

## INSTITUTE FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

20 August 2013

By Hakim Khatib

Junior Lecturer in Islamic Studies and Politics  
Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany

### **ISLAMISTS IN POWER: EASY COME, EASY GO!**

---

Interestingly, fair elections in Arab countries have nearly always resulted with Islamists reaching out to the highest positions in power. Hamas in Palestine and then Ennahda in Tunisia followed by Muslim brotherhood in Egypt, then Libya and Yemen and now the Islamisation and sectarianism seem to come out of the closet in the on-going Syrian civil war. Those powers were politically marginalized under the rule of the dictatorships but they were evidently active in the social life in the Arab world and proved to be organized in heart-hunting campaigns to win the sympathy of the civil societies. After the demonstrations of 25th January 2011 in Egypt for instance, parliament elections resulted with 45.7% for the conservative Islamic Freedom and Justice Party and 23.6% for the extreme conservative Salafi Al Noor Party. In this case, the Islamists owned 351 seats from 498, around 70% of the Egyptian parliament.

In the case of the Arab transitions, the issue of uncertainty remains a ravelling and problematic concept. The sudden fall down of the dictatorships has left a huge gap in the political system in those countries. The nationalist states were suppressive to the extent that no political opposition was worth to be mentioned. However, the socially active Islamist groups were the most organized groups that seemed to fill in the gap, therefore, it was by coincidence that they were more equipped to win the hearts of people than other parties. The days go by and the Islamists win the power in the after-transition Arab countries, with which they constantly proved their inexperience in state management. The quality of performance and competence they have offered was less than what they had promised.

The Middle East Values Study Organisation (MEVS) conducted a survey with 3496 interviewees from Egypt before and after the transition in Egypt, in which a

significant decrease in supporting an Islamic government. This is what Asda'a Burson-Marsteller, a communication network in the Middle East, also revealed with their research of 2013, in which they conducted 3,000 face-to-face interviews between December 2012 and January 2013 with Arab men and women aged 18 to 24 in several Arab countries. The young simply long for better standards of living as well as to practice more fundamental freedoms regardless the form of state. This shows that the core demands of the public differ completely from those of the Islamists.

In 2011 in Egypt, millions crowded into Tahrir Square against Hosni Mubarak. The Muslim Brotherhood supported this uprising but very lately. Indeed, the same Muslim brotherhood that supported the uprising of 2011 is calling the demonstrations of 2013 as a result of a universal conspiracy against Egypt. All those who demonstrate or protest against president Morsi are thugs repeating by that what was used to be said in January 2011 by the former government. After ousting Morsi in July 2013 by the General Abdulfattah El-Sissi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces and Minister of defence, the Muslim Brotherhood proved their interest in only supporting their own group neglecting the national interest of Egypt.

The promises the Islamists made for Egyptians were brazenly broken. While Morsi was running to the Egyptian presidential elections, he promised to lift the state of contingency law and he said that it is not needed in a free country like Egypt. He reconfirmed that message right after becoming the president of Egypt. Well, ironically, in 2013, in order to suppress the demonstrations rallied against the Brotherhood, Morsi imposed contingency law again and called for national dialogue, in which all political parties can take part.

2013 Demonstrations took place for several reasons such as: the failure of the Islamist government to deliver what they promised, the autocratic governance and the continuation of the same policies of the previous regime.

Apparently, the new Islamist political leaders lack democratic experience. This makes Egypt face a number of key challenges in defining democracy and being able to implement it, which is by far the most challenging form of government - both for politicians and for the people.

The insistence on Islamist values in governance and the renewed commitment to the basic principles of Islam are not a return to the past, as it seems but an effort to encounter the changing contemporary problems. The contemporary worldwide wave of Islamist revivalist movements is a direct response to the global changes that constitute modernity for such societies.

These movements can be traced back to the example of the Prophet himself, whose own life constituted an Islamic response to conditions of "modernization" in his own society. Islamic movements today represent the conjunction of contemporary circumstances and historical cultural norms. In the 70s, many of those Islamist revival movements took a political form to revive by that what Hassan Albanna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, started in 1928. These Islamist movemnets

spread all over the Islamic world: The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Ennahda in Tunisia, Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, the Jama'at-Islami in Pakistan and elsewhere in South and South east Asia, and Shi'i movements in Lebanon such as Amal and Hizbullah.

Obviously, until recently, the Brotherhood had the strongest command in Egypt within the law but according to observers, there are doubts about the strength of the Brotherhood's commitment to its promises. The Brotherhood has also a strong command in Tunisia, Yemen, Jordan, and Libya. Islamists represented by the Brotherhood are not equipped enough to lead a country into democratization, according to the Mohammad Badi, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The impact of national states in the past 60 years or so oppressed the Islamic movements and worked hard on the de-Islamization of those societies and the enforcement of secularization and marginalization of Islam in educational and legal systems. Therefore, and as not only a reaction to the global changes in the world but also to the internal changes in their national states, those movements evolved seeking ideological and political alternative in Islam to socialism, liberalism, communism, secularism...etc. In countries like Tunisia and Egypt, in which the majority are Muslims, a growing movement based on Islamic religion is not a surprise. This change in the balance of power gave the chance to Islamists of all sects to strongly emerge and explicitly speak their minds, which led to a deep mixture between politics and religion, which proved to be inefficient in many occasions. However, based on the above-mentioned premises, it seems that Islamists will vanish from the political scene in Arab countries as quickly as they emerged in power.