

Two Egyptian Views of U.S. Policy

Aug 30, 2012



Articles & Testimony

Fikra Forum contributors offer unique perspectives and analysis from Egypt regarding the changes in U.S. policy toward the new Egyptian government.

America's Reversed Policy toward the Muslim Brotherhood (<http://fikraforum.org/?p=2620>)

By Amin Makram Ebeid

America used to be acknowledged as a beacon of democracy, a defender of values, a bridge-builder between people and nations, and an example for the entire world to emulate. In the Middle East, this image of America is unfortunately quickly losing its place in the hearts of democracy lovers and peace makers of this tortured region.

In early 2011, political observers noted that the Obama administration had begun to reverse decades of mistrust and hostility towards the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). This reversal was carried out with full knowledge that Brethren policy calls for the imposition of the Islamic Shari'a on Christians and liberal Muslims who reject this policy as tyrannical. Their organizational creed says it all: "Allah is our objective, the Qur'an is our law, the Prophet is our leader, Jihad is our way and death for the sake of Allah is the highest aspiration". Even the MB emblem appears to encourage military Jihad, consisting of two swords and the Qur'an. This would probably be acceptable in a homogeneous Muslim Society like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), but it is certainly not the case in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

It would be tempting to ask the leaders of the current U.S. administration: is the principle of the U.S. constitution's first amendment that separates the sacred (Church) from the secular too good for a country like Egypt? Or is there an ulterior motive behind the new Obama policy towards the Brotherhood? It seems that the current administration has no problem using two sets of rules that it may use or misuse for its immediate benefits; but certainly not for that of the people who will suffer from their new choice.

It is important to recall at this point that the MB is not a religious organization that calls for the protection of persecuted minorities (religious or otherwise), nor is it a charitable society that sends volunteers to serve in leprosy colonies, and it has not been known to teach its male members to look at women with pure lust-free eyes when it is much easier to cover them with heavy layers of veils. In fact, the MB's first aim is to introduce the Shari'a as the jurisprudence that fundamentally governs the affairs of State and society. The second aim of the MB is to work towards unification of Islamic countries, especially the Arab states. It is no coincidence that the MB association was founded in 1928, four years after the fall of the Turkish Caliphate. With a renewed Caliphate, the Islamists hope to reunite all Muslims from Indonesia to Morocco.

The MB is extremely well organized and could work very efficiently for the unity of Muslims around the world.

Moreover, as noted by political analyst Igor Ignatchenko, the MB is an international Islamist organization forming a network type structure with offices representing the organization in 30 countries. It has recently proved its efficiency in helping to topple Qadhafi in Libya and in winning the elections in Egypt and Palestine, where it is known as the Hamas Organization.

Why has the United States (in its current administration) dramatically changed its policy towards the MB? How could such a policy be made by leaders of a country founded on the principles of strict separation of Church and State? I am at a loss to answer that question, and worry about the underlying political ethics of the Obama/Clinton team. Have Mr. Obama and Mrs. Clinton forgotten the toxic effects that followed the support of the radical Islamist Mujahedin war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and how it resulted in the destabilization of the Middle East and the entire world? Have they also forgotten how easy it was to destabilize Iran by the support of the Ayatollah?

If this political volte-face is done to better control a weakened and destabilized Middle East, the fact is that it would be more profitable for the United States to use her offices in order to encourage and help Egypt and other Arab nations enjoy authentic democracy that is exposed to the values of separating the sacred from the secular. Furthermore, the United States should promote industrial, agricultural, economic and scientific progress in order to render those nations peaceful and prosperous and therefore are less likely to use violence in solving problems.

Separation of Church and State is central to the U.S. Constitution. It is so important that it is inserted in the first amendment of the Constitution which reads as follows: "Congress shall make no laws respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". This is why America does not have a State religion such as found in the KSA and in Egypt. It is also on account of this constitution that America is prohibited from going to war for religious reasons.

It is important to understand however, that separating the sacred from the secular does not mean to call for a radical divorce from personal ethics which, whether we like it or not, has been protected in America by the Judeo-Christian code of morality that has been espoused by the United States for well over two centuries.

Today, liberals and religious minorities of Egypt are forced to helplessly face a U.S. administration that is prepared to sell the well-being of peace-hungry minorities such as the Christians, the liberal Muslims and the Baha'is to the Islamists and their oil rich Arabian financiers the well-being of peace-hungry minorities such as the Christians, the liberal Muslims and the Baha'is, all for thirty barrels of oil.

It should be known however that the new U.S. policy towards the MB has not gained her the long term support of the Islamists, despite the Obama administration's shameful attempt to placate the enemies of democracy at the cost of abandoning its traditional liberal friends.

The Christians and liberals of the Arab Middle East have been deeply hurt by the current reversal of U.S. policy and hope that a return to sanity will soon arrive with a wiser administration. As for the radical Islamists, their hatred for the United States will never abate because of their rejection of many American values that are felt to be inimical to those of radical Islamists.

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The Current Egyptian Government: A Fragile Stability **(<http://fikraforum.org/?p=2627>)**

By Magdy Samaan

Egypt's recently elected president, Mohamed Morsi, has been facing great difficulties, bringing to question his ability to govern. This all changed, however, after the terrorist incident in which 16 Egyptian soldiers on border patrol fell

victim in the city of Rafah on the Israeli border. The president used this incident as an excuse to dismiss the key figures in the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, as well as the General Intelligence Service who were running the country's affairs. Where there previously had been doubts as to the new president's competency, he came out of this a modern pharaoh, more competent and powerful than his predecessor Hosni Mubarak, especially after he nullified the constitutional declaration supplemented by SCAF, and announced a new declaration, without the approval of the people, giving himself the right to legislate.

There are those who believe that Morsi's decisions were made within the framework of a conflict between the military council and the president as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood for control of the country. It is my conviction, however, that the struggle is essentially among army institutions, between those who supported Lt. Gen. Ahmed Shafiq's presidential campaign, and those who supported the Muslim Brotherhood's campaign as a way to diffuse the expected popular protests had a military candidate been elected. Had the military united behind Shafiq and threatened to try SCAF leaders, it might have restored the revolution to its rightful path. The Brotherhood was merely the spearhead in this conflict.

Following the incident, the statements of General Mourad Mowafy, director of the GIS, pointed to this conflict when he reported that he had notified the army of available information regarding a plan to execute a terrorist attack, thus indirectly accusing the army of failing to perform its duty. Despite these statements, Morsi ordered his dismissal, immediately before dismissing a number of key members of the military council, including Field Marshal Tantawi, the Minister of Defense, and Lt. Gen. Sami Anan, Chief of Staff, after honoring them for their service and assigning them to civilian posts.

Regardless of the indications of conflict within the government, the decision to dismiss SCAF heavyweights was imperative in order to close the door on the haphazard transitional phase that the country has witnessed, in hopes that the Egyptian people will forget the manipulation of their revolution, and the massacres committed at the hands of these leaders.

Following the January Revolution, citizens refused the idea of a military president, thus leaving military leaders with the dilemma of how to protect their interests under an elected civilian president. The Muslim Brotherhood has appeared flexible with the military, and helped them abort the civilian revolutionary force which would have guaranteed democratic transformation and achieved a balance of power. While the MB dismissed the suggestion of the presidential council, supported amendments to the constitution, and advocated for presidential elections before the completion of a new constitution, the army, for its part, turned a blind eye to the legal status of the MB, and failed to monitor the MB's sources of funding, just as they ignored the MB's unconstitutional use of religious slogans during the elections.

There are two possible explanations for what happened. Either the MB turned on SCAF, and now empowered, will separate itself from the army, or, the changes were coordinated by the MB and SCAF to give the government a fresh face and legitimize the new president, while the army's influence and interests remain pervasive. Superficial amendments to balance power were instated, and the military returned to playing behind the curtain. I suspect the latter of the two options is true, and do not foresee any fundamental changes in the government's policy outlines, whether external or internal, particularly with relation to dependency on the United States and commitment to the peace treaty with Israel.

The statements that followed Morsi's decision to dismiss key members of SCAF confirm the second hypothesis that an agreement has been made between the parties in power in the likes of a conspiracy. The leaders ordered to retire did not have prior knowledge, as stated by recently retired navy commander Mohab Mamish. Meanwhile, SCAF member Maj. Gen. Mohamed El Assar, who maintains a close relationship with the United States, said that SCAF was consulted in the decision to retire its leaders, which means that some members of the council were in fact privy to

the decision beforehand. Moreover, American Secretary of State Hilary Clinton was informed during her visit to Egypt of the changes agreed upon, as stated by State Department spokesperson Victoria Noland, which means that we are witnessing a plot between some members of SCAF and the U.S. administration, whose negotiations gave a green light to Morsi to proceed as he did.

Three weeks prior to the SCAF dismissals, I wrote an article titled “When will the Muslim Brotherhood Turn on the Military Council?” predicting it would happen because a formula for governance with two butting heads will not last long and maintaining the personal interests of two parties will inevitably bring about change.

When Secretary of State Clinton uttered her famous words at the pinnacle of the Egyptian Revolution, “The Egyptian government is stable,” she was expressing her hopes and not the reality on the ground. In time, U.S. policy, backed by allies in the Gulf and Israel, contributed to restabilizing the Egyptian government where the Muslim Brotherhood assumes the role of Mubarak.

However, stability in the hands of a Muslim Brotherhood president faced with an economy in trouble is at best fragile, as social unrest increases due to the breakdown of services. Confronted by all of this, the MB government has been forced to not only abandon its principle to refuse borrowing from the World Bank in accordance with Islamic law which prohibits usury, but is in the process of negotiating the increase of the loans from 3 billion to 4.8 billion dollars. Even if the World Bank approves the loan, it will do so only under tough conditions, perhaps the most important of which is ending energy subsidies, which may prove unbearable for a large sector of Egyptian society. Unless the government is able to maneuver out of this bottleneck, stability will remain fragile, and the Brotherhood will remain in the crossfire of social unrest.

Magdy Samaan is an independent Egyptian journalist. ❖

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