

# Egypt's Morsi Assumes Major Role In Mideast

BY STEVEN R. HURST  
Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Egypt's new President Mohammed Morsi assigned himself the heavy-weight's role in the Middle East on Wednesday, declaring in his first speech to the United Nations that the civil war raging in Syria is the "tragedy of the age" and must be brought to an end.

In a wide-ranging address that touched on all major issues confronting the region, Morsi also decried Israeli settlement-building on territory Palestinians claim for a future state and condemned a film produced in the United States that denigrates Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

He urged all U.N. member nations to join in an effort to end what he called "the catastrophe in Syria" that pits the regime of Bashar Assad against opposition forces trying to end 40 years of dictatorship. More than 30,000 people have been killed in the 18-month conflict.

Morsi has called for Assad to step down and said Wednesday that "the bloodshed in Syria and the humanitarian crisis that has unfolded must be stopped."

Morsi, an Islamist and key member of the once-banned Muslim Brotherhood, opened his remarks to the U.N. General Assembly by celebrating himself as Egypt's first democratically elected leader who was swept into office after what he called a "great, peaceful revolution" that overthrew Hosni Mubarak.

He then quickly inserted himself into the thorniest issues in the Middle East, demanding that the United Nations grant membership to the Palestinians, with or without a peace agreement with Israel.

"The fruits of dignity and freedom must not remain far from the Palestinian people," he said, adding that it was "shameful" that U.N. resolutions are not enforced.

The Palestinians are expected to again ask for U.N. recognition and formally make application to the world body in November, after the U.S. presidential election. President Barack Obama said when the Palestinians sought recognition last year that Washington would block the move until there was a peace deal with Israel. The focus of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, which have been on hold for four years, is a two-state solution that would formally grant the Palestinians the rights of an independent country.

In his bid to end the violence in Syria, Morsi has invited Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia to join a contact group, though the Saudis have not yet partici-

pated and the fighting in Syria continues unabated. While Morsi wants Assad to step aside, he said Wednesday that he opposes any foreign military intervention.

The U.N. Security Council, which could call for intervention or global sanctions against Syria, is deadlocked because Russia, Assad's main protector, and China have blocked a series of resolutions brought by Western governments.

Morsi also denounced as an obscenity the anti-Islam video that portrays the Prophet Muhammad as a womanizer, a child molester and a fraud, insisting that freedom of expression does not allow for attacks on any religion.

He also condemned the violence that swept Muslim countries last week in reaction to the video. At least 51 people were killed, including the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other Americans targeted in an attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi.

"Egypt respects freedom of expression. One that is not used to incite hatred against anyone. One that is not directed toward one specific religion or culture. A freedom of expression that tackles extremism and violence. Not the freedom of expression that deepens ignorance and disregards others," Morsi said.

He appeared to have been responding to Obama's General Assembly speech Tuesday in which the U.S. leader again condemned the video but sternly defended the U.S. Constitution's free speech guarantees.

In Cairo, Egyptians watched Morsi's speech closely for signs of how he would conduct his presidency. Sahar Abdel-Mohsen, a 31-year architect, praised Morsi's condemnation of the Assad regime, but questioned his assertions about free speech.

"How can he talk about freedom of expression when there are many protesters in detention in Egypt, including minors, and when people are locked up for the so-called contempt of religion?" she said.

The head of the Arab League, meanwhile, called for the international community to criminalize blasphemy, warning that insults to religion pose a serious threat to global peace and security.

Nabil Elaraby's comments to a special session of the U.N. Security Council put him at direct odds with the United States and its Western allies, which are resolutely opposed to restrictions on freedom of expression. However, Elaraby said that if the West has criminalized acts that result in bodily harm, it must also criminalize acts that cause "psychological and spiritual harm."



Egyptian President

## Mohammed Morsi

### Early years

**Born** 1951 in Sharqia, Egypt

**Education** Bachelor's and masters degrees from Cairo University, doctorate in engineering from University of Southern California

**Family** Married with five children, two of whom are U.S. citizens, born in California

### Academic career

**1980-1985** Assistant professor of engineering at California State University, Northridge

**1985** Became head of the engineering department, Zagazig University, Egypt

### Political career

**1977** Joined the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood

**2000-2005** Member of parliament as an independent since the Brotherhood was banned from fielding candidates; headed the Brotherhood's unofficial bloc

**2011** Becomes chairman of the Brotherhood-linked Freedom and Justice Party

**2012** Wins election to become first freely elected civilian president; forces senior officers from powerful military

Source: BBC, New York Times, The Miami Herald, MCT Photo Service  
Graphic: Pat Carr © 2012 MCT

## Syrian Rebels Strike With Suicide Bombs

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian rebels struck deep in the fortress-like inner sanctum of President Bashar Assad's rule Wednesday in Damascus, detonating two car bombs that engulfed the army headquarters in flames.

The suicide bombings and subsequent gun battles in the Syrian capital killed at least five people, including a reporter for Iranian TV. The carefully orchestrated attacks highlighted the regime's growing vulnerability, even as the 18-month battle to bring down Assad is locked in a stalemate.

International diplomacy has failed to stop the bloodshed. Making his debut on the global stage at the United Nations, Egypt's new President Mohammed Morsi said he will not rest until Syria's civil war is brought to an end. He called it the "tragedy of the age" and one that "we all must end."

Morsi has launched an "Islamic Quartet" of regional powers to seek an end to the violence, but he has not offered a specific plan of action.

## UK Court Prevents Extradition Of Radical Cleric

LONDON (AP) — A British court issued an interim injunction Wednesday blocking the extradition of a radical cleric to the United States on terror charges, granting a court hearing for an appeal.

Mustafa Kamal Mustafa — who is better known as Abu Hamza al-Masri — challenged his extradition on charges that include helping set up a terrorist training camp in rural Oregon. The appeal marked yet another legal twist in a case that has wound its way through the courts for eight years.

Khaled Al-Fawwaz, a second terror suspect, has also mounted a legal challenge before Britain's High Court.

Britain's Home Office immediately challenged the appeals. Judicial authorities said in a statement that a hearing would be held Tuesday to consider the two men's applications. Sonn Macmillan Walker, a London law firm representing al-Masri, declined to provide details "given the sensitive nature of this matter."

## Beloved Crooner Andy Williams Passes At 84

BRANSON, Mo. (AP) — For many Americans, particularly those on the older — OK, squarer — side of the generation gap, Andy Williams was part of the soundtrack of the 1960s and '70s, with easy-listening hits like "Moon River," the "Love Story" theme and "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year" from his beloved Christmas TV specials.

The singer known for his wholesome, middle-America appeal was the antithesis of the counterculture that produced rock and roll.

"The old cliché says that if you can remember the 1960s, you weren't there," Williams once recalled. "Well, I was there all right, but my memory of them is blurred — not by any drugs I took but by the relentless pace of the schedule I set myself."

The entertainer, who died Tuesday night at his Branson home following a yearlong battle with bladder cancer, had a plaintive tenor, boyish features and clean-cut demeanor that helped him outlast many of the decade's rock stars and fellow crooners such as Frank Sinatra and Perry Como. He remained on the charts into the 1970s and continued to perform into his 80s.

Williams became a major star in 1956, the same year as Elvis Presley, with the Sinatra-like swing number "Canadian Sunset." For a time, he was pushed into such Presley imitations as "Lips of Wine" and the No. 1 smash "Butterfly."

# Slipping In Polls, Romney Assures Voters 'I Care'

BY BEN FELLER AND  
STEVE PEOPLES  
Associated Press

WESTERVILLE, Ohio — Slipping in states that could sink his presidential bid, Republican Mitt Romney declared Wednesday that "I care about the people of America" and can do more than President Barack Obama to improve their lives. In an all-day Ohio duel, Obama scoffed that a challenger who calls half the nation "victims" was unlikely to be of much help.

Romney's approach reflected what he is up against: a widening Obama lead in polls in key states such as Ohio, the backlash from a leaked video in which he disparages Obama supporters as government-dependent victims, and a campaign imperative to make his policy plans more plain.

With under six weeks to go, and just one week before the first big debate, Obama's campaign reveled in the latest public polling — but tried to crush any sense of overconfidence. "If we need to pass out horse blinders to all of our staff, we will do that," said campaign spokeswoman Jen Psaki.

The day's setting was Ohio, where Obama's momentum has seemed to be growing. It's also a state no Republican has won the White House without carrying.

Romney went after working-class voters outside Columbus and Cleveland before rolling to Toledo. Obama rallied college crowds at Bowling Green and Kent State, reminding Ohioans their state allows them to start cast ballots next week. Early voting has already begun in more than two dozen other states.

For Romney, in his appearances and in a new TV ad in which he appeals straight to the camera, it was time for plain talk to contrast himself with Obama. "There are so many people in our country who are hurting right now. I want to help them. I know what it takes," Romney told the crowd in Westerville. "I care about the people of America, and the difference between me and Barack Obama is I know what to do."

That message so late in the campaign — a presidential nominee declaring his concern for all the people of the country — was part of his widening effort to rebound from his caught-on-video

comments at a fundraiser.

In those comments, made last May but only recently revealed, Romney said "47 percent of the people" pay no federal income tax, will vote for Obama no matter what, are victims, think the government must care for them and do not "take personal responsibility and care for their lives."

New opinion polls, conducted after the video became public, show Obama opening up apparent leads over Romney in battleground states, including Ohio and Virginia. And majorities of voters in Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania say Romney's policies would favor the rich over the middle class or the poor.

Specifically in Ohio, two surveys show the president crossing the 50 percent mark among likely voters. A Washington Post poll found Obama ahead 52 percent to 44 percent among those most likely to turn out, and a Quinipiac University/CBS News/New York Times poll showed a 10-point Obama lead among definite voters.

Noting anew the Romney video comments, Obama said Wednesday: "We understand that America is not about what can be done for us. It's about what can be done by us together, as one nation, as one people."

And he added: "You can't make it happen if you write off half the nation before you take office."

Romney was showing signs of picking up his pace.

He scheduled a blizzard of interviews with ABC, CBS and NBC, his second round of broadcast network appearances in three days after weeks of ignoring their requests. He also did interviews Tuesday with Fox News and CNN.

The new Romney TV ad, at 60 seconds, is a longer and softer approach in which he speaks about people struggling to pay for food and gas with falling incomes.

At one point on Wednesday, the two candidates spoke from different sections of northern Ohio at the same time, their scenery as different as their message.

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