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By Jennifer Rubin

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Will Muslim Brotherhood control Egyptian religious institutions?

By Jennifer Rubin

[Barry Rubin](#) (no relation) wrote yesterday about "the opening of a Muslim Brotherhood campaign to replace Egypt's current clerical hierarchy with its own people." He explains that Hosni Mubarak clearly grasped that "control over Islam was vital to maintaining control of the country":

The head of the al-Azhar Islamic university, the chief qadi, the clerics of different mosques, are government-appointed. Sermons are government-approved. A ministry in charge of awqaf (religious foundations) and religion supervises all of this and hands out the money. And the government also decides which clerics appear on television and radio, or even have their own programs.

Over the last decade or so, the "official" clerics have been radicalized, and they support terrorism against Israel. Yet there is still a huge gap between those who accepted the rule by Mubarak's regime and those who demand an Islamist regime. They hate the Brotherhood and the Brotherhood hates them.

Now, if all of these official clerics are declared to be corrupt instruments of the old regime and are thrown out of office, the Brotherhood will control "Islam" in Egypt. Equally important, they will control a vast amount of patronage and money. Every cleric will have to get along with them or be unemployed. They could authorize which mosques could open. They would control religious education.

I asked [C. Holland Taylor](#), the co-founder of LibForAll (a private organization seeking to bolster voices of moderate Muslims and to use social, cultural, new media and religious platforms to counteract the influence of Muslim radicals), what he thought of this development.

He responded via e-mail, noting that his organization's deputy director of academics for the International Institute of Qur'anic Studies is based in Cairo, and has been directly involved with this issue. He explained:

Clearly, the Muslim Brotherhood does wish to seize control of Egypt's Islamic institutions, and they have been infiltrating al-Azhar for many years, with considerable

success among faculty, but not at the highest levels of authority, due to government appointment of the Grand Shaykh, etc.

At present, (as indicated in Barry Rubin's article) a movement is underway to have the Grand Shaykh elected by the faculty of al-Azhar, rather than appointed by the government. Both non-Islamist democrats and the Muslim Brotherhood appear to favor this approach, the former due to their intense mistrust of government, and the latter as part of their strategy to gain control of Egypt. For the time being, the Muslim Brotherhood wants to ensure that al-Azhar does not reflexively support a government which they do not control.

Should the Muslim Brotherhood subsequently come to dominate the government, I would expect them to reassert government authority over al-Azhar

Taylor told me that in Indonesia, another Muslim country with a determined Islamic faction, the Muslim Brotherhood-controlled PKS party is denied the religious affairs ministry and the education ministry posts. In other words, as Egypt makes its way in the post-Mubarak era, Egyptian Brotherhood figures "might well be denied in Egypt also, if they do not control the next government."

The battle, Taylor observed, is only beginning. He told me, "People in Muslim countries are fully aware of the strategic nature of the positions we're talking about, and there will be a battle royale in Egypt in coming years, as the Muslim Brotherhood seeks to gain control of the nation's religious institutions."

This is only one challenge facing Egypt. The degree to which the U.S. can influence events is unclear, but we might at least start by articulating that good relations with the U.S. are dependent upon movement toward a democratic government, respect for human rights, and maintenance of the peace treaty with Israel. All of that, we should make clear, is put into question by the sort of Islamic regime that the Muslim Brotherhood would dearly love to establish.

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