's death, Omar Telemsani got the leader of the society and after his death in 1986, Hamed Abunaser took his place. The main goal of the society was to make an Islamic government ruled based on principles of the religion. In February 1986, he wrote a letter to Hosni Mubarak the president and asked him to study internal and external issues of Egypt, he also advised him to end his cooperation with Israel, to let women participate more in the society's affairs, the Muslim Brothers believed that democracy should be the center of attention, it also declared that the establishment of a multi-partied system and democracy in Egypt was a necessity, and a powerful government did not gain power through military force but through civil freedoms and attracting people's trust toward the government<sup>30</sup>.

Despite these suggestions, Hosni Mubarak kept his dictatorship government ruled based on secular principles and decreases the role of religious systems in running the society, he gave the Muslim Brothers a chance to enter the parliament, however, in 1995 some of the leaders of the society were accused of being Islamic protesters, consequently they were sent to jail.

### **Islamic awakening; decline of Hosni Mubarak and beginning of Mohammad Mursi' power**

Hosni Mubarak's regime which was faithful to west and Camp David accord declined in February 2010. And a new era of evolutions started in Egypt. In a public election, Muhammad Mursi who was an Islamic candidate won the election, however there still are some questions about him<sup>31</sup>.

What would be the reaction of Mursi toward Camp David contract and the relation with Israel?

What would be his policies in relation with America and Western countries?

How far is he faithful to the Muslim Brother's principles in representing his internal and external policies?

Is he able to end secularism?

From now on, this article compares the internal and external policies of Mursi and Erdogan as the Islamic leaders of Egypt and Turkey based on the above questions.

Justice and development party, the Muslim Brothers society in the practical scene.

### **Clarification of Arbakan's and Murci's policies in the internal and external fields**

During its management period, justice and development has made several fundamental changes in the political and social powers. From political perspective, this country tries to represent a model of Islamic democracy which respects democratic principles inside and outside of the country. From cultural perspective, this country tries to make a laic government which is compatible with a multinational country. Erdogan's government has tried to consider the requirements of different groups and parties. His government is based on considering civil rights, omission of capital punishment, respecting rights of all racial and religious groups, omitting sexual discriminations, reducing military roles in administrative positions especially national Security Council and education council. Moreover, justice and development society is aware of religious groups 'dissatisfaction from Kemalists, therefore it tries to attract their attention to it and keep them satisfied'<sup>32</sup>.

Hence, Erdogan's government has been the first government in Turkey to omit the limitations against Kurdish regions of Turkey during the last decades. This government also supported Islamic tendencies in the society such as women's hijab (a Muslim women's way of dressing) and religious schools' activities. Generally, it is possible to say that as a result of reformations done during the last decades, national Security Council of Turkey has changed from a special entity into a counseling entity and the role of military members has also been decreased in it. Today, the council's secretary is chosen by the prime minister not the army. Some other entities such as courts, Radio and Television were effective in these improvements. Turkey has signed the sixth and the ninth protocols of human rights European convention based on which it has omitted capital punishment, developed the authenticity of court of justice, it also decreased the power of military police via omission of security courts. The government avoided extremism not to let opportunist parties limit the government's administrative activities. In the recent parliament election, justice and development party omitted 156 representatives of the previous parliament who were extremists and instead of them, it introduced political and academic characters who were moderate<sup>33</sup>.

Moreover, in order to keep its power, justice and development party tried to make confidence in the internal and external level through emphasizing secularism and reformism. It also achieved a safe position in the European Union to stand against military threats, in other words, doing liberal and democratic reforms decreased the role of military forces in political affairs. In fact, Turkey solved the political problems for ever. The problem of Islamic politics was also solved through combining a proper amount of pressure and freedom. The point is that if some day Islamic parties ignored Islam, they would lose the election and pass the power to other parties.

Also, in foreign politics strategy, Justice and development party acts based on "strategic depth" thesis by Davood Gholov. In clarifying this thesis, Gholov declared that the main idea of this thesis is based on historical and geographical depth of Turkey. In other words, Turkey needs to have a good relation with all its neighbors in the region so that it could be considered as a successful regional power. Strategic depth has an important role in i. Creating security for all ii. Having political conversations in order to tackle the crisis iii. Having close financial cooperation, and iv. Pluralism

Generally, Erdogan tries to represent balanced internal and external policies in order to improve relations with the region states and Muslim states; it is also successful in cooperation with West. In fact, he has created a balance between secularism and Islamism.

However, in the new Egypt and during the last year that the power is in the hands of Mursi, tensions are still continued. There is no hope to see Mursi's success just like Erdogan's success. Mursi also tries to keep a multilateral policy; he has kept his relation with Islamic region states as well as his relation with Israel and America. After getting president, he announced in several interviews that he would be faithful to all Egypt international contracts. Referring to international contracts, he meant Camp David accord. Mursi has kept his relation both with Israel and Palestine. Moreover, his intimate relation with America as the real cause of disasters in Egypt still goes on and in a trip to Iran for participating in non-aligned movement, Mursi did not clarify his position<sup>34</sup>.

Though the Muslim Brothers' background refers to 80 years ago and it has given Egypt a special position through taking advantage of an Islamic and national view, it does not have a unique leader. Finally, the Muslim Brothers has been divided into several branches as a result of having internal differences. Today, Egyptian people have succeeded in defeating Mubarak; however, they are afraid of the repetition of previous conflicts among Islamic movements and return of another tyrannical government. Hasanein Heikal is one of the Egyptian thinkers, about the revolution of Egyptian people and lack of a unified leader he says, "there is a difference between success and achievement. The truth is that people were successful in making Tunisia and Egypt revolution, it means that they caused the decline of two dictators, however, these two revolutions have not still achieved their main purposes".

His declaration shows that beside all its public movements, Egypt does not have a unified leader to plan for the fate of the state after the revolution. Therefore, we should leave it to the passage of time so that we could achieve a more appropriate analysis toward Mursi's policies; Mursi also needs to make logical policies in order to calm the situation.

## Conclusion

As mentioned in the above text, justice and development party has tried to play an important role in the region and to keep its contact with the western countries through applying a multilateral diplomacy, it has also been successful in the internal level, however, it could not end secularism, instead it has tried to make a balance between Islamism and secularism. In comparison with its main leader, Najm al-din Arbakan, this party does not have a hostile relation with western countries; it has even tried to enter Turkey into the European Union and to keep its relation with Israel.

However, there are many ambiguities in Mursi's policies as the president of Egypt and the representative of the Muslim Brothers. It seems that he is not faithful to the principles of the Muslim Brothers. Mursi's relation with Palestine and Israel, his loyalty to Camp David accord and military contracts with America and other western countries and also its ambiguous relation with Iran and other Islamic countries shows that he is not faithful to the principles of Egyptian Islamic movements especially the Muslim Brothers.

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