

Morsi May Die in an Egyptian Prison. It's Time the British Government Spoke Up

British diplomats pressed for Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest. What about medical attention for Mohamed Morsi?

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The latest bulletins concerning the health of ex-president Mohamed Morsi of Egypt are terrible.

Morsi has been held in custody since the July 2013 military coup which saw him overthrown and brought Abdul Fattah al-Sisi to power.

In cases criticised by Western governments, human rights groups and the UN, Egyptian courts have handed him lengthy prison sentences several times, including on charges of spying for Qatar and Hamas and killing protesters during demonstrations in 2012.

The former president is suffering from fainting fits and has [twice collapsed into a coma](#). His health is severely damaged and I am told there is even reason to fear for his life.

This news has just emerged. Last week, his family visited for first time in four years and were shocked by what they saw – and so should we all be.

But I'm also shocked by the inertia of the British government.

Where is the protest?

Three hundred years ago, the English diplomat Sir Henry Wotton declared:

"An ambassador is an honest gentleman sent to lie abroad for the good of his country."

But John Casson, the British ambassador to Egypt, is stretching this advice rather too far.

I can assure Casson that he has not been sent abroad to betray everything that Britain stands for: tolerance, decency, freedom, the rule of law.

Three years have passed since Casson was [dispatched to Egypt](#) as British ambassador.

As far as I can discover, he has not yet described the military takeover of Egypt by Field Marshall Sisi as a coup d'état, which is what it was.

I have examined Casson's record. I can find no complaints about the mass murder of

Egyptian citizens by the Sisi regime. I can find no protests about torture and rape of political prisoners in Egyptian prisons.

At one I assume satirical moment, Casson [praised](#) Sisi's Egypt for "building a more stable, more prosperous and more democratic future".

Soon after the Rabaa Massacre in August 2013, when Egyptian security forces violently cleared two pro-Morsi protest camps in Cairo killing at least 1,000 protesters, the UK government [suspended 49 military export licenses](#) to prevent British military goods from being used to repress Egyptians.



An Egyptian riot policeman points his gun at stone-throwers during clashes that broke out as Egyptian security forces moved in to disperse supporters of Egypt's ousted president Mohamed Morsi by force in a huge protest camp near Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque. (Source: Middle East Eye)

"As a result of the developing situation in Egypt, we have agreed with EU partners in this instance to go further and suspend all export licences for goods which might be used for internal repression," Vince Cable, UK's business secretary, said at the time.

"By acting together, we want to send a clear signal that we condemn all violence in Egypt."

Slowly but surely, this stance has eroded as Britain has quietly [resumed arms deals](#).

Time to speak out

Even if we accept – and we should not – that Britain, for cynical, base, amoral, commercial reasons, is unable to confront any of the above actions, we return to the basic humanity of the situation.

Ex-president Morsi is ill. He is not receiving proper medical attention. He desperately needs help. Britain should do everything it can to ensure he gets it, including speaking out publicly

and putting harsh pressure on the regime.

On Tuesday, I spoke at an emergency press conference called by the Egyptian Revolutionary Council to draw attention to the plight of Mohamed Morsi.

My fellow speakers spoke eloquently.

Anas Al-Tikriti, founder of the Cordoba Foundation, pointed out that Britain is “a nation which prides itself on the values of human rights and freedoms” adding that “it is irresponsible of our government...to be absolutely dismissive and silent on the horrendous abuses committed on a daily basis.

“Not only in the prisons, but on the streets of Egypt every day. The closing down of media outlets, of free speech, of political dissent, and the crushing of any popular movement that might air a trace of dissent against the ruling military regime. “

The renowned British lawyer Toby Cadman pointed out that deprivation of medical treatment under international law is equivalent to torture. It is time, he said, to contemplate sanctions against the regime in Cairo, adding that

“Egyptian leaders when they travel to Britain should be arrested.”

It is time for the British government to ponder such measures.

A matter of indifference

We are guilty of gross double standards.

When Myanmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi was illegally held under house arrest, British diplomats pressed for her release.

But when ex-president Morsi is deprived of medical attention he needs, this is apparently a matter of indifference to Her Majesty’s Government.

Of course, Egypt is not the only place where Britain seems to have forgotten our fundamental values. We are deeply complicit in the tragedy in the Yemen, for exactly the same reasons.

In the Yemeni conflict, as in Egypt, we are pathetically beholden to Saudi Arabia. It’s time Britain remembers we are a great country, with proud values and one that stands up for decency.

That means lifting a finger for Mohamed Morsi, the democratically elected president of Egypt.

Peter Osborne won best commentary/blogging in 2017 and was named freelancer of the year in 2016 at the Online Media Awards for articles he wrote for Middle East Eye. He also was British Press Awards Columnist of the Year 2013. He resigned as chief political columnist of the Daily Telegraph in 2015. His books include The Triumph of the Political Class, The Rise of

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