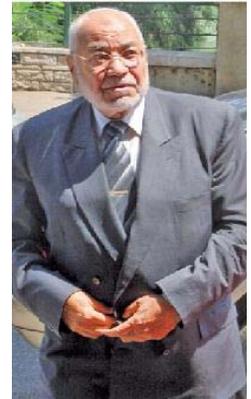




Political Islam Online

The Brotherhood Political Party Platform in Egypt.... Iran, Taliban or Erdogan Style?

In an attempt to retest the climate for creation of its own political party, a few days ago in Egypt, the “Society of the Muslim Brothers” (commonly known as the Muslim Brotherhood) distributed to a few select political and intellectual personalities their recently published platform for a new party. However, the unlikely possibility that, under the present political regime, the Brotherhood would be allowed to carry out their plan any time soon, raised questions about the timing and intentions of their action. Writer *Khalil Al-'Inani* describes the initial mixed reaction to their platform: “While some saw it as a well-intentioned attempt to calm the fear that the Brotherhood’s political and intellectual views generate, others derided the “regressive ideology” of the ideas presented. The author describes the language of the platform as a recoiling from the Brotherhood’s softer stands which allowed them to participate in the parliamentary elections of 2005 and 2007.



Brotherhood Supreme
Guide: Mahdi 'Akif

Religious or Civil Country?

From the very first chapter the platform reveals a considerable hardening of tone, asserting the necessity of “applying the authoritative source of the Islamic Shari’a in accordance with the vision agreed upon by the *Ummah*.”¹ This “vision” is to be supplied by “An institution of Muslim scholars” directly elected by the people and totally independent from the Executive branch. This would mean that a religious institution would act as “guardian” over all other governmental bodies, without any supervisory constitutional or legislative authority. It is nothing short of theocratic rule à la “Khomeini.” The platform further stipulates that the government’s first responsibility is “the zealous protection of the religion” and the primary responsibility of the president is to defend the “Islamic Nation.” The author deduces that such discourse is a clear indication of the Brotherhood’s desire to apply the principle of “*Al-Hisbah*,”² as practiced under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

¹ “Ummah,” meaning “nation,” is the word preferred by Islamists because, unlike the word “country,” it connotes an extension of the group beyond geographic borders, as in “The Muslim Ummah”.

² “Al-Hisbah” is a system of control to ensure that all society’s actions adhere to the religious dogma, supposedly to rid society of vices.

The Case of the Copts³ and Women

The platform's vagueness and contradictory position on the subject of equality among citizens represents a major failure. While the platform proclaims equality regardless of belief, sex or color, it also states that Christians are precluded from holding the position of "president of the country," on the grounds that non-Muslims are unable to understand the religion by which they must govern.

Al-'Inani sarcastically notes that the subject of women is listed under the section entitled "Legal Proceedings and Problems." While the platform proclaims that women have an important status, it vaguely attributes the equality of women to "human dignity." The details paint a decidedly "unequal" position for women. For example, before a woman may hold any public office, particularly in the judiciary, the platform states that the issue must be reviewed to ensure that the appointment is in conformity with acceptable "societal harmony," a vague reference meant to avoid proclaiming their opposition to women holding public offices.

The Economic View

The platform generally exhibits a lack of understanding on the economic front. For example, although this section states that tourism must be encouraged to combat unemployment, it asserts that, before coming to Egypt, all tourists must be well versed in, and abide by the constraints of Islam – a requirement that would obviously stifle tourism. The platform also advocates the abolition of the stock exchange and all interest-bearing bank accounts without offering alternatives to encourage investments or savings.

Al-'Inani concludes that while many were awaiting a credible platform for progressive government, similar to the platform offered by Erdogan's party in Turkey, they found they were offered a rigid plan unacceptable to both the intellectuals of Egypt and the masses.

It remains to be seen whether the author is correct in predicting that certain elements of the platform will cause the masses to reject it. The current climate in Egypt suggests that the Brotherhood's strict religious ideology may, in fact, appeal to many. Recent events, such as the objection of several religious figures and judges to the appointment of women to the judiciary, the almost country-wide adherence of Muslim women to use of the head scarf in public, and the increase in tensions between Copts and Muslims are all indications that religious fervor is on the rise, at least among the masses. The Brotherhood's platform may be a reflection of that fervor, or those events may reflect surrender of the masses to religious pressure and economic despair, rather than deep-seeded belief. Thus, while Egypt is almost certainly on the threshold of change, a clear vision of the post-Mubarak era has yet to materialize. Egyptians are waiting to be saved – the question is by whom.

Source : Author : Khalil Al-'Inani – Dar Al-Hayat – Date 9/25/2007
URL : <http://www.daralhayat.com/special/features/09-2007/Item-20070924-38930c4f-c0a8-10ed-00c3-e8c47f854c47/story.html>

³ The term "Copt" originally meant "Egyptian." Today, the term is used to mean "Egyptian Christians," most of whom belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church, with much smaller Coptic Catholic and Coptic Protestant minorities.