Backgrounder

Religious Freedom in Egypt

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Abstract: *The Egyptian government has played a major role in creating and maintaining a religiously intolerant environment in Egypt that is hostile to non-Muslims and any Muslims who deviate from government-endorsed religious norms and traditions. This intolerant environment that stifles independent thinking and religious liberty is the natural breeding ground for Islamist extremists. The U.S. should encourage the Egyptian government to address this root cause of Islamist extremism by establishing and protecting true religious freedom at home.*

Religious liberty, Islamist extremism, and terrorism are closely interrelated. Therefore, the struggle for religious freedom is at the heart of the current war against terrorism, and the U.S. government should treat it as such, particularly in Egypt, a country that is strategically important to the United States.

With a population of 83 million and located at the center of the Middle East, Egypt has long dominated its Arabic-speaking neighbors politically and culturally. While military defeat in 1967, economic decline, and political stagnation have eroded some of its influence, Egypt remains an influential country in the region due to the realities of geography, size, and history.

Religious freedom in Egypt—or, more precisely, the lack thereof—turns on the interrelationship of four forces in Egypt: the regime, the religious establishment, the Islamists, and society at large. Each entity has its own internal considerations and goals

Talking Points

- Egypt's ongoing cycle of religious intolerance is driven by four forces in Egyptian society: the regime, the religious establishment, Islamists, and society at large.

- Of these four, the regime is the key to stopping the cycle of intolerance because of the natural capabilities of the state and its authoritarian nature and because the state plays a major role in perpetuating the cycle of intolerance.

- By enacting and enforcing laws that protect the rights of religious minorities and the right of independent religious thought, the regime can break this destructive cycle and foster an environment that is resistant to Islamic extremism.

- Religious freedom must be a part of any real defense against Islamic extremism that both maintains people's freedoms and diminishes religious radicalism and Islamist terrorism.

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that help to diminish religious freedom, but the dynamic relationship between them creates the ongoing cycle of intolerance. Given the nature of this dynamic, any attempt to deal with religious freedom issues in Egypt must start at the state level. The U.S. government should use every available avenue to encourage the Egyptian government to enact and enforce laws that protect the religious freedom of all Egyptians.

Religious freedom must be part of any real defense against Islamist extremism and terrorism that maintains people's freedoms.

The Religious Environment in Egypt

Egypt's population is predominantly Sunni Muslim. Exact numbers are impossible to ascertain because such statistics are a state secret. This secrecy is reminiscent of a police state, which Egypt remains in many respects, but the secrecy also serves the state's interest in deflating the numbers of religious minorities. According to the latest official census figures (1986), Christians account for less than 6 percent of the population. To stanch criticism, later censuses have simply not given any figure. The U.S. State Department places the number at 8 percent to 12 percent,[1] while the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) cites a range of 10 percent to 15 percent.[2] The government does not acknowledge the existence of non-Sunni Muslim groups, which are deemed deviant versions of Islam. Independent sources estimate that Shiites are less than 1 percent of the population.

Non-Muslim groups include Christians, 2,000 Baha'is, and 120 elderly Jews, who are the remnants of a once thriving Jewish community that numbered in the tens of thousands. Christians are generally referred to as Copts, and a majority of them belong to the indigenous Orthodox Church. Sizeable minorities belong to the Catholic Church and various Protestant sects.

The story of Egypt's tense relationship with the concept of religious freedom is deeply rooted in his-

tory. Government activity in areas of religion in Egypt's post-Ottoman era has been associated with two phenomena that have had lasting effects on the understanding of religious freedom: the mind-set created by the Ottoman millet system and modern nationalism.

From the 16th century through the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire organized and modernized the millet system. While the system was quite tolerant for its times, it was based on a notion of each religious group as a nation. Each religious group was given autonomy in its own affairs, but the side effect was that these groups were viewed as both alien and constituting a collective identity. With such a mentality, new religious groups were viewed with suspicion as they deviated and broke away from the organized and recognized sects. The emergence of modern nationalism in Egypt exacerbated this perception. Egyptian nationalism, first emerging in the 1919 revolution against the British occupation, was based on the concept of national unity—the unity of Muslims and Christians, the unity of two distinct groups that are united in the national project. Other religious groups were suspect.

The lack of a philosophical foundation for individualism resulted not only in the development of group identity, but also in the state adhering to this group mentality regarding individual citizens. The organized religious communities were all too willing to adhere to this arrangement. Religious leaders were given full control of both heavenly rewards and the earthly success of their coreligionists. Once the Egyptian nationalist project collapsed and was replaced by other identities—Arab nationalism and Islamism—it was only a matter of time before the dynamics between religious groups turned sour and the state became suspicious of religious minorities and deviations.

Concern for religious freedom in Egypt has long been focused on the plight of minorities, especially Christians. In reality, Muslims have been the greatest victims of the lack of religious freedom. While

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1. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Egypt," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*, October 26, 2009, at *http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127346.htm* (September 16, 2010).

2. U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report 2010*, May 2010, p. 230, at *http://www.uscirf.gov/images/ar2010/egypt2010.pdf* (September 16, 2010).

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persecution of religious minorities is more severe and noticeable, the Muslims' lack of ability to think separately about religion and to enjoy the freedom to believe, practice, and worship according to their own conscience has resulted not only in suppression, but also in a controlled religious environment that has proven a fertile ground for Islamists.

The basic Egyptian understanding of religious freedom is limited, often understood as simply freedom to worship, albeit under significant constraints. An understanding of religious freedom as the right of all faiths to bring religiously based val-

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ues to the public square is virtually nonexistent. This is partly a matter of priorities. A religious person who is not permitted to build a place to worship is unlikely to be concerned with the right of adoption, something accepted by Christianity but rejected by Islam, and thus illegal.

The problem is compounded by the association of religion with social traditions. Because the state generally upholds those social traditions and enforces conformity, the religious establishment has been quite content with the arrangement. Only with the greater radicalization of the Muslim religious establishment since the 1970s has the clash with the state emerged. This arrangement has also been maintained, albeit under a different relationship, with the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Coptic Church developed patterns of dependence on Egypt's Muslim rulers.

Religious freedom in Egypt—or, more precisely, the lack thereof—turns on the interrelationship of four forces: the regime, the religious establishment, Islamists, and society at large. Each entity must be accorded its distinct understanding, but the give and take between the four entities is what creates the challenge for religious freedom in Egypt.

The Egyptian Regime. Western observers often describe the Egyptian regime as secular, in contrast to the Islamists, who challenge the regime, and the Islamists' definition of the regime. However, this description ignores the regime's underlying complexities. Egypt's rulers are neither Turkey's Mustafa Kemal Atatürk nor Tunisia's Habib Bourguiba, both of whom shared a modern, secular vision modeled on the French example.

While Egypt's rulers have fought the Islamists and challenged the religious establishment on various issues, they have not held a secular viewpoint or attempted to limit the role that religion plays in Egypt. They focused on taking control of religion, which they viewed as a dangerous weapon in the hands of their enemies. Egypt's three modern rulers have pursued this policy with varying degrees of success using methods ranging from the stick to the carrot. Human rights organizations have described the result: "As religion has been increasingly exploited as a tool for state administration, the state has begun to acquire some theocratic features."[3]

Gamal Abdel Nasser ended the dual court system in Egypt when he closed the religious courts. This gave the government full control of the judiciary and diminished the role of the religious establishment. Similarly, he abolished the system of religiously controlled land, putting it directly under state control. While this was partly an attempt to take over the religious establishment's vast financial empire for the state's benefit, it was also an attempt to cut off all of the religious establishment's independent sources of finance and to make it dependent on the state for its salaries and projects. Simultaneously, Nasser greatly expanded state aid to the religious establishment. Al-Azhar University and its pre-university schools were expanded dramatically with government money. Since 1952, the number of students at Al-Azhar schools and university increased from 3,000 to 1.9 million.[4] The Commission on International Religious Freedom rightly notes that "the government maintains tight control over all Muslim religious institutions."[5]

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3. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, *Bastion of Impunity, Mirage of Reform: Human Rights in the Arab Region*, 2009, at *http://www.cihrs.org/Images/ArticleFiles/Original/485.pdf* (September 16, 2010).

Religious programming expanded with the development of new media technologies, especially television. Newspapers, which were all owned or controlled by the government, developed special religious pages. Nearly exclusively Islamic, these pages promoted the officially accepted version of religion. The state also organized religious contests, such as Koran reciting competitions, and provided religious education in all schools. Although most government efforts focused on the Muslim religious establishment, the regime dealt with the Orthodox Church in a similar manner. Church building required a presidential decree, and the president became the benevolent ruler who provided places of worship. When the Coptic Orthodox Pope became interested in building a new cathedral, Nasser was all too happy to provide half of the needed financing and open the cathedral himself.

Nasser and the presidents that followed him were driven by a fear of the Islamist challengers to the regime. Under President Anwar El Sadat and then President Hosni Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood and the violent Islamic groups have been viewed as the main threats to the regime, both practically on the ground and in terms of legitimacy. To combat this challenge the regime aimed at mobilizing Islam for its own benefits. Under Nasser, the religious establishment was encouraged to emphasize the socialist nature of Islam. After Sadat gave up on socialism, the religious establishment was directed to emphasize how the peace with Israel was Islamic. Sadat even took the absurd step of calling himself the "pious president." A religious authority was always available to issue a fatwa with whatever the regime had in mind.

The absurdity of the arrangement is evident because each of Egypt's three presidents took contradictory political stands, and the religious establishment was called upon to support each position. The most striking case might be the late Sheikh Tantawey, who wrote an anti-Semitic dissertation building on the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the 1960s,[6] but in later years, as Sheikh of Al-Azhar, he took the opposite position of supporting the peace process with Israel.

"Islam is the Religion of the State. Arabic is its official language, and the principal source of legislation is Islamic Jurisprudence (Sharia)."

The regime's policies naturally overflowed into the constitutional framework and laws. Article 2 of the Egyptian constitution proclaims: "Islam is the Religion of the State. Arabic is its official language, and the principal source of legislation is Islamic Jurisprudence (Sharia)."[7] In theory and practice, Articles 40 and 46 contradict Article 2. Article 40 declares: "All citizens are equal before the law. They have equal public rights and duties without discrimination due to sex, ethnic origin, language, religion or creed." Article 46 proclaims: "The State shall guarantee the freedom of belief and the freedom of practicing religious rights."[8]

This apparent contradiction stems from the various goals of the state. In fighting the Islamists, the state simultaneously appeals to the secular intelligentsia as the only alternative, attempts to control the religious establishment and confront the Islamists, and tries to appease the religious constituency with appeals to Sharia. The existence of contradic-

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4. For a comprehensive analysis of the rise of religious education in Egypt, see Adel Guindy, "Was the Muslim Brotherhood's Success in the Elections a Surprise?" *Middle East Transparent*, December 24, 2005, at *http://www.metransparent.com/old/texts/adel_guindy/adel_guindy_brotherhhood_election_surprise.htm* (September 16, 2010).

5. U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report 2009*, May 2009, p. 161, at *http://www.uscirf.gov/images/AR2009/egypt.pdf* (September 16, 2010).

6. Sheikh Tantawey's thesis was republished posthumously by several Egyptian newspapers, most notably *Al-Masry, Al-Youm*, and *Al-Shorouk*.

7. Egypt Constitution, September 11, 1971, art. 2, at *http://www.egypt.gov.eg/english/laws/constitution/default.aspx* (September 20, 2010).

8. *Ibid.*, art. 46.

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tory guarantees in the constitution and legal framework allows the state to move freely between the two positions in each case involving religious freedom. In practice, it also allows individual judges to interpret the law as they wish, with the all-too-common Islamist judge basing his rulings on Article 2 and thus Sharia, while the rare tolerant judge is guided by guarantee of equality in Articles 40 and 46.

The Religious Establishment. Islam by its very nature has no religious hierarchy. In reality, however, religious scholars have built up a religious establishment. This establishment is embodied in Al-Azhar, which has developed as a mosque, a university, and the global center of Sunni Islam. Sunni thought had been stagnant for centuries, not allowed the freedom of thought associated with Shiites. With the modernization of the state in the 19th century, the religious establishment felt extremely threatened by both modern science and Western missionaries. The result has been two distinct methods of adaptation to this challenge.

Some scholars embraced the project of modernizing Islamic thought and making it adaptable to modern times. However, most clerics chose to deal with the challenge by seeking to restore what they view as Islam's golden age through more rigid maintenance of tradition and Middle Age interpretations and fatwas. The result of both approaches has been a complex arrangement in which Al-Azhar modernized in appearance, by adopting the teaching of the sciences in its university, while the core of the religious education remained the same. More importantly, the religious establishment maintained its close links with the state as the only guarantee and weapon against the challenges of modernity.

The challenges that confronted the religious establishment in the 19th and early 20th centuries were mixed. First, there were the non-Muslims, who traditionally were tolerated as only second-class citizens. The religious establishment sought to maintain this arrangement as best as it could. While Christians and Jews could no longer be expected to wear special clothes or be banned from entering the army, the establishment sought to maintain their inferiority in other matters. For example, building churches was seen as an attempt not only to spread Christianity, but also to challenge the dominance of Islam in the land of Islam by publicly displaying the cross. The number of religious minority doctors, engineers, and professionals in general was also viewed with suspicion. Most threatening was the visible financial success of religious minorities.

Increasingly the religious establishment has encouraged the state to ban, punish, and persecute any deviation from the accepted version of Sunni Islam.

The second and gravest challenge in the eyes of the religious establishment was from within Islam itself. Religious non-Muslim minorities were ultimately controllable because their numbers are small, but religious freedom for Muslims was the real challenge. Muslims allowed to think independently from the religious establishment could deviate from the accepted version of Sunni Islam. This threat took the form of other traditional Islamic sects, such as Shiites; new religions with Islamic backgrounds, such as Ahmadiyya and Baha'is; and independent thinkers who seek to modernize Islam. Increasingly, the religious establishment has encouraged the state to ban, punish, and persecute any deviation from the accepted version of Sunni Islam.[9]

The Orthodox Christian religious establishment has followed a similar pattern in its relationship with the state. Outside of the historical pattern of dependence on the Muslim ruler, leaders of the

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9. Compass Direct News, "Islamists Join Case Against Convert to Christianity," October 10, 2007, at *http://archive.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&idelement=5069* (September 20, 2010); International Society for Human Rights, "Egypt: Muslim Authorities Call for Beheading of Convert," August 30, 2007, at *http://www.ishr.org/index.php?id=697&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=762&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=296&cHash=c51802de6d* (September 20, 2010); Al Arabiya News Channel, "Penalize 'Re-conversion': Egyptian Fatwa Says," January 20, 2008, at *http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008/01/20/44471.html* (September 20, 2010); and Alshark Alawsat, "Sheikhs of Alazhar: Quranists Are Apostates; and the Evidence from the Holy Book Proves Their Guilt," Ahl AlQuran, August 30, 2007, at *http://www.ahl-alquran.com/English/show_news.php?main_id=460* (September 20, 2010).

Orthodox Church have been willing to use the state's power to fight challenges from other Christian traditions. Historically, Protestant mainstream churches were viewed as the enemy. Currently, groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses, the Seventh Day Adventists, and the Mormons pose a threat to the traditional church. Most recently, the newly established Independent St. Athanasius Orthodox Church has been targeted. In return for the church authorities' cooperation, the state persecutes these groups, and Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are legally banned in Egypt.

The Islamists. The rise of political Islam in the late 1920s is attributed to both the failures of Egypt's liberal era and the challenge posed by Western domination of the historic land of Islam. Western domination introduced Western values and culture into a traditional culture that had no means of providing an alternative discourse after years of Ottoman control. The Egyptian intellectuals reacted to the apparent crises in Islam's earthly success by arguing for adapting the Western model of separation of state and religion to Islam. Both that very notion and its failure led to the alternative discourse of returning to the days when Islam controlled the world. In the eyes of the pious, only a return to true Islam could ensure the Muslims' domination again.[10]

The relationship between the Islamists and the state was naturally one of conflict. The state was too secular for the Islamists to tolerate, and they saw it as an obstacle to returning to the golden age of Islam. The natural outcome was a theological argument that the regime was infidel and thereafter should be changed by violence. The Muslim Brotherhood led the way in the late 1940s and 1950s until it was crushed by Nasser. Sayed Qutb, who was killed in prison in 1965, not only theorized the infidel nature of the state, but of society at large. In his eyes, any society that did not follow Islamic values and rules was infidel and jihad was the natural road to establish an Islamic state. Torture in Nasser's prisons ensured that Islamism's reemergence would be more violent. After the failure of Arab nationalism, the Islamists returned with a vengeance.

Islamists pose the gravest threat to religious freedom.[11] Any deviation from their understanding of Sunni Islam draws an automatic accusation of apostasy and is punishable by death. Independent Muslim thinkers are usually at the top of their list of targets. Farag Fouda paid for his ideas with his life when he was assassinated in 1993 by members of Islamic Jihad.[12] Nobel Literature Winner Naguib Mahfouz barely escaped,[13] and others receive numerous death threats.[14] Religious minorities are also easy targets of the Islamists. Copts have been regularly targeted with violent attacks often resulting in massacres, such as in Abu Qurgas and Dairut.[15]

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10. Scholars have long ignored European fascism as an important factor in the rise of political Islam. Hassan El Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, was influenced by fascist ideas and received financing from European fascists. For recent scholarly discussion on European fascism's influence in the rise of political Islam and its continuing influence, see Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009); Matthias Kuntzel, *Jihad and Jew Hatred: Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11* (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2007); and Latifa Mohamed Salem, *Farouk wa skout Al Malakiya fe Masr 1936–1952* (Farouk and the Fall of Monarchy in Egypt 1936–1952) (Cairo: Madbouli, 1989).

11. For a general study of the threat to freedom posed by Islamic armed groups, see Amnesty International, "Egypt: Human Rights Abuses by Armed Groups," September 1, 1998, at *http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE12/022/1998/en/3c53038a-dab2-11dd-80bc-797022e51902/mde120221998en.html* (September 22, 2010).

12. Middle East Media Research Institute, "Censorship and Persecution in the Name of Islam," Assyrian International News Agency, at *http://www.aina.org/news/20070108191217.htm* (September 17, 2010).

13. National Coalition Against Censorship, "Naguib Mahfouz, Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, the Victim of an Attempted Assassination by Islamic Extremists," File Room, at *http://www.thefileroom.org/documents/dyn/DisplayCase.cfm/id/1059* (September 17, 2010).

14. Stephen Ulph, "Al-Qaeda Extends Threats to Journalists and Intellectuals Outside Iraq," Jamestown Foundation *Terrorism Focus*, July 22, 2005, at *http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=530* (September 17, 2010).

15. For a listing of violent attacks on Christians by Islamists, see Amnesty International, "Egypt."

While the Muslim Brotherhood, the main Islamist movement in Egypt, has always claimed to be a peaceful organization, its actual repudiation of violence can be traced to the late 1960s. Other more violent groups, such as Islamic Jihad and Gamaa Islamia, have renounced violence since the late 1990s, although smaller groups still conduct terrorist attacks. However, the Islamists' renunciation of violence did not constitute a change in ideology or goal. Islamists still seek to establish an Islamic state in Egypt,[16] but through more peaceful means.

For example, through the parliament of Egypt, members of the Muslim Brotherhood seek to introduce Islamic legislation and stop any deviation from their notion of Islam.[17] Baha'is are often targets of verbal attacks in parliament,[18] and the publication of any book that is deemed deviant leads to an automatic outcry in parliament. Through this mechanism and often allied with the religious establishment, the Islamists help to maintain the general repression of thought in Egypt and can challenge the regime's legitimacy as non-Islamic.

Egyptian Society. The tolerant Egyptian society of the 1920s and 1930s, which included a large Jewish community whose members reached ministerial positions, and could accept the publication of a book entitled *Why Am I an Atheist?*, has been systematically transformed into an intolerant society that violently attacks anything deemed as deviating from religiously accepted norms and traditions. This transformation was greatly aided by the alliance between the state and the religious establishment.

This alliance is most evident in education. For many years, Egyptian students have been indoctrinated in hate.[19] The rise of Wahhabi Islam has also greatly influenced this transformation. Aided by increasing oil revenues, the rigid Saudi interpreta-

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tion of Islam, which allows no tolerance of others, spread throughout the region. The millions of Egyptians who worked in the Gulf helped to transform Egyptian society. Through Saudi financial aid, the Saudi religious establishment was able to radicalize its Egyptian counterpart, leading to greater intolerance in society.

This radicalization is keenly felt by observers. While in the past armed Islamists would attack religious minorities, today religious minorities are attacked by their neighbors, people who are often drawn out by the wildest rumors, ranging from an alleged relationship between a Christian man and a Muslim women, an attempt to build a church, or simply the presence of Baha'is in their village. This radicalization and its resulting violence have spread from remote villages to the hearts of the major cities, including Cairo and Alexandria.

Many in Egypt see society itself as the major obstacle to religious freedom. This has led most supporters of religious freedom to ally themselves with the state as the least radical of the political forces at play and the only protection for minorities and intellectuals from an increasingly intolerant society. They argue that only the state's iron hand can maintain order. The state encourages this argument by often portraying itself—especially to Western observers—as the only alternative. However, this argument ignores the role that the state has played in creating this situation. Through its actions

16. Khairat El Shater, "We Want an Islamic Government," at *http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ID=5050&SectionID=270* (September 17, 2010).

17. Islam Tawfik, "The Education Minister Accused of Renting Egyptian Students' Minds to Foreigners," February 27, 2008, at *http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=34876&SecID=250* (October 11, 2010).

18. Ahmed Saleh, "A Law in Parliament Criminalizes Believing in Baha'i," April 28, 2009, at *http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=48306&SecID=0* (October 11, 2010).

19. "Islamizing Egyptian Education: Unsteady Egypt," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer 2009), pp. 76–77, at *http://www.meforum.org/2414/islamizing-egyptian-education* (October 11, 2010).

and inactions the state has fostered the rise of radicalization by crushing all independent thought.

The growing radicalization of society plays a role in the internal dynamics of the institutional conflict within the state apparatus. The security apparatus, which is the authoritarian regime's only effective protection, tends to play the card of societal unrest to stop any advancement in freedoms in general, particularly any progress in religious freedom. Because the security apparatus is directly responsible for the religious file, it views any movement toward religious freedom as a threat to its institutional domain and an attempt to limit its role. Thus, the security establishment often discourages the regime from taking any meaningful steps toward greater religious freedom by highlighting the unrest that such a move would create in society.

The Dynamics

Each of the three entities—the regime, the religious establishment, and the Islamists—has its own internal considerations and goals that help to diminish religious freedom, yet the dynamic relationship between them and how it influences society is what creates the cycle of intolerance.

While the state is often portrayed as an entity separate from society, the various layers of the state apparatus are naturally part of society. Whether bureaucrats or security officers, the government employees are greatly influenced by the growing radicalization of society. These employees go through the same education system as other Egyptians and are influenced by the same media. Naturally, they develop the same intolerance of religious minorities and freedom of thought. Thus, while the political decision makers might allow more freedom, in many cases of religious freedom, local bureaucrats and officers stop that advancement.[20]

Furthermore, the religious establishment and the Islamists are not entirely separate entities. The religious establishment, which has long been considered traditional and conservative, has become radicalized with the spread of Wahhabi Islam. The Al-Azhar establishment embodies this change, often leading the calls to confiscate books and issuing fatwas against independent thinkers and religious minorities.

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These dynamics are best understood in the numerous challenges that face religious liberty in Egypt. Copts are systematically excluded from government appointments and from high ranks in the police and army, as the U.S. State Department and the USCIRF have documented in their reports. Proselytizers from non-Islamic religions are arrested and, if they are foreigners, deported. Sects not recognized by the state are intimidated, and their members are frequently arrested by State Security. While each of these challenges deserves a lengthy analysis, this paper focuses on the most serious problems: building churches, conversion cases, Baha'is, the plight of Muslim intellectuals, and anti-Semitism.

Building Churches. Building houses of worship in Egypt for non-Muslims and for Muslim sects deemed deviant is nearly impossible. For Baha'is, who have been prohibited from having any places of worship since 1960, it is literally impossible. The Shiites face similar difficulties because the state does not even acknowledge their existence as a separate sect.[21] For a preacher to proclaim any Shiite doctrines in a mosque in Egypt is grounds for immediate arrest. The declining number of Jews in Egypt means that building new synagogues is not an issue. Given these realities, the problem associated with building a house of worship is almost exclusively a Christian problem.

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20. A case in point is local government officials refusing to issue a building permit for a new church in Assiut despite its receiving a presidential order. There are many such cases. For a list of some of those cases, see U.S. Department of State, "Egypt."

21. For a comprehensive study of problems facing Shiites in Egypt, see Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, "New Report Documents Arrests and Torture of Shiite Muslims in Egypt," August 3, 2004, at *http://eipr.org/en/report/2004/08/01/570* (September 17, 2010).

Egypt has between 1,950 and 2,500 churches (buildings) according to various official government sources. Laws governing church construction in Egypt date back to the Ottoman rule and were supplemented by a 1934 internal memorandum in the Interior Ministry. This set of regulations and laws discriminates against Christians, imposing requirements that are exceedingly difficult to meet. Before 2005, to build a new church, renovate an old one, or even add a bathroom to a church building required a presidential order.

Under mounting international criticism of these rules, the Egyptian president issued the 291/2005 Decree, which authorizes governors to approve church renovations and repairs, while the president retained exclusive authority to approve new churches. While this decree was hailed as progress for religious freedom, in reality it created new obstacles because local authorities were often more intolerant than the national government. The USCIRF has documented only 67 new church permits that were issued between

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1998 and July 2009.[22] Even completing the required paperwork and receiving presidential approval will not guarantee that a church would be built because the police often stop the construction citing security concerns. The same security concerns are also often used to close existing churches.

Faced with these obstacles, Christians often resort to building illegal churches. The existence of these churches or the mere rumor that Christians are buying a piece of land in a village in many cases leads to an angry reaction by their Muslim neighbors. That simply a rumor of a church being built automatically leads to violent attacks on the alleged church site and nearby Christian houses and shops

is perhaps the best illustration of the state of religious freedom in the minds of Egyptians. Most of these attacks result in wounded Christians, financial losses, and terrorized minority communities.

The police force responsible for maintaining order resorts to indiscriminate arrests of Muslims and Christians. The U.S. State Department views the arrests of Christians[23] as a method to stop legal action and to force Christians to accept reconciliation sessions that usually include a promise by the Christians not to build a church. The attackers are never prosecuted. The State Department rightfully concludes that "this practice contributed to a pattern of impunity that encouraged further attacks."[24]

This sequence of a rumor, an attack, and a reconciliation session has become a pattern in recent years, which manifests the dynamics of how the relationship between the four entities operates in an endless cycle. The state through its security branch attempts to stop any church from being built. This state action is rationalized by the argument of maintaining order and not instigating Muslim anger. The state's attitude encourages the local religious establishment in the village, the mosque preacher, and the local Islamists either to start a rumor of Christians attempting to build a church or to use actual construction of a church to ignite violence against Christians in a society that has become radicalized. Once the violent attack occurs, it becomes further proof to the state apparatus that church building should be dealt with cautiously. The state's unwillingness to punish the attackers also encourages attacks in other villages when the people realize that attacks on Christians will not be prosecuted. The endless cycle has no escape. The state always has society to blame for the situation, and the state encourages violent behavior by members of society.

Faced with growing international criticism, the Egyptian government has repeatedly promised to pass a comprehensive law on building all houses of worship, but more than six years have passed since this promise, leading observers to question the government's commitment to pass the law.

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22. U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report 2010*, p. 232.

23. U.S. Department of State, "Egypt."

24. *Ibid.*

Conversion Cases. Officially, there are no legal obstacles to religious conversion. In reality, conversion from other religions to Islam is possible and often encouraged. However, conversion from Islam to another religion is punishable both legally and practically. While there is no law that explicitly bans conversion, those attempting to leave Islam are punished under Article 98(f) of the Penal Code, which criminalizes insulting heavenly religions. In addition, Islamists and many, perhaps most, Islamic jurists[25] believe that apostasy is punishable by death under Sharia law, despite the fact that the "Qur'an does not explicitly provide for the punish-

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ment of apostates in this life"[26] and the counterarguments from liberal reformers. Although the Egyptian courts have not imposed the death penalty on apostates—a power that Islamist judges believe they have under Article 2 of the Constitution—vigilantes have. Thus, conversion from Islam is a story of official prosecution, societal intimidation, and constant death threats. Conversion cases in Egypt fall under three categories: Muslim converts to Christianity, Christians who have converted to Islam and wish to return to Christianity, and the children of converts to Islam.

Cases of Muslims converting from Islam are rare. Their mere existence is a phenomenon that has only recently been acknowledged in the Egyptian media. Historically, such people would hide their conversion stories as best as they could and attempt—mostly unsuccessfully—to flee the country. Their stories are often known to State Security, which keeps a close watch on churches and any attempts to proselyte. State Security often arrests converts, attempts to persuade them not to convert, and tortures them.[27]

Recently, Mohamed Hegazy, a convert to Christianity, sued in Egyptian courts for legal recognition of his conversion and to be issued a new national identification card with his religion listed as Christian. His attempts and those of Maher Al Gohary have proven fruitless.[28] In both court cases, the government argued against the right to convert, Islamists joined the battle,[29] the religious establishment issued fatwas against apostasy,[30] and the judges threatened the petitioners.

Christian converts to Islam who wish to return to Christianity face a similarly impossible battle. Some Christians have converted to Islam to obtain a divorce, which is prohibited by the Orthodox Church. After obtaining the divorce or for other reasons, they later wish to return to Christianity, but they soon discover that conversion is a one-way road in Egypt. Individuals can freely enter Islam, but there is no way out of it. Their court cases have been an uphill battle against the government, which is unwilling to issue them new ID cards as Christians, and against fatwas from the religious establishment denouncing them as apostates.[31]

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25. Patrick Sookhdeo, *Freedom to Believe: Challenging Islam's Apostasy Law* (McLean, Va.: Isaac Publishing, 2009), pp. 41–53.

26. Michael Nazir-Ali, "The Challenges of Islamist Ideology to America's Founding Principles," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2430, June 29, 2010, at *http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2010/06/The-Challenges-of-Islamist-Ideology-to-America-s-Founding-Principles*.

27. Compass Direct News, "Security Police Torture Christian Convert Woman," July 18, 2007, at *http://archive.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&idelement=4952* (September 20, 2010), and Assyrian International News Agency, "Egyptian Convert to Christianity Tortured, Raped in Egypt," December 20, 2008, at *http://www.aina.org/news/20081219220247.htm* (September 20, 2010).

28. Christopher Landau, "Egyptian Christian's Recognition Struggle," BBC News, February 13, 2009, at *http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7888193.stm* (September 20, 2010), and Compass Direct News, "Court Rules Against Convert," January 31, 2008, at *http://archive.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&idelement=5209* (September 20, 2010).

29. Compass Direct News, "Islamists Join Case Against Convert to Christianity."

30. International Society for Human Rights, "Egypt: Muslim Authorities Call for Beheading of Convert."

31. Al Arabiya News Channel, "Penalize 'Re-conversion.'"

Yet returning converts have had a few qualified successes in court. In some instances, a person who has converted back to Christianity has been given permission to receive a new ID identifying his religion as Christian with the note "Ex convert to Islam" added, which would make him an easy target of discrimination and death threats.[32] Yet even in these rare instances, the Interior Ministry has refused to issue them new ID cards.[33]

The most tragic conversion cases involve people forced to become Muslims because their parents converted. Children with one Muslim parent are automatically considered Muslims. Thus, a father's or mother's conversion to Islam immediately transfers custody of the children to the Muslim parent and means the forcible conversion of the children. If the mother converts, it also means automatic divorce because a Muslim woman is not allowed to

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The government's failure to take a firm stand for religious freedom allows the cycle of religious intolerance to continue without interruption.

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be married to a non-Muslim under Sharia. In the case of Mario and Andrew, their father converted to Islam and they were under 18 years old, automatically making them Muslim despite their objections.[34] In the case of Shadia and Bahia, the father of these two sisters converted to Islam in 1962, but returned to Christianity three years later. The father's conversion and return were unknown to the young daughters. In 2007, their problems began when they were accused of fabricating their 1982

marriage certificates by listing themselves as Christians. Both were sentenced to three years in prison.[35] After mounting international criticism, the two sisters were acquitted on appeal.[36]

The same dynamics involving religious freedom in general are evident in the story of converts from Islam. The state, wishing to portray itself as more Islamic than its opponents and bowing to the pressure from the religious establishment, positions itself against those converts. The Islamists join the court cases and attack the government for its lack of enforcement of the death penalty for apostasy. The religious establishment pressures the government with its fatwas against the converts, and society at large intimidates the converts. The government's failure to take a firm stand for religious freedom allows the cycle of religious intolerance to continue without interruption.

Baha'is.[37] Unlike Christians, who are at least considered an accepted "heavenly religion," the Baha'i religion is not recognized by the Egyptian government. Baha'is are therefore banned from having places of worship. Their plight is much worse than the Christians. In the past, their religion could be mentioned on the Egyptian paper ID cards and birth certificates, but with computerization they are given only three options in the religion box: Christian, Jew, or Muslim. Not wishing to be identified as any of the three, Baha'is have asked either to have their religion accurately identified or to leave the religion box blank. The Interior Ministry refused both options, and a five-year court battle ensued. In March 2009, after many contradictory verdicts and government appeals of any rulings in favor of Baha'is, they won

32. Compass Direct News, "Converts Win Case but May Face Discrimination," February 11, 2008, at *http://archive.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&idelement=5233* (September 20, 2010).

33. Compass Direct News, "Citizen Wins Rare Legal Victory to Revert to Christianity," Coptic Assembly of America, January 8, 2009, at *http://www.copticassembly.com/showart.php?main_id=1753* (September 20, 2010).

34. Assyrian International News Agency, "We Refuse to Be Muslims by Force Say Egyptian Christian Twin-Boys After Losing Court Case," April 26, 2010, at *http://www.aina.org/news/20100425203200.htm* (September 20, 2010).

35. Compass Direct News, "Egyptian Father's Brief Conversion Traps Daughters in Islam," OneNewsNow, October 13, 2008, at *http://www.onenewsnow.com/Persecution/Default.aspx?id=285672* (September 22, 2010).

36. Agence France-Presse, "Egypt Copt Jailed 45 Years After Father's Conversion," Google News, November 22, 2007, at *http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gWAdeTNMOeMfyPaOwrYpODjNAQJA* (September 20, 2010).

37. For a comprehensive study of the plight of Baha'is in Egypt, see Human Rights Watch and Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, "Prohibited Identities: State Interference with Religious Freedom," *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 19, No. 7(E) (November 2007), at *http://hrw.org/reports/2007/egypt1107* (September 20, 2010).

the right to have the religion box left empty.[38] The practical ramifications of this ruling are still unclear because the Interior Ministry is still not issuing those ID cards to all Baha'is who apply.

Understanding the gravity of the situation requires understanding the importance of ID cards for Egyptians. Without an ID card, a newborn Baha'i child cannot be issued a birth certificate. Later in life, this will block him from entering school or universities. For Baha'is with old birth certificates, failure to carry a new ID card exposes them to random arrest for not carrying the card. Baha'i couples cannot receive a marriage certificate, making it impossible for them to stay at any hotels, which legally require a marriage certificate for any man and women renting a room. Working is also impossible. For the past six years, the only official document that the Egyptian government is willing to issue to Baha'is is a passport, practically encouraging them to emigrate.

The ongoing court battles for Baha'is have increased media exposure, which has not always been helpful. The media exposure has led to attacks by the Muslim Brotherhood and the religious establishment.[39] In one case, after a television program that discussed the Baha'i problem, a mob attacked the homes of Baha'is in a village in southern Egypt causing property damage and their banishment from the village.[40]

As with other issues of religious freedom, the dynamics between the four entities are the same. The government's fear of being portrayed as un-Islamic leads it to discriminate against Baha'is. The government's actions encourage the Islamists and the religious establishment to further attacks on Baha'is and increase intolerance toward them in society, which further strengthens the government's fear of acting to stop discrimination.

Muslim Intellectuals. Concern for religious freedom in Egypt has long focused on the plight of minorities, especially Christians. While persecu-

tion of religious minorities is more severe and noticeable, the Muslims' inability to think independently about religion and to enjoy the freedom to believe, practice, and worship according to one's own conscience also makes them victims of Egypt's intolerance.

The government's alliance with the religious establishment has led to growing intolerance in the educational system and the media. The government actively persecutes intellectuals who attempt independent thinking in matters of religion. The government persecution is supplemented by official denunciations and fatwas by the religious establishment and by verbal and physical attacks by Islamist groups. Any attempt to challenge the officially

> *The government's alliance with the religious establishment has led to growing intolerance in the educational system and the media.*

accepted version of Islam is systematically crushed. This intolerant environment that stifles independent thinking and religious liberty is the natural breeding ground for terrorists like Ayman Al-Zawahri and Mohamed Atta. While some attempts have been made to improve matters, especially how educational textbooks discuss religion, the main structure of the religious environment remains the same.

The persecution of thought is carried out under Article 98(f) of the Penal Code, which authorizes a punishment of up to five years in prison for insulting a "heavenly religion." In practice, the law is only used in cases involving Islam. This law is a direct threat to anyone willing to challenge the official interpretation of Islam.

The plight of independent and moderate Islamic thinkers has taken many forms. While Farag Fouda paid for his ideas with his life, others were more fortunate. Ahmed Sobhy Mansour,[41] the leader of the Quranist movement, was persecuted for years and

38. Liam Stack, "Egyptians Win the Right to Drop Religion from ID Cards," *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 20, 2009, at *http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0420/p06s12-wome.html* (September 20, 2010).

39. Ikhwan Online, "Al Azhar, the Government and the MP's Try Baha'ism in Parliament," May 3, 2006, at *http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=20072&SecID=250* (September 20, 2010).

40. BBC News, "Call for Egypt Bahai Attack Probe," at *http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7981252.stm* (September 20, 2010).

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often imprisoned before escaping to the United States, where he lives in safety, although he is not immune to verbal attacks by the religious establishment.[42] His followers are still subject to arrest and imprisonment in Egypt.[43] His sole crime is attempting to develop a moderate, tolerant understanding of Islam based solely on the Quran and rejecting the Sunnah, which he sees as dubious and intolerant.[44]

Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, a leading thinker, was also forced to flee Egypt[45] after a court ordered his divorce from his wife[46] because he was branded an apostate[47] and under Sharia no Muslim woman is allowed to marry a non-Muslim.

Abdel Kareem Amer, a young blogger who dared to criticize the religious establishment represented in Al-Azhar as well as the Egyptian president, was sentenced to four years in prison.[48] He is still in prison for his writings.

This environment of persecution has affected publishing. Book bans are frequent, often driven by the Islamic Research Center of Al-Azhar University, which has the legal right to censor and confiscate any book it deems insulting to its interpretation of Islam. The Egyptian government granted it the authority to censor books in the mid 1980s, and in 2004 the government gave it the authority to confiscate books. Thousands of books from the classical *A Thousand and One Nights* to modern academic books, such as *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, have been banned.[49]

The government's alliance with the religious establishment not only encourages the religious establishment's control of books and intimidation of thinkers, but also through its complicity encourages Islamists to use publication of any "un-Islamic" book as an excuse to stage public protests, such as in the case of Haydar Haydar's novel *Banquet for Seaweed*.

Anti-Semitism.[50] Anti-Semitism remains the most serious plague infecting the Middle East in general and Egypt in particular. Although Egypt has signed a peace treaty with Israel, the level of anti-Semitism in the Egyptian press has not decreased.[51] Regrettably, no group in Egypt is immune to this disease,[52] including the American University in Cairo,

41. Free Muslims Coalitions, "Sheikh Dr. Ahmed Subhy Mansour, Board Member," at *http://www.freemuslims.org/about/mansour.php* (September 20, 2010).

42. Alawsat, "Sheikhs of Alazhar."

43. Ethar Shalaby, "Admin Court to Decide on Quranist's Case on July 31," Free-Islam.com, July 5, 2007, at *http://free-islam.com/modules.php?name=Forums&file=viewtopic&t=548* (September 20, 2010).

44. International Quranic Center, "About Us," at *http://www.ahl-alquran.com/English/aboutus.php* (September 20, 2010).

45. Nadia Abou El-Magd, "When the Professor Can't Teach," *El-Ahram Weekly*, June 15–21, 2000, at *http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2000/486/eg6.htm* (September 20, 2010).

46. Mona Eltahawy, "Lives Torn Apart in Battle for the Soul of the Arab World," *The Guardian*, October 20, 1999, at *http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,260766,00.html* (September 20, 2010).

47. International Freedom of Expression eXchange, "Writer Dr Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid-Branded an Apostate," August 6, 1996, at *http://www.ifex.org/fr/content/view/full/77664* (September 20, 2010).

48. Reuters, "Egypt Court Upholds 4-Year Sentence for Blogger," December 22, 2009, at *http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5BL3KB20091222* (September 20, 2010).

49. For censorship cases, see Middle East Media Research, "Censorship and Persecution in the Name of Islam," Assyrian International News Agency, January 9, 2007, at *http://www.aina.org/news/20070108191217.htm* (September 20, 2010); International Freedom of Expression eXchange, "Egyptian Government Censors Books and Writer—Confiscation of Dozens of Publications Reported at Cairo International Book Fair," February 7, 2001; "Behind the Ban," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, November 2–9, 2005, at *http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/767/cu2.htm* (September 20, 2010); and Pakinam Amer, "Censorship of Literary Work Remains Unchallenged in Egypt," February 12, 2007, at *http://news.monstersandcritics.com/middleeast/features/article_1262896.php/Censorship_of_literary_work_remains_unchallenged_in_Egypt* (September 20, 2010).

50. For a scholarly study of anti-Semitism in the Middle East, see Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999).

51. Anti-Defamation League, "Anti-Semitism in the Egyptian Media," 2009, at *http://www.adl.org/anti_semitism_arab/Egyptian-Media-Report.pdf* (September 23, 2010).

which is largely funded by U.S. taxpayers.[53] When confronted with anti-Semitic articles and movies, the Egyptian government often either blames Israeli actions for inciting anti-Semitism or argues that its hands are tied because the Egyptian press is free.

Numerous academics have explained the difference between anti-Semitism and legitimate criticism of the state of Israel's policies. While both sentiments are evident in Egypt, they are clearly distinguishable. Demonization of Jews as Jews is the norm. This is further entangled in a web of conspiracy theories involving Jews. It is also important to understand that "Anti-Israelism and anti-Americanism travel together."[54]

The Egyptian government directly owns and controls most Egyptian newspapers.

Freedom of the press is also a phony excuse because the Egyptian press is decidedly not free, as human rights organizations have observed. Furthermore, the Egyptian government directly owns and controls most Egyptian newspapers.[55] The Egyptian government's lack of interest in ending anti-Semitic rhetoric is a policy pursued not only to advance its international political interests but also as a part of its larger policy toward religious freedom.

For the Egyptian regime, Jews are easy scapegoats for all of its internal failures. Furthermore, almost no Jews remain in the country, so allowing anti-Semitism to flourish poses no security threats to the regime. The religious establishment, which holds strong anti-Semitic feelings, is encouraged to blame the Jews for everything, and the regime is able to appear as standing firmly against the "inter-national Jewish conspiracy." This also enables the regime to compete with the Islamists in the rhetoric.

One ramification of this myopic policy and the active encouragement of anti-Semitism has been the increasing publication of anti-Semitic literature. Unsurprisingly, the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* has become a hit at the annual Cairo Book Fair and was made into a popular television series. The government further uses this societal sentiment to answer international criticism. The same dynamics between regime, religious establishment, Islamists, and society are repeated once again.

What the U.S. Should Do

In his Cairo speech, President Barack Obama identified religious freedom as one of the important issues to be addressed in the "Muslim world." In the Egyptian context, he mentioned the Copts as an example of the richness of the religious diversity that should be upheld. Sadly, a coherent policy has not followed the rhetoric. In fact, the exact opposite has been the case.

During a visit to Tanta University, U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Margaret Scobey stated, according to a news report, that

> there is no differentiation between minorities in Egypt and described it as the country of "civil coexistence," where there are some cases that reach the level of slight conflict, that Egypt aims to solve before they develop, in light of it enjoying full freedom of the press and Human Rights organizations work there in complete freedom.[56]

Of course, such misguided talk by a high U.S. official not only damages the cause of religious freedom and shows a lack of concern for the matter, but also completely contradicts the numerous U.S. State Department reports on religious freedom.

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52. Amr Bargisi and Samuel Tadros, "Why Are Egypt's Liberals Anti-Semitic?" *The Wall Street Journal*, October 28, 2009, at *http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704335904574497143564035718.html* (September 20, 2010).

53. Riham El Houshi, "AUC Senate Calls for Anti-Normalization," *Caravan*, May 18, 2008, at *http://www1.aucegypt.edu/students/caravan/stories/08May18/front_riham2.html* (September 20, 2010).

54. Josef Joffe, "The Axis of Envy," *Foreign Policy*, No. 132 (September–October 2002), p. 68.

55. Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press*, 2010 ed., s.v. "Egypt," at *http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&country=7816&year=2010* (October 11, 2010).

56. "During Her Visit to Tanta University: Scoby Praises Freedom of the Press and Human Rights in Egypt," *Youm7 Newspaper*, December 14, 2009, at *http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=166189&SecID=65&IssueID=0* (October 11, 2010).

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To foster religious freedom in Egypt, the Obama Administration should:

- **Oppose attempts by the Egyptian government to extend its domestic laws on religious freedom into the international arena.** Specifically, the U.S. should take a clear stand against the Egyptian-led initiative in the United Nations to criminalize defamation of religion.

- **Provide funding for organizations working to combat religious discrimination in Egypt.**

- **Actively promote religious freedom with all of the tools of U.S. public diplomacy, including the U.S. Embassy and Alhurra television network.** In this regard, it is important to explain why religious freedom is not only a minority concern, but would benefit the Muslim majority as well. U.S. officials at all levels and in all departments should follow the same policy.

- **Actively investigate cases of discrimination.** A visit by a high-ranking U.S. Embassy official to the site of a banned church can sometimes perform miracles.

- **Challenge anti-Semitic articles in Egyptian newspapers through the U.S. Embassy.**

- **Punish specific actors working against religious freedom.** For example, an Egyptian officer known to be responsible for the torture of converts should not receive a U.S. visa, and the editor in chief of a newspaper that specializes in anti-Semitic articles should not be invited to U.S. Embassy parties.

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The Administration should also specifically encourage the Egyptian government to:

- **Enact a comprehensive law governing the building of places of worship regardless of religion.**

- **Repeal the 1960 law that bans Baha'is from having places of worship.**

- **Change Article 98(f) of the Penal Code to end the criminalization of independent religious thought.**

- **Ease the restrictions governing the recognition of religious sects.** Specifically, the government should officially recognize both the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons).

- **Pass a strict law punishing violent attacks on religious minorities**.

- **End the publication of anti-Semitic articles in government-owned newspapers.**

- **Ensure that educational textbooks do not incite hatred of religious minorities.**

- **Work with the Egyptian government on a coherent timetable to ensure enforcement.** Simply raising issues will not solve the problems.

Conclusion

While the four entities—the regime, the religious establishment, the Islamists, and society—are partners in the endless cycle of religious intolerance and persecution, their roles are not equal. The regime is the most powerful, due both to the natural capabilities of the state and the authoritarian nature of the Egyptian regime. Any attempt to deal with religious freedom issues in Egypt must therefore begin at the state level.

The lack of true religious freedom in Egypt is a root cause of the growth of radicalism. Thus, creating an environment of flourishing religious freedom is one of the most powerful remedies for radicalism. The Egyptian regime often defends its restrictions on religious freedom for Muslims as guided by fear of the rise of the Islamists. While violations of religious freedom will worsen if the Islamists ever reach power, it is also true that terrorism and radical Islam threaten the whole world, not just Egypt. This should encourage policymakers to increase religious freedom, not fight it. Religious freedom is the only real defense that both maintains people's freedoms and diminishes religious radicalism and Islamist terrorism.

—Samuel Tadros is Senior Partner at the Egyptian Union of Liberal Youth.