



Political Islam Online

Ahmad Kamal Abu Al-Magd
(Personality of the Month)

Constitutional Lawyer - Politician - Islamic scholar



Ahmad Kamal Abu Al-Magd, a constitutional lawyer by trade, is vice-president of the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights [NCHR]. [PI Online](#) has chosen him as the personality of the month for his quest to establish a dialogue within the Muslim world and avoid a clash of civilizations. The septuagenarian Islamic intellectual espouses Islamic principles without being confrontational. Although he rejects the notion that it is feasible to have a totally secularist government in a Muslim country, he believes that it is possible to apply Islamic governing principles while guaranteeing the rights of minorities within a constitutional

framework.

Because he advocates restraint without rejecting Islamism, *Abu Al-Magd* has been championed by many intellectually moderate Islamists as well as human rights activists, but has not lost the government's support – a feat difficult for an Islamic scholar to attempt much less achieve. He is considered to have made significant contributions to modern Islamic thinking, incorporating rationalism within a unique divinely inspired dogma. That philosophical amalgamation stems from *Abu Al-Magd's* belief that Islam is important in legitimizing the actions of the government although the government itself is civil and depends upon the democratic consent of the people. Until now, *Abu Al-Magd* is considered an optimist who would like nothing better than to take the entire Islamic nation on a journey with him towards harmony with other religions and civilizations.

He recognizes that achievement of that goal must start with the establishment of internal harmony between Islamists and the government, a goal that has eluded centrist Islamists until now. *Abu Al-Magd* has condemned radicalism in no uncertain terms and blames Jihadis for having reduced his beloved religion to what is now perceived in the world as a “security problem.” He considers the militants slaves to two doctrines – isolationism (*fiqh al-‘uzlah*) and covert action (*fiqh al-amal al-sirri*)¹ – which make them unfit to engage in the mainstream political dialogue.

Abu Al-Magd's criticism of the rigid *Salafi* application of Islamic laws has also been at the center of his agenda. He has repeatedly called for using the *Ijtihad*² concept to develop pragmatic views and modernize Islamic laws in order to adjust to the changing realities of modern society. He has at times been critical of the scholars at *Al-Azhar* in Egypt for what he characterized as “their deplorable retrogression...rendering them incapable of fulfilling the role imposed upon them by the new reality of Muslim nations and the World.”

Abu Al-Magd has also not shied away from criticizing human rights violations in Egypt, condemning physical abuses by the Intelligence apparatus and electoral fraud. He knows well, however, the subtlety

¹ The Far Enemy: Why Jihad went Global (Cambridge Middle East Studies), Fawaz A. Gerges, P242

² *Ijtihad* in Islamic law is a process of making legal decisions by renewed and independent interpretations of the Quran and the Sunnah.

and intricacy of the limits of permissible criticism of the Egyptian government, having previously occupied the post of information minister. In order to remain effective, therefore, he is careful in his condemnation of human rights abuses, focusing on local police mistreatment or unjust court orders, without touching the presidency.

Abu al-Magd is also known for having written the preface to *Naguib Mahfouz's* book, "Children of Geblawi (1959), which was banned from Egypt for allegedly blaspheming monotheistic religions. In 1994, his novel triggered a fatwa by Egyptian sheikh *Umar Abdul-Rahman* and Islamic extremists tried to assassinate *Mahfouz*. It was not until 2006 that the novel was published in Egypt and *Abu al-Magd's* endorsement was taken symbolic of the freedom of expression he espouses.

Abu al-Magd's philosophy teaches a gentle Islam unburdened by the past and evolving with time, characterized by Islamic parties which reject violence and engage in peaceful participation within a political process based upon democratic representation. He opposes any threat of physical abuse by the authorities and insists on respect for the law by the courts and police, who should only target extremists without infringing on the rights of the majority of Muslims³.

Abu Al-Magd's present position at NCHR seems to fit well with his views and his goals. While *Boutros Boutros Ghali* has been appointed president of the NCHR, mainly to validate the council's legitimacy on the international scene, it is *Abu Al-Magd*, together with other members in the council, who are considered the most credible and best able to influence the majority of the Muslim population. His importance and that of the few like him in the Arab world rests in their capacity to draw intellectual Muslims who lately have become further polarized by radicalism back to the side of the moderates. The attraction of more militant Islam was enhanced by what is perceived as the government's continuous human rights abuses and more difficult economic conditions. In the past, *Abu Al-Magd* seemed to see the solution to these problems in accepting the Muslim Brotherhood as a viable party and stressing the importance of a dialogue between Islamists and the government. Since 1981, his motto, and the title of one of his books, has been: "Dialogue rather than Confrontation."⁴

Lately, *Abu al-Magd's* views seem to have changed. This past month he was quoted as accusing the Muslim Brotherhood of political ignorance and failure as parliamentarians. He went as far as stating that the writings of *Hassan Al-Banna* and *Sayyid Qutb*, the two important spiritual leaders and founders of the movement's ideology, are irrelevant. He considers their books full of heretical thoughts and described members of the Brotherhood as hoodlums who act at the expense of God and Islam.⁵ Unfortunately, while *Abu al-Magd* now appears to reject the Brotherhood, there is no moderate Islamic institution in Egypt that could fill the gap, particularly among the youth. This fact is well known to *Abu al-Magd*. Thus, it is particularly disconcerting to see an optimist like *Abu al-Magd* give up on the Brotherhood as beyond saving.

There is no doubt that *Ahmad Kamal Abu al-Magd* is one of the most credible centrist Islamists. His persistent efforts to rid Egyptian society of its progressively more radical elements is commendable. Whether you agree with him on all issues or not, there is wisdom in his call for "dialogue without confrontation."

³ Source : Maktoobblog.com

⁴ Hiwar La Muwajahah {Dialogue rather than Confrontation}, Ahmad Kamal Abu Al-Magd, Dar al-Shuruq - 1989 ISBN 9771481916 (977-14-8191-6)

⁵ Source: http://www.mooga.com/MoogaNews/news_details.asp?id=122999

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