



# Civil Society

and Democratization in the Arab World

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**Arab Muslims are the problem**

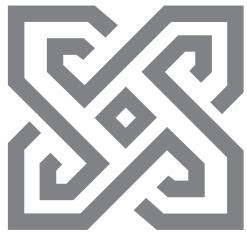
**Undermining Mubarak**

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Saad Eddin Ibrahim

# Even if Islam is the Answer, Arab Muslims are the Problem

Written from exile

In May 2008, the Arab nation experienced a number of fires, or rather, armed conflicts---in Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, and Somalia. In these conflicts, the warring parties used Islam as the instrument for mobilization and amassing support.

Collectively, Muslims are waging war against Muslims. After some Muslims raised the slogan of "Islam is the solution," it became apparent "their Islam is the problem." No sooner have some of them acquired weapons, than they raised it against the state and its ruling regime regardless of whether that regime was ruling in the name of Islam or not. We have seen this in recent years between the followers of Osama bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda organization on the one hand, and the authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the other. We have also seen an explosive example of this phenomenon in Morocco, whose king rules in the name of Islam and whose title is the 'Prince of the Faithful.' Thus each Muslim faction kills other Muslims in the name of Islam.

A quick glance at the contents of the media confirms how the term Islam and its associated symbols have become mere tools in the hands of these Muslims. Prominent examples of these Islam-exploiting factions are:

- The Muslim Brotherhood, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and Jamiat al-Islamiyya, in Egypt
- Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement, in Palestine
- Hezbollah, Fatah al-Islam, and Jamiat al-Islammiyya, in Lebanon
- The Houthi Zayadi rebels and the Islamic Reform Grouping (Islah), in Yemen
- The Islamic courts, in Somalia
- The Islamic Front and the

- The Islamic Front and the Islamic Liberation Parties, in Jordan

- The Justice and Equality Movement, and the National Islamic Front, in Sudan

- Islamic leadership parties, including the Justice and Development Party, in the Arab Maghrib

- The Armed Islamic Group and the Islamic Salvation Front, in Algeria

- Al-Qaeda, the Islamic Party, and the Mahdi and the Badr Armies, in Iraq

Historical evidence shows that those who try to use religion to acquire legitimacy then rule tyrannically over their people, open the gates of hell on themselves, their country, and its people, and, moreover, defame Islam. The following are examples that attest to this truth:

In the 1970s, the late Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, who liked to be called the "Faithful President," in an attempt to bolster his faltering legitimacy, introduced two consecutive amendments in the constitution: the first made Islamic Sharia a "source of legislation," then the second made it the "principal source of legislation." However, these Islamizing steps did not prevent others from outbidding him in their religiosity, and he was killed on October 6, 1981. Those who killed him belonged to a radical Islamic group that went by the name of the Jihad Organization.

In the Sudan, President Jafar Numeiry assumed power following a military coup. When protests increased against his authoritarianism, he imitated President Sadat and announced "his Islamism," the adoption of Shariah, and found himself a Muslim Brotherhood Islamic



Saad Eddin Ibrahim

theoretician, Hasan al-Turabi, who soon declared that the ideas of four other Muslim scholars show that in fact they are apostates. Thus, four members of the group known as the Republican Brotherhood were sentenced to death for their peaceful, independent Islamic reasoning on the issue of religion in the modern world. Then Numeiry and al-Turabi disagreed, upon which Numeiry put al-Turabi in jail. A few years later a popular uprising overthrew Numeiry who then sought refuge in Egypt.

After a brief period, al-Turabi conspired with a group of officers in the Sudanese army and, in the name of Islam once again, pounced on a democratically elected government which was headed by his brother-in-law, Imam Sadiq al-Mahdi. Al-Turabi and the leader of the new military junta, general Omar Al-Bashir, announced the establishment of the Islamic Front, and that Sharia law will apply on all Sudanese, including the quarter of the population in the south which is not Muslim. This promptly ignited a vicious civil war once again. When other Muslims felt injustice at the hands of Muslims in the northern Sudanese capital Khartoum, they created their own extremist opposition organizations which were also given Islamic names, such as the "Justice and

Equality” group in the Darfur region.

Yemen witnessed and continues to experience something similar. Those competing for power again discovered that their best strategy was to utilize an Islamic discourse and Islamic symbols and slogans in order to forestall the autocratic regime's attempt to outbid them in this regard. When Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh announced the General People's Congress Party, a team composed of the opposition founded an opposition party named the Yemeni Congregation for Reform. As the conflict intensified, Saleh instructed one of the tribal leaders, Badr Eddin Al-Houthi, to create an Islamic movement from the followers of the Zaidi sect. The goal was to counteract the Yemeni Congregation for Reform, which includes most of the followers of the Sunni Shafai school of Islamic jurisprudence which is supported by Saudi Arabia. Eventually, Al-Houthi realized his own position of power, and came to understand the true dimensions of the religious game in which Saleh was using him in the name of Islam. He refused to continue in the role of a cat's paw in the service of Ali Saleh and decided to build up a following of his own from among his own tribe in North Yemen in a bid for their share in wealth and power. They (the Houthi tribe) wanted to be partners, not agents for or clients of Saleh. However, like most Arab tyrants, Saleh did not want any partners or any kind of control or accountability over his absolute power. He thus ordered the army to punish Badr Eddin Al-Houthi. A bloody battle ensued, during which Al-Houthi was killed, but his brother took over leadership of the tribe against the regime of Ali Saleh. A sister Arab country, Qatar, tried to mediate between the Houthi tribe and the regime. But after more than a year,

the fighting was still raging between the two sides. It is said that some army officers started asking for special pay for waging war on behalf of the President. This led the President to establish special forces led by his son Ahmed, to function parallel with the army. Thus, the magic---in the name of religion---began to turn against the magician.

As for Hezbollah, its leader Mr. Hassan Nasrallah said to me at the end of January last year (an interview which I noted in the article titled “Between Hassan Nasrallah and Thomas Friedman,” February, 2007) that his followers would not raise weapons or fire upon any Lebanese citizen, even if they were fired upon by other Lebanese. Clearly he has not kept his pledge. Fighters from Hezbollah have fired upon other Lebanese during the attempt of the Lebanese government to take control of the communications network that Hezbollah set up around the airport, on the pretext that this network was necessary for possible future rounds of fighting with Israel. Because Hezbollah had in the past entered into commendable struggles with Israel (that led to Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon) it now wanted to be recognized by the Lebanese government as a virtual state within the state. Hezbollah is acting, whether intentionally or unintentionally, like current Arab governing regimes who justify their authoritarianism on the pretext of preparing for a future struggle against Israel, though they failed to liberate even one inch of the land of Palestine in the last 60 years. In other words, Hezbollah is requiring submission to the tyranny of the immediate brother in hope of protecting from the tyranny of the far enemy.

Thus, in this way the slogan “Islam is the solution” which the

Muslim Brotherhood raised years ago transformed those who adopted it into becoming themselves “the problem.” Sometimes the slogan is raised to fight non-Muslims, but more often it is used to attack other Muslims.

Thus, the number of Muslims whom Al-Qaeda has killed in Iraq exceed by more than ten times the number killed by the invading American forces.

Is it the purpose of those who raise the slogan “Islam is the solution,” to do so only to gain power, and then impose an autocratic rule that oppresses both Muslims and non-Muslims?

There is no doubt that there are truly faithful Muslims that rush to embrace this attractive spiritual slogan without asking themselves: where and when have those who raised this slogan ever succeeded in achieving a society without problems?

Maybe they do not realize that a society without problems cannot be a human society. Perhaps a society of angels is the only society without problems. The evidence shows that those who play with these religious slogans are only the Arabs, while the majority of Muslims are not Arab. Perhaps this is the reason that two thirds of all Muslims in the world today live under democratically elected systems, while the last third---the Arab Muslims---lives under undemocratic, authoritarian regimes. Even though they have said that “Islam is the solution,” Islam has been transformed into a problem in the hands of Arab Muslims. ■

## Undermining Mubarak

**O**utrage against soaring inflation, the scarcity of subsidised bread and discontent with the regime of President Hosni Mubarak exploded on 6 April in Mahalla al-Kubra, a major industrial city north of Cairo. Muhammad al-Attar told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "The city is burning. Thousands of demonstrators are out on the street, throwing stones, chanting anti-government slogans and defying the batons of the riot police, tear gas and bullets." Al-Attar is a member of the elected strike committee of the 25,000 workers at the gigantic Misr Spinning and Weaving Co, a public-sector textile conglomerate and the largest industrial enterprise in Egypt. In January, the committee announced that the Misr workers would strike on 6 April to force the company to fulfill promises made after successful strikes in December 2006 and September 2007.

This developed into a call for a nationwide strike to protest against the sharp increase in the prices of many basic foods, especially bread, and to demand a rise in the minimum wage from \$21 a month, set in 1984, to \$222. Between 2005 and 2008, food prices rose by 33% for meat and as much as 146% for chicken, and this March inflation reached 15.8%. Severe shortages of subsidised bread, the main source of calories for most Egyptians, have made things worse -- low-paid government inspectors often sell subsidised flour on the black market. Rows in long bread lines caused injuries and even deaths. The cost of unsubsidised bread has nearly doubled in the past two years.

On 2 April, security forces occupied the city of Mahalla and the Misr mill, and pressed al-Attar, Sayyid Habib and other members of the committee to call off the strike. The company granted several outstanding demands: increases in basic monthly pay to \$65 for unskilled workers, \$69 for high school and trade school graduates, and \$74 for college and university graduates; a doubling of the

monthly food allowance; and a commitment to implement a promise of free transport to work. These gains will raise the rates of the best-paid Misr workers to about \$185 a month.

### Carrot and stick

The National Council on Wages and the state-sponsored Egyptian Trade Union Federation also began discussing raising the national minimum wage. They will certainly recommend far less than the \$222 a month proposed by the Misr workers, which is still below the World Bank poverty line of \$2 a day for each person in a family of four.

The combination of carrot and stick induced the committee to call off the strike but some workers were not happy. Just after the 3:30pm shift change, a few workers mingled with a crowd of mostly young boys and women in the main square of Mahalla al-Kubra. The leaderless crowd began chanting: "Oh pasha, oh bey, a loaf of [unsubsidised] bread costs a quarter of a pound." In response, hired thugs threw volleys of rocks to disperse them. Uniformed Central Security forces fired tear gas and prepared to beat the demonstrators with batons. As the violence escalated, the crowd burned the banners of ruling National Democratic Party candidates for the municipal elections scheduled two days later.

The elections aroused little interest and had no legitimacy: hundreds of Muslim Brothers candidates were arrested in the weeks before the balloting, eliminating the main opposition.

On 7 April, violence continued for a second day when a crowd of several thousand, much larger than the day before, gleefully defaced a large poster of President Mubarak. Security forces arrested 331 people, beat up hundreds, critically wounded nine, and killed 15-year-old Ahmad Ali Mubarak with a bullet to his head as he was standing on the balcony of the family flat.

On 8 April, a delegation of high government officials led by prime

minister Ahmad Nazif rushed to Mahalla al-Kubra to restore calm. Nazif announced a bonus of a month's pay for Misr workers and 15 days for all other textile workers. The minister of investment promised better transport, special bakeries for subsidised bread, and a revival of the cooperative store to provide subsidised rice, oil, sugar and flour. The city's general hospital will receive new medical equipment and specialised staff. (Faulty equipment may have caused the deaths of eight patients in Mahalla's cardiac centre in March.)

As the first Egyptian-owned mechanised textile mill (established in 1927) and the largest industrial enterprise of the public sector nationalised in 1960, Misr has enormous symbolic importance. Events there often set the pace for wages and working conditions for other industrial workers. So the government was willing to pay a high price, as it has in the past, to satisfy its workers.

### Call for a general strike

The Mahalla workers' plan for a national labour strike escalated into a call for a general strike endorsed by the Egyptian Movement for Change -- Kifaya (a multi-tendency pro-democracy coalition), the Islamist Labour Party, the Nasserist Karama Party and the Bar Association. A FaceBook group with more than 60,000 members also called on Egyptians to remain at home on 6 April. Some went on strike and there were large demonstrations on the steps of the Bar Association and at several universities. In downtown Cairo there was less traffic, and reduced activity in poorer districts such as the market area of Imbaba.

But the general strike was aborted by the arrest of nearly 100 political activists on the eve of 6 April. Khalid Ali Umar, a lawyer at the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre, criticised the call as a "premature act on behalf of the leaders of ineffective political parties and groupings". He regarded organising

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through text messages, emails, and FaceBook as “political opportunism.”

The 11 December 2004 demonstration organised by Kifaya began political ferment in Egypt. Breaking a taboo, demonstrators personally criticised Mubarak and demanded that he should not run for re-election in 2005 (he did), that his son Gamal should not succeed him in the presidency (most Egyptians expect he will) and that the powers of the presidency should be reduced (the constitutional amendments of March 2007 expanded them). Although Kifaya initially showed much promise, it lost steam after the 2006 Lebanon war. The Communist Party, the newly established Social Democratic Party and the Trotskyist Revolutionary Socialists have made some gains among workers since 2004. But Kifaya has not been a big factor in the labour movement.

Kifaya's support for a general strike on 6 April was considered so threatening that on 9 April George Ishak, a founding member of Kifaya, was arrested followed by 50 others. The charges against Ishak were typical of the spurious accusations the Mubarak regime directs against opponents: “Organisation of a gathering in collaboration with others with the aim to commit crimes of aggression against individuals, treasury and public property; the use of force and violence with the aim of affecting the performance of public authorities.”

Twenty-five academics organised by Kifaya travelled to Mahalla on 11 April to visit families of the injured. They were detained 20km from the city and prevented from entering. This suggests that the Mubarak regime is escalating repressive measures against its secular opponents besides repressing the Muslim Brothers.

Their successful strikes projected the Mahalla workers into the leadership of a massive upsurge of working class collective action, in which as many as 400,000 have occupied factories, gone on strike, demonstrated or taken other collective action since 2004. Industrial workers have inspired strikes or strike threats by

professionals such as doctors, university professors and dentists. It is the largest and most sustained social movement in Egypt since the campaign to oust the British after 1945.

#### **Primary impulse**

The main cause is the neo-liberal agenda that is creating a new Egypt for 10% of the population while disenfranchising industrial workers and white collar employees, especially those in the diminishing public sector. Following Egypt's Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Programme agreements with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, Law 203 of 1991 stipulated that 314 public sector enterprises were eligible for privatisation. By mid-2002, 190 had been privatised. Then, in July 2004, a new government headed by Ahmad Nazif took office. The economic portfolios were entrusted to western-educated PhDs or businessmen close to Gamal Mubarak. The government of Gamal Mubarak's entourage initiated more sell-offs: A record 17 firms were sold in its first fiscal year in office.

This provoked fears about the loss of jobs and unwillingness of new private investors to pay long overdue social benefits, such as dividends in shares of firms owned by workers or contributions to retirement funds, which some public sector managers had neglected for as long as a decade. Real wages have declined sharply, and the gap between the rich and the poor has widened. A common estimate is that 40% of Egyptians live below the poverty line.

These conditions have impelled the unprecedented strikes and collective action since 2004. There were 74 collective actions in the first half of 2004 and 191 after the installation of the Nazif government in July. Some 25% were in the private sector, more than before. On 2 March 2008, the liberal daily Al-Misri al-Yawm reported 222 strikes, factory occupations and protests during 2006. Egyptian Workers and Trade Union Watch reported more than 580 episodes of industrial action in 2007.

During 2007, strikes spread from the textile and clothing industry to workers in building materials, transport, the Cairo metro, food processing, bakeries, sanitation, telecommunications, oil workers in Suez, the Helwan Iron and Steel Mills, the National Cement Company in Helwan and many others. Private sector industrial workers were a significant part of the labour movement for the first time in many decades.

In summer 2007, the movement broadened to white-collar employees, civil servants and professionals. The single largest collective action was the December 2007 strike of 55,000 real estate tax collectors employed by local authorities. After months of demonstrations, they went on strike for 10 days and won their demand for wage parity with their counterparts employed directly by the ministry of finance.

The workers' movement -- even more than the demonstrations of the intelligentsia organised by Kifaya -- has popularised a culture of protest and is contributing to consciousness of citizenship and rights far more successfully than the moribund secular opposition political parties or the most active NGOs. Addressing a rally after his release from jail during the September 2007 strike at Misr, Muhammad al-Attar said: “I want the whole government to resign -- I want the Mubarak regime to come to an end. Politics and workers' rights are inseparable. Work is politics. What we are witnessing here -- this is as democratic as it gets.”

This strike ended after the workers forced the government to negotiate with their elected strike committee; the tax collectors' strike was ended likewise. These are significant political defeats for the state-sponsored trade union federation, which many hope are steps towards establishing an independent trade union. While there is not yet an adequate organisational vehicle to express this new culture of protest, it has radically undermined the legitimacy of the Mubarak regime. ■

*Youssef M. Ibrahim\**

## Last Chance For a Legacy

**P**resident Bush will return empty-handed from his first voyage to some dicey Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, the world's prime purveyor of Islamofascism. The Saudis will be able to buy more advanced weapons, and they will get a free pass to export Islamist terror as well as oil.

America should lead a sweeping transformation of the West's hesitant prosecution of the war on Islamofascist terror. With teeming armies of boorish fanatics on call, an assembly line of suicide bombers, bearded commissars at their pulpits, and feudal lords reeking of oil money, Islamofascists are the 21st-century enemy that communism was in the last century. Mr. Bush has Six months left to do some lasting good and leave a legacy. He needs to issue the following directives:

\* All American instruments of policy including the National Security Council, the State Department, the Pentagon, and frontline embassies should enunciate a clear demarcation line between Islam, a religion among others, and those who promote an extremist version of the faith in thousands of madrassas and mosques across Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Islamist countries, from the Saudi feudal regime of Riyadh and its satellites all the way to Pakistan, should not to benefit from American military and political alliances.

\* Reform cannot remain a distant slogan proffered for convenience in places such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Real reform must be measured and tied to policy and military aid. America should demand an overhaul of educational systems and theological institutions, demanding the elimination discrimination against women and

away with the rote learning and harrowing anti-Americanism dispensed by the state-owned Arab press.

\* The Pentagon's top policy circles need to be reconfigured. Those who advocate abject submission to Islamic fundamentalism need to leave. In the latest dumbfounding episode, the office of the deputy secretary of defense, Gordon England, fired Major Stephen Coughlin, a lawyer and reserve military intelligence officer who has been the Pentagon's vigilant specialist on Islamic law and jihadist ideologies. His failing was being "insensitive." As the Washington Times reported, the major ran afoul of an increasing number of Muslim Arab advisers in the Pentagon's circles, particularly Mr. England's special assistant for international affairs, the Egyptian-born Hesham Islam. Amazingly, the secretary of defense appears to concur. Talk about cutting off your nose to spite your face.

\* An urgent reform, indeed purge, is needed at Al Hurra, the American government-sponsored Arabic-language television network, and Radio Sawa, its radio counterpart. Out with Islamist sensitivity gurus. In with serious anti-Islamofascists who are not confused about who the enemy is. I have listened and watched these two instruments of American foreign diplomacy for years, in shock at the their shallowness and desire to be more Muslim than Muslims themselves. America's war on terror is premised on the rejection of religious tyranny and the separation of mosque and state. These principles must be translated into Arabic programming in America's official voices.

\* Reform should also occur in international forums. There is no reason to allow Saudi, Libyan, or



**Bush Decorated by King Abdullah**

Sudanese teams of athletes into the Olympic games as long as those countries ignore women's rights, persecute minorities, and perpetrate massacres and mayhem in the name of religion. Civilization has a set of minimum requirements. Those who do not meet the standards cannot remain in the club. Thus we should kick Saudi Arabia out, as the writer Mona Eltahawy recently argued in a compelling commentary in the International Herald Tribune about the infamous story of the Saudi girl from Qatif who was condemned to 200 lashes by a religious court after being raped. We applied similar standards to the apartheid regime of South Africa for years. No decency, no go. The idea of allowing Muammar Gadhafi's Libya, a regime founded on murder, abduction, and terror, to head human-rights committees in U.N. circles is absurd.

"Change" has become the keyword in the American presidential race. America has the right to dream again about world leadership—not in Iraq, not in the mired mess of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and not in mediating endless struggles among barbarians, but in setting standards for modernity, freedom of expression, and beliefs.

Only when it becomes policy will the war on Islamofascism become Mr. Bush's legacy, too. ■

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Stephen Eric Bronner\*

## Against a Flawed Consensus: New Thoughts on the Sudan and Darfur

A dangerous consensus seems to be emerging in the United States about policy toward the Sudan and the crisis in Darfur. It calls for the kind of “muscular” foreign policy based on public denunciation, economic sanctions, and threats of military force. Cautionary voices are notably absent among the interventionist editorials in major newspapers like *The New York Times*, and there are calls for action by establishmentarian pundits on progressive and mainstream radio stations like *Air America* and *National Public Radio*. But that is not only the case in the United States. Speeches have been made and petitions signed by an international group of intellectuals and celebrities ranging from Bob Geldof, Umberto Eco, Jürgen Habermas, and Harold Pinter to George Clooney, Mia Farrow, Danny Glover, and Mick Jagger. Troops from the European Union and France are, meanwhile, now in the Central African Republic and Chad, and they have already clashed with those of the Sudan. Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Poland, Rumania, and Sweden have agreed with the deployment. The International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, and numerous other such organizations and agencies are also in support, and “Save Darfur,” a supposedly “non-political” organization, has been pivotal in setting the political agenda. Along a sliding scale, this agenda calls for: 1) increasing existing economic sanctions; 2) introducing a “no-fly zone” 3) pressuring China to use its influence on pain of withdrawing from the Olympics or the like; 4) bombing or using military force against the Sudanese army and air force. The assumption is that only when faced with real pressure will the Khartoum regime finally end the terrible violence by negotiating with the West, disbanding the armed nomadic forces known as the Janjaweed, allowing refugees from a terrible civil war to return to their villages, and making peace with Southern rebels so that stability can return to the Sudan.

None of these proposals, either alone or in concert, will bring about the ends that so many well-intentioned people seek: 1) Existing sanctions by the western powers have not forced the Khartoum regime to its knees but rather driven it into the arms of China, Indonesia, and Malaysia with the result that investment in the Sudan has actually grown \$2.8 billion over the last year. 2) As regards a “no-fly zone: Sudan is the size of Western Europe, Darfur is the size of France, 158 refugee camps exist that would require strategic consideration, and even proponents of the no-fly zone are doubtful about its potential efficacy. 3) With respect to “pressuring” China: given its problems with Tibet, Darfur is not a priority, and talk about withdrawing from the Olympics will not exactly make a nation that accounts for 20% of African trade, and that buys 60% of Sudan's oil, shake in its boots. 4) Finally, there is the “military option”: bombing or intervening will only justify fears of Western “imperialism” in the Sudan. Given the splintering of rebel forces in the South, and the estimated eighty tribes and clans with their own militias, it could also generate a power vacuum in the Sudan and a maelstrom for the nine states many of them “fragile” or “failed” states — on its borders.

The new consensus is blind to real-world constraints with respect to the policies it advocates. There is also uncertainty about whether their aim is to “pressure” the existing regime or produce “regime change.” Western analysts and activists should have learned by now that “pressure” and military threats produce only resistance and that genuine diplomacy involves using the carrot as well as the stick. The new consensus has put nothing on the table in the way of positive incentives to resolve the crisis in Darfur. Thinking about the matter differently might involve: 1) lifting sanctions on the Sudan in favor of developing new investment opportunities following the achievement of benchmarks tied to

repatriating refugees, rebuilding their villages; and demobilizing the Janjaweed: let us say, for every ten dollars of investment, x dollars should be directed toward these goals; 2) calling not only on the Sudan but also on the rebel forces, over which the United States and its allies have some influence, to return to the bargaining table; 3) bringing China into the mix by heightening its public role in constructing repatriation, demobilization, and vocational programs; 4) offering to aid the Sudanese in rebuilding the tribal reconciliation councils that were destroyed during the civil war; 5) trying to reintegrate the Sudan into the world community through academic exchanges, conferences, political visits, and the like; 6) strengthening the African Union, which Western analysts have consistently underestimated with an almost indescribable arrogance, in order to foster African solutions to African problems.

I have been to the Sudan twice and, as part of a delegation organized by Conscience International, I have also visited the refugee camps in Nyala and El Fasher in Darfur. I have met with literally dozens of Sudanese politicians and diplomats. I know the Khartoum regime is authoritarian and utterly ruthless. But I also know that it is not monolithic. Factions within the regime might prove supportive of new policies that would temper the climate of violence in the Sudan, improve the conditions of refugees, and lower international tensions. The new consensus is predicated on an approach that has already undermined respect for progressive Western values throughout the non-Western world. Its policies won't work. They are unrealistic and, ultimately, counter-productive. It is time to try something new. There is really nothing to lose. ■

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## Two Causes of Arab Political Incoherence

BEIRUT -- How much are the Arabs responsible for their own political dysfunction, national fragmentation and rampant violence, and how much of their troubles can be blamed on foreign interference and military interventions in the region? Two recent articles in quality American journals highlight how low-class Arab politics that are widely dissatisfying to their own citizens can reflect both indigenous autocracy and foreign mischief-making.

In an article in the May/June issue of *Foreign Affairs* entitled "The price of the surge: How US strategy is hastening Iraq's demise," former US National Security Council official and current Council on Foreign Relations Fellow Steven Simon methodically discredits the year-old "surge" of additional American troops. He sees it as a short-term fix that will have negative long-term consequences for Iraq, because it promotes forces that can degrade national integrity.

He notes: "The surge may have brought transitory success... but it has done so by stoking the three forces that have traditionally threatened the stability of Middle Eastern states: tribalism, warlordism, and sectarianism. States that have failed to control these forces have ultimately become ungovernable, and this is the fate for which the surge is preparing Iraq."

He sees the American surge being anchored in the "retribalization" of Iraq, because it pays cash to induce Sunni insurgents who used to fight the United States to switch sides and work alongside the US and the Iraqi government to fight Al-Qaeda-allied terrorists and other nationalist insurgents. Strengthening tribes tends to splinter national cohesion and weaken the power and even the legitimacy of the central state -- a state that was painstakingly if hastily created in much of the Arab

world after WWI by incorporating the tribes into state structures and payrolls.

Similarly, the surge strategy is promoting competing local warlordism by arming and "empowering tribes and other networks without regulating their relationship to the state," thus allowing them to compete with one another for local control and "what is mostly criminal revenue."

Sectarianism is on the rise also, Simon argues, because Sunnis who have been bought back into national politics may see the US strategy as aiming to have them challenge Shiite supremacy, which will spark long-term sectarian strife.

"When it withdraws from Iraq," Simon concludes, "the United States will be leaving a country more divided than the one it invaded -- thanks to a strategy that has systematically nourished domestic rivalries in order to maintain an illusory short-term stability."

For those who ask why the Arabs cannot run stable, peaceful countries, this article offers at least one explanation that highlights the negative consequences of continuing foreign-armed interference.

The second article notes instead the indigenous Arab causes of political tensions and potential extremism. It was published in the January issue of the *Journal of Democracy*, by Michael McFaul of Stanford University and Tamara Cofman Wittes of the Brookings Institution, and is entitled "Morocco's elections: The limits of limited reforms."

The authors argue that Arab instability often reflects the lack of democracy. The parliamentary elections in Morocco last September, they argue, offered important insights into what might happen when Arabs are given a chance to engage in democratic politics -- along with the dangers of autocratic leaders perpetually controlling and limiting democratic

transformations from the top.

They said there are three interesting results emerging from those elections: First, when they were allowed to enjoy free and fair elections, Moroccans did not sweep Islamists into power, as had been widely expected. Many dissatisfied citizens chose other options to express their concerns, including not voting or casting spoilt ballots.

Second, the dominant Islamist party in Morocco, the Justice and Development Party, should not be seen as a threat to democracy, but its intentions can only be truly tested if it is allowed to share genuine power.

Third -- and most importantly in my view -- the authors argue that, "limited reform has a limited shelf life." Opening parliament to democratic and free elections while keeping all other powers in the firm grasp of the king does not advance democracy. Voters were not fooled to rush to embrace a parliament that enjoys "few core powers of governance," and they registered their discontent by staying away (only 37 percent of registered voters cast ballots) or by spoiling about one-fifth of all cast votes.

If Arab regimes shun outright rigging of elections, and instead "configure the political system to contain the impact of popular Islamist parties... the regime may compromise the democratic legitimacy of the process by distorting the link between the ballot box and the parliament chamber, making each new government look much the same as the one before."

The authors conclude that democratic reforms could lose legitimacy, and tightly managed liberalization may push Arabs away from peaceful politics and toward extremists.

Home grown dysfunction and state collapse at the hands of foreign armies are equally deplorable, but they remain concurrently active in the Middle East today. ■

\*Rami G. Khouri is Editor-at-large of *The Daily Star*, and Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, in Beirut, Lebanon. This article is reprinted with permission from *Agence Global*.

Hassan Elsawaf

## Peace and Democracy in The Middle East Go Together

The Middle East is an enigma. For sixty years the region has been cursed with virtually uninterrupted violence in a manner reminiscent of an age, several centuries ago, in which the world was fragmented, with many regions totally cut-off from the outside world and little chance of foreign awareness, let alone intervention. It was then that one heard of one-hundred-year wars and similar anachronistic phrases. Today's world has changed with a more serious attitude towards spreading the doctrine of peaceful coexistence and more dedication to the policy of patching up differences once a war is over. In terms of animosity and festering wounds, there are other regions such as Manchuria and Armenia where matters were even worse than the Middle East; yet nowhere has the strife lingered for so long. It has actually become a joke to hear of a new Middle East peace initiative or another travesty of a peace conference, clearly headed nowhere.

Why is the situation in the Middle East so complex?

Every time a new Israeli/Palestinian peace initiative is launched (the Palestinian side always incorporating a wider Arab participation), the international community, spearheaded by one American administration after another, seems to believe that this time they have finally got it right. Without exception, they fail miserably and will continue to do so until they cease to live in denial: *peace negotiations with autocratic regimes cannot be serious!*

The disingenuous approach being used to resolve the riddle of how to reach a peace

settlement is based on reconciling two incompatible sides under a bogus umbrella of American brokerage and in an utterly superficial manner. The two sides are politically different, and therefore incapable of seeing eye-to-eye, ruling out the chance of reaching a lasting agreement. To elaborate, one side has an elected government answerable to its people and genuinely motivated to attaining its aim. The other consists of a sordid cabal of corrupt and vicious dictators, answerable to no one and motivated solely by the pursuit of self-interest.

The philosophy of making peace deals or avoiding warfare or doing anything related to improving the quality of life of the people is based on total disclosure and accountability of governments, traits that must cover the official hierarchical ladder all the way to the very top; *especially* at the very top. A peace agreement must observe the needs of the people and not be confined to the convenience of the ruler. Under the sinister shadow of the typical Arab despot, it is not easy to expect that to happen for many years to come.

Why do countries go to war? Invariably, it is to satisfy the whims of the ruler, irrespective of his avowed intentions. In an open and free society, a ruler

must provide *v i a b l e* justification for going to war and can be turned down by his peers. In closed societies, things are somewhat different!



Hassan Elsawaf  
ICDS Board of Trustees

An interesting observation is whether, over the course of history, there has been a single incident of two full-fledged democracies that have not managed to resolve their differences peacefully and have elected to go to war instead. Naturally, the definition of a 'full fledged' democracy entails more than free elections, Hitler or Hamas-style, but covers a broader range of issues, including freedom of speech, respect for basic rights, press freedom, independent judiciary and other aspects that collectively give credence to the concept of a democracy.

In my reading of history, there is not a single example of war erupting from two democratic sides. If you agree, the theory we can establish is that democratic nations do not go to war and that it takes at least one side to be undemocratically ruled for a war to break out.

The United States might appear to stand out as a



conspicuous aberration since it is a democracy, yet has initiated several wars with countries such as Korea, Vietnam, Granada, Nicaragua, Panama and, more recently, Iraq. That must, however, be seen in its proper context in which it is clear that all those wars were waged under liberation claims, whether we care to believe that or not, and, more importantly, that the American occupier always departed as soon as possible. Moreover, not one country being attacked was democratically ruled. So, for those looking for loopholes, sorry.

A good example adding weight to the viability of the theory is how a free Egyptian parliament, back in 1967, would have reacted to Nasser's foolhardy and reckless war-precipitating bluff that inevitably had to backfire, altering the course of history. It is safe to argue that he would never have been allowed to get away with what he did.

Back to the issue at hand, in 1979 Sadat signed a 'peace treaty' with Israel. Begin, the Israeli prime minister at the time, had to take it back to his Knesset for ratification before it could come into force. He did not possess the right to single-handedly approve the deal, which was thoroughly scrutinised before passing. Sadat, with no such hurdle to overcome, perfunctorily obtained subsequent ratification from his rubber-stamp parliament, requiring no more than his word at Camp David to commit Egypt. Opposition to an Egyptian strongman by his minions is never on the table. To this day, however, few Egyptians feel less hatred towards Israel than they did prior to the 'peace treaty' and even fewer regard it as a document reflecting the sentiments of the Egyptian public. A peace treaty signed by a dictator is precarious and rarely

survives him if he is overthrown. Mubarak is but an extension of Sadat and not inclined to stretching his neck out, which somewhat explains the official upholding of the flimsy peace deal, albeit being enforced reluctantly by an aloof Egyptian side, effectively paying no more than lip service to a loathsome treaty. Under a radical Islamist regime, the whole thing wouldn't last a week.

Apart from the political schism between Israel and its Arab neighbours, there remains a serious obstacle to concluding a fair and comprehensive peace treaty: ***it is not in the interest of most Arab autocrats to have a conflict-free Middle East!***

Overlooked by many observers is the outrageous reality that, after the cessation of hostilities in the region, some Arab despots would rapidly lose their *raison d'etre*. Faced with growing unrest and instability among their peoples, they are happy to resort to the convenient excuse of being hindered in their allegedly noble quest to bring about progress and prosperity by the enormous difficulties of securing peace and by the turmoil created by an implacable Israel. Then there is the bigger con act used to good effect with the outside world to portray the peace-maker image in order to make gullible congressmen believe that a Middle East without, say, Mr. Mubarak, would be catastrophic in terms of future peace prospects.

***The harsh truth is that real peace would foil many an Arab tyrant's longevity plans!***

Even harsher to come to terms with is the daunting reality



that the longer the feeble and half-hearted peace efforts go on under existing conditions, the more difficult the attainment of results, given the growing proliferation of oppression-induced radical forces relentlessly sprouting from hard-line regimes.

It would be wrong to absolve Israel of blame since its draconian policies with the hapless people of Palestine go a long way in fomenting the rancour and bitterness spewing the region. The Israelis also stand guilty of deluding themselves into believing they can have real peace with autocratic regimes festooned with weaknesses and with livid opponents adamant on abrogating any existing treaty as soon as they get the chance. However, Israeli hooliganism plays but a minor role in the huge rift between the warring factions.

***As long as the Arabs are ruled by tyrants, there is no way real peace will ever be achieved!***

In short, if you are serious about your valedictory peace efforts, Mr. U.S. President, whoever you may be, please focus on the only plausible way to do it: ***convert the Arab countries to genuine democracies.*** Then -and only then- would you have no cause for concern, because radicalism would swiftly abate and peace will follow on a silver platter. Otherwise, you are wasting everybody's time and would be well advised to mind your own business!

## Egyptian Writer Ahmad Al-Aswani: It's "Open Season" on Egypt's Copts

*Ahmad Al-Aswani, an Egyptian writer, writes extensively on political topics from a critical and reformist perspective. In the following essay, posted June 7, 2008 on the liberal website Aafaq.org, [1] he focuses on the escalating series of physical attacks on members of the Coptic minority in Egypt. The following are excerpts from the article:*

### **"What Is Happening to Our Coptic Brothers... Is No Longer a Matter of Sporadic Incidents"**

"I hope that I have not exaggerated in using the word '[open] season' for what is happening in Egypt to our Coptic brothers, but it is the closest description to what is happening. It is no longer a matter of sporadic incidents, but an uninterrupted series of events. "Today, you read of the incident in Zeitoun, and tomorrow of the one in Alexandria, [2] and after that of the one in Deir Abu-Fana in Minya, [3] and then of the diverse incidents, ranging from killing without reason to armed robbery, kidnapping of monks, torching of houses and cars, and waylaying and kidnapping of girls. "As usual, all repudiate and condemn, accompanied by official and media denial of any sectarian or terrorist motive. And if that isn't appropriate, the standard excuse [is trotted out]: the criminal was mentally disturbed and did not mean to do what he did. "This is what has happened in individual incidents... such as the Zeitoun incident a few days ago, or the Alexandria incident two years ago. [4] If we observe closely, we find that these criminals then

disappear, and are not brought [to trial in] any court, and no one hears about them afterward."

### **"Mass Incidents... Follow a Friday Sermon Inciting [Worshippers] to Burn the Homes of the Village's Copts"**

"[In] mass incidents, such as marches after Friday prayers - which follow a Friday sermon inciting [worshippers] to burn the homes of the villages Copts, on the pretext that these 'infidels' seek to turn one such home into a church that will pollute the pure village - the [allegations that sparked the incident] are later proven untrue. [This proof, however, comes] after houses, shops, and cars have been burned, [and] after police and government officials arrive to make sure that the burning is complete.

"Then the media, as usual, accuses rumormongers of being behind the regrettable events, saying that they must be agents of Israel or America.

"Of course, the usual Coptic notables deny any suspicion of sectarianism, and affirm national

Unity, and the sheikh and the priest embrace. "The matter is concluded with no investigation and no trial for anyone - as if nothing had happened. [All then] wait for the opening of the next season, and for the recurrence of the same events, the same responses, and a promise that parliament's new unified law for houses of worship will solve all problems - in the knowledge that this law does not yet exist."

### **"Prominent Copts Voluntarily Deny Any Suspicion that Sectarianism Is Fueling Recent Events"**

"[Thus] continues the cycle of sad events in Egypt, without end - and one saddening thing is that some prominent Copts voluntarily deny any suspicion that sectarianism is fueling recent events [even] before the truth becomes known. I do not know whether they are aware that their words both increase the suffering and will fail to end this series [of incidents]. "[Instead,] why don't they use their media presence to defend their people, the Copts, and to urge the



Enactment of laws to prohibit what is happening, and to purge the educational system and media of the explosive mines of sedition, discrimination, and incitement?"

**"An Attempt to Terrorize the Copts... and Force Them... To Either Emigrate... or Convert"**

"What is happening is an attempt to terrorize Egypt's Copts, and to force them either to emigrate from the homeland once and for all, or to convert to Islam to protect themselves and their families [from harm] and to protect their property from the confiscation mentioned by many Islamic publications. "It causes me regret, and as an Egyptian it makes my heart bleed, to see this farce endlessly repeated, and to see the same prominent individuals say the same words - and [then to see] the matter forgotten a short time later. "Frankly, I blame the Coptic leadership in Egypt, headed by His Eminence Pope [Shenouda III] himself, because it has reached the point where lives and property are taken with impunity, and clearly with the authorities' collusion - with no fear of effective response, and with the confidence of all that, as always, the matter will end with beard-kissing and forgetting. "Although I fully believe that the majority of Egypt's Muslims side with their Coptic brothers and against these incidents, [I must point out that] in light of the incitement, and in light of the seditious clerics on the religious [television] channels, things have changed, with the suspect collusion of the government. "Perhaps the most recent farce is



**Funeral of Coptic Victim**

the June 5 report in [the Egyptian government daily] *Al-Ahram*... accusing Copts residing abroad of being behind the Zeitoun incident, [and of] forming an armed Coptic organization to instigate civil strife in Egypt. "Can you imagine such far-out nonsense? I implore you: For God's sake, oh Egypt!"

[1][http://www.aafaq.org/masahas.aspx?id\\_mas=1905](http://www.aafaq.org/masahas.aspx?id_mas=1905).

[2] On May 28, 2008, four Coptic Christians - a jeweler and three of his employees - were shot dead by masked men in their shop in the Zeitoun district of Cairo. The next day, two men armed with machine guns robbed a Coptic jeweler in Alexandria of 150,000 Egyptian pounds (see <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008/05/28/50596.html>).

[3] On May 31, 2008, men armed with automatic weapons attacked the Abu-Fana monastery in the Minya governorate, about 210 km south of Cairo. Four monks were wounded, and another three were kidnapped, beaten, threatened with death for refusing to convert to Islam, and later released. Previously, in January 2008, armed men had attacked the monastery and destroyed eight cells inhabited by solitary monks, beating one, and also destroyed Bibles and religious objects (see <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/E77B0CA4-4D9A-4DF8-8375-59694E2A6522.htm> and <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/900/eg6.htm>).

[4] On April 14, 2006, a man carried out a knife attack on worshippers in three different Coptic churches; one victim died of his wounds (see <http://english.aljazeera.net/English/archive/archive?ArchiveId=22014> and <http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/04/14/news/egypt.php>).

*\*This excerpt is reprinted from the Middle East Media Research Institute*

# Human Rights Defenders...Persecuted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



## Press Statement 11/6/2008

Arab rights organizations and civil society organizations signatories to the present statement call upon Saudi authorities to put an end to the arbitrary practices targeting Saudi activists who aspire to effect democratic reform in the Kingdom. The organizations moreover demand Saudi authorities, in particular, to take necessary measures to promptly and unconditionally release Dr. Matruk Al-Falih a Saudi activist, prominent in the area of human rights and renowned for his involvement in the most notorious events demanding constitutional reform in the Kingdom.

Al-Falih was arrested on the 19th of May while at his office at King Saud University (KSU) Riyadh where he is a Professor of Political Sciences.

The signatory organizations presume that the arrest of Dr. Matruk was directly interrelated with a message he had sent a couple of days earlier through an email and a website. The message spoke of the poor living and health conditions within the Breidah Public Prison, which he had personally witnessed during his visit to Dr. Abdullah Al-Hamid and Issa Al-Hamid two of his rights activist friends who remain within that prison since last November after being condemned, by virtue of a

Judicial sentence, with being openly involved with the families of Saudi detainees who have, last year, demonstrated in front of the Breidah Prison in protest against the prolonged, unlawful detention of their relatives.

Saudi authorities, instead of embarking on tangible measures to correct the dreadful conditions within the prison, which were confirmed by the attestation of Abdullah and Issa Al-Hamid, decided to punish Dr. Matruk for his public criticism of the conditions of detention and to subject him to even more arbitrary measures by confiscating his personal laptop and mobile phone upon his

\*This statement is printed, with permission, from the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies.

arrest; moreover, by exercising further pressures and psychological torment on the Professor during his confinement in Al-Ha'er Prison. As advised by his wife, Prison officials deliberately woke him up after midnight claiming that he would be subject to interrogations, tied his hands and feet and tried to force him to eat after he had announced a food strike in protest against not only being detained, but also against his detention without any notification of the charges pressed against him.

The signatory organizations of the present statement fear that continued arbitrary confinement of Dr. Matruk will only jeopardize his health and his life; especially that he is diabetic and suffers from hypertension. The organizations also deem the measures undertaken against Dr. Al-Falih and his fellow inmates, Abdullah Al-Hamid and Issa Al-Hamid, an additional indicator of the extremely poor state of human rights in a country that pays no regard to the freedom of speech and to the right of citizens

To complain, demonstrate or peacefully associate; moreover, in a country in which the procedures of litigation and the criteria of a fair trial are greatly violated.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that Matruk Al-Falih and Abdullah Al-Hamid have previously been detained, in 2004, with a number of advocates of reform after they had submitted a petition to the King of Saudi Arabia demanding constitutional reforms to be brought about and legislations be enacted to protect human rights and public freedoms. Al-Falih and Al-Hamid have been sentenced to prison for a term of 6 to 9 years and were released in August of 2005 by virtue of a royal pardon granted at that time.

It is also worth noting that Saudi authorities have detained blogger Fouad Al-Farhan late last December after requesting the release of several reform activists. Al-Farhan remained in solitary confinement with no charge or trial until he was recently released last April.

The signatory organizations to the present statement stress the necessity to bring together the efforts of the international Human rights movement to promptly release Matruk Al-Falih, Abdullah Al-Hamid and Issa Al-Hamid and to put an end to the brutal measures taken against the human rights defenders and advocates of reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The undersigned lay a special emphasis on the fact that member states of the United Nations Human Rights Council should seriously study the relevant measures needed to be taken by Council to spur Saudi authorities to act as per the pledges they made upon their election for the Council membership in 2006. These pledges included, total commitment to defend and foster human rights within the Kingdom.

The Arab organizations consider that the actual practices of Saudi authorities in this context show blatant withering and scorn for these pledges.

Signatory Organizations of the Statement (partial list)

- 1) Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies (AITAS) Egypt;
- 2) Arab Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession (ACIJLP) Egypt;
- 3) Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) Egypt;
- 4) Association for Human Rights Legal Aid (AHLA) Egypt;
- 5) Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) Bahrain;
- 6) Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS);



**Saudi Human Rights Activists**

# Human Rights News from Around the Arab World\*

## Egypt

### Egyptian Journalist Kamal Murad becomes target of a brutal assault, for his role in documenting Police Brutality

Three human rights organizations have submitted a petition to the Deputy Minister, on 21 June 2008, demanding an investigation into the brutal assault of journalist, Kamal Murad of Al-Fajr Newspaper by three police officers four days earlier. The police officers, who are all from Rahmánya Center in Buhaira Governate in the Delta region, badly beat Murad, verbally insulted him, and seized his private notes and mobile-memory card. This assault, and the consequent seizure of his intellectual assets, was a direct result of Murad's investigative reporting of an influential peddling case involving a local trader and his two sons, both police officers.

The assault took place on Tuesday 17th June, 2008. Murad was arrested after conducting interviews with peasants in Ezbat Mohram, in Rahmánya Center. Murad interviewed peasants, and took photos of police personnel beating them in order to coerce them into signing lease contracts with one of the nearby landlords. The police officers engaged in this blatant misconduct as a courtesy to their friends and police colleagues, the sons of the aforementioned landlord. After conducting his interviews, Murad fell victim to police brutality himself, as the officers turned their attention to him, beating him heavily, and detaining him.

Three hours after his detention, Murad was shocked to be charged, with attacking the

police officers and with inciting the peasants to attack security forces.

This case is considered revenge for Murad's role in a recent and particularly famous torture case, known as Emad el-Kabir's Case. Murad was the journalist who published the torture story of the Egyptian driver Emad el-Kabir by a police officer, Ismal Nabih. Officer Nabih, subsequently, was sentenced to three years in prison. Many of the police officers that attacked Murad while outside the Rahmánya Prosercutor's office blatantly taunted him with: "You will see, O' the one who sent the officer to jail for three years." Clearly, then, this was an act of pure and unadulterated retaliation.

Despite his eventual release by the Prosecutor's office, the police department still maintains possession of Murad's mobile-memory card, which contains detailed photographs of the officers assaulting the peasants, and of the huge banquets thrown for the officers by their landlord, for their help in quelling the farmers. Moreover, the police department still maintains Murad's private notes, which include the draft of the interviews he made with the peasants as well as their statements.

The petition, filed by Mr. Abd al-Gawad Ahmed, advocate and director of the Arab Council for the Support of a Fair Trial, was submitted to the Deputy General under the no. 11167 for 2008.

This petition included accusations made by Murad and the three human rights organizations against the specific police officers involved in the violence. The three officers include:

#### **Mohamed Badrawy - Amr Allam - Mohamed Basiouni**

The Assistant to the Deputy General has referred the case to the relevant prosecutor in Damanhur city, the capital of El-Buhaira Governorate, to act as required.

The outright police brutality against Kamal Murad reaffirms the state's motivation to extract revenge from brave journalists, in this case one who has revealed a major torture case, and who succeeded in cooperating with Egyptian bloggers to bring the perpetrator-police officer, Islam Nabih, to justice. The ball is the Interior Minister's court now, so he must now start to stand by his written declaration about ending torture, noted Gamal Eid, the executive director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information.

The three rights organization have established a forum to defend Kamal Murad, and bring those officers to court, as a step towards elimination of the impunity for rogue police officers, and towards limiting the torture and ill-treatment of journalists.

\*This survey is based in large part on material from the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, at [www.hrinfo.net/en](http://www.hrinfo.net/en).

## **Hundreds of Police Forces Prevent Poets and Educated Demonstrators from publicly standing against Extremism**

Police forces banned a protest organized by poets and intellectuals in Talaat Harb square calling for patriotic unity and rejecting extremism. The forces deprived activists from reaching the square, threatening the use of violence if they tried or

insisted on protesting. The great Egyptian poet Ahmed Fouad Negm, along with a number of Egyptian intellectuals, were invited to a protest in Talaat Harb Square calling for patriotic unity on Wednesday 11th June 2008. The

program simply included poetry and singing as a means of declaring the rejection of extremism and sectarian violence that had been taking place in Egypt recently.

## **More News on the case of Nader Gohar, director of the Cairo News Company**

Last April, Mr. Nader Gohar the executive director of the Cairo News Company (CNC) had been charged with two offenses: owning satellite transmission equipment and using it inside the country

Without a permit from the Egyptian Radio and Television Union, and building and operating a communication network without permission from the National Telecommunication Regulatory

Agency. The Prosecution General demanded punishment of Mr. Nader based on the articles 70, 72, and 77 of the Telecommunication Regulatory Law no. 10, year 2003.

## **Bahrain**

### **It is a Crime Punishable by Law to Establish a Youth Rights Organization**

The Bahrain Youth Association for Human Rights watched with deep concern the summons issued by the Bahraini Justice Ministry to Mohamed Mesgati, a 21-year-old college student and regional member of the Norwegian International

Defense Organization, and chairman of the Bahrain Youth Association for Human Rights. This summons, filed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, requires Mesgati to appear before the 4<sup>th</sup> Penal Court on 6 November 2008. As a defendant

In a criminal case---practicing association before obtaining permission from the establishment---Mesgati potentially faces imprisonment for up to six months, or a fine of 500 BD, or both.

## **Tunisia**

### **Mass Human Rights Violations, Fire Shooting by the Tunisian Authorities**

On Friday, 6th June 2008, in the aftermath of al-Haoud al-Menjami demonstrations, the security forces in Tunis violently

Fired live bullets at a group of protestors in Radif city, leading to the death of Hafnawy Ben Reda. The incident, moreover,

Left dozens of other demonstrators wounded.

## Yemen

### **Sami Ghalib, Editor in Chief of Alnedaa Newspaper, is being Prosecuted, for the Crime of Practicing Investigative Journalism**

The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information expressed its displeasure today at the pursuance of the prosecution of Sami Ghalib, Editor in Chief of the Yemeni Independent Newspaper *Alnedaa*, following a complaint from the undersecretary of the ministry of the Awkaf, Maqboul Al Ahdal. One of Mr. Ghalib's articles, published in Alnedda on 29 November 2006, discussed the malfunctioning of the Yemeni Awkaf Ministry in arranging the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages. In retaliation, the Awkaf Ministry undersecretary is demanding the punishment of Ghalib, under provision of

article 197 of the Penal Code, for slander and humiliation.

The prosecution of the newspaper is seemingly a response to the newspaper's basic role of acting as an outlet of the press, as mandated by the Yemeni Press Law. But the ministry of Awkaf, as represented by its undersecretary, nonetheless found it appropriate to chastise all newspapers who reported on Awkaf mal-performance. This witch hunt began with *Al-Nass* newspaper, then *Al Wassat*, and then finally *Alnedaa* newspaper and its editor-in-chief Sami Ghalib. This case, moreover, is not the only putative threat

against Mr. Ghalib, as he has been receiving multiple death threats since June 2007. Ostensibly, these threats are a response to his basic commitment to journalistic integrity.

Many risks are threatening press and journalistic freedoms in Yemen, but the presence of brave journalists like Ghalib contributes to strengthening the hope for an independent press, said Gamal Eid, the executive director of the Arabic Network For Human Rights Information. Our duty is to support these journalists against attempts by the state to intimidate and silence them.

## Syria

### **Prosecution of Activists in Syria Continues**

On Sunday, 8 June 2008, the Supreme State Security Court suspended the prosecution of the Syrian activist Kareem Arbaji to an undermined date, alleging that the new court premises in Mazza Neighborhood in Damascus are not yet fully secure, also citing that escape of detainees from the court building is still a possibility. The defendant in this case, Kareem

Arbaji, was arrested by the district branch of the Military Intelligence on the basis of his activity as a moderator in some online brotherhood forums.

The Front Line Foundation for Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Communiqué demanded the release of Dak El Bab, a member of the Arab Organization for Human Rights in Syria, attaching a letter to the

president of Syria, urging him to intervene to free Dak Al Bab.

Dak Al Bab was summoned on 2 May 2008, and arrested immediately thereafter. The summon was thought to have been issued against him in retaliation against him for articles he wrote recently, which included critiques against the Information Minister, Mohsin Belal

## Lebanon

### **Rasid announced reopening of its office, after a month-and-a-half closure due to threats**

The Palestinian Association for Human Rights (Rasid) announces the reopening of its office, located in Ain El Helwa camp for Palestinian refugees in

Lebanon, after ultimately resolving potential threats against it, through a settlement including pledges of non-infringement against the

Association and its members, and against the obstruction of its activities.

## Morocco

### Human Rights association condemns police brutality against civilians in Sedi Efni, demanding an investigation.

Dozens of civilian women and men in Efti City were subjected to a violent outburst by public forces. On the early morning of 7th June, 2008, innocent civilians were unnecessarily

subjected to beatings, rape and sexual harassment, looting, tear gas, and rubber bullets, reports the Moroccan Association for Human Rights in a press release. Clearly, this is a blatant violation

of the basic freedoms afforded them by law, and is a breach of international conventions of human rights and prohibitions of torture.

## Iraq

### American Forces Arbitrarily Arrest Journalists

Reporters without Borders and the Press Freedoms Observatory call on for the release of Associated Press photographer Ahmed Nori, who has been detained since 4 June 2008 in an American Base in Tikrit. Both organizations declared that detaining Ahmed Nori without any justification are indicative of

A patent disregard for the laws of Iraq. The American authorities currently detaining Nori should release him if unable to charge him.

The journalist Saad El Rikabi told the Iraqi Association for Defense of Journalists Rights that American forces had broken into his house in Nassirya

governorate and arrested two of his siblings, while he was at his work place, as a deputy editor-in-chief of *Assharq* (The East) daily newspaper. One of his brothers was released, while the American forces are still withholding his other brother, without any official warrant by the Iraqi Judiciary.

## Yemen

### Abduction and Unfair Trials against Activists in Yemen

Human rights organizations condemned strongly the ruling of the Specialist Penal Court against journalist Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani to 6 months in prison. This prosecution was

Based primarily on his having written detailed information related to the Saada war. The court sentence against al-Khaiwani is entirely political in nature, a revenge and

punishment against him for the “crime” of expressing his opinions and practicing his legitimate right as a journalist to freely publish information

### Abduction of Al Tagheer Organization Staff Member

According to Al Tagheer Organization for the Defense of Rights and Freedoms, unidentified parties had abducted Eng. Yasser al-Wazir,

the member of al-Tagheer Organization for the Defense of Rights and Freedoms, on 5 June 2008. To date, he cannot be located. Moreover, the

Organization stated that this abduction is based solely on his activity of teaching the Zaidism doctrine in Yemeni universities.

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