



Written by [James Heiser](#) on March 29, 2012

## Despite Protests, Islamists to Draft New Egyptian Constitution

As the Muslim Brotherhood continues building a future for Egypt that would place that nation in the ranks of the radical Islamist regimes, the U.S. State Department is still downplaying the course of events in the aftermath of the “Arab Spring.” But as the Egyptian government begins the process of drafting a new national constitution, it is clear that Islamists will dominate the process [see related article at end of this article].



In recent months, members of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party and the Al-Nour Party gained a clear majority of seats in both houses of the Egyptian parliament. [As reported for \*The New American\* on February 28:](#)

The Islamist Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party took 58 percent of the available seats in the upper house of Egypt’s parliament, while the even more extremist Salafist Al-Nour Party took a quarter of the seats. In all, more than 80 percent of the contended seats in Egypt’s upper parliament are now in the hands of Muslim extremists. Last year’s “Arab Spring” is now more fully manifesting its true character: the transformation of Egypt into a more stridently Islamist regime.

One of the results of that clear majority is that the drafting of the new Egyptian constitution will be overseen by a man whose views are in keeping with those of the newly elected parliament, [Mohamed Saad al-Katatni](#). Al-Katatni (pictured above) had been imprisoned during the last days of the Mubarak government because of his involvement with the Muslim Brotherhood. Following last year’s revolution, he founded the Freedom and Justice Party and became the Secretary-General of the party. Following the triumph of his party in the parliamentary elections, al-Katatni resigned as Secretary-General of the party on January 22, and was elected Speaker of the lower house of Egypt’s parliament — the People’s Assembly — the next day. Some might argue that it was virtually inevitable that al-Katatni would be assigned the role of overseeing the drafting the nation’s new constitution.

Nevertheless, al-Katatni’s appointment was not without controversy. In fact, his selection — and the makeup of the 100-member panel— was preceded by resignations and was greeted by protests in the streets. An article by Mohannad Sabry in the *Miami Herald* explains the reasoning behind the resignations and protests:

Mohamed Saad el-Katatni [also spelled al-Katatni], the only candidate for the chairman’s post, collected 71 out of 72 votes; the remaining members of the 100-person panel boycotted the vote.

El-Katatni, a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood’s ruling Guidance Council, made it clear



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that a threatened boycott of the panel by non-Islamist members wouldn't deter him. ...

Wednesday, el-Katatni denied that the constitution-drafting commission faced any crisis, despite the boycott by non-Islamist members.

"The joint meeting of the Parliament's upper and lower houses predicted that some members of the assembly would have personal circumstances that will keep them from participating," el-Katatni said. "That is why we elected 20 reserve names from Parliament and 20 others from public figures."

Opponents said the message was clear: If you boycott, you will be replaced.

Non-Islamists are undeterred by the implicit threat; in their opinion, they were only "window-dressing" for a panel which is firmly under the control of Islamists. Thus, Sabry cites the example of Coptic Christians who had been appointed to the panel:

Emad Gad, a Coptic Christian parliamentarian from the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, compared el-Katatni to Ahmed Fathi Soror, the longtime speaker of Parliament during Mubarak's years. "The Brotherhood started where the National Democratic Party ended," he said, referring to Mubarak's political party.

Six member of Gad's party who'd been named to the panel resigned Wednesday.

With [reports surfacing](#) that the Muslim Brotherhood may have plans to replace the governments of other Arab nations with ones which are more sympathetic with their Islamist agenda, the willingness of al-Katatni's party to simply eliminate the opposition from the political equation may not only signal a similarity to the regime that it recently displaced — it may signal the course of their intentions for other nations which they are allegedly intending to reshape in their own image.

At the same time, however, the Obama administration appears unconcerned about the direction in which al-Katatni's government appears to be moving. [As Guy Taylor wrote for \*The Washington Times\*](#):

The State Department downplayed concerns Monday that Islamists are dominating the drafting of Egypt's new constitution, despite criticism and outrage voiced by secular and Christian politicians in Cairo.

"We're not going to prejudge, obviously, the work of this panel," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said, referring the 100-person body elected over the weekend by a post-revolution parliament to write the constitution.

Two liberal Egyptian politicians quit the panel Monday, citing concerns that it is being dominated by Islamists and lacks sufficient representation for women and Christians.

In fact, with 'liberals' and Christians departing the panel in protest, it remains to be seen whether al-Katatni will be able to get any significant non-Islamist participation in the work of the panel. While the State Department spokeswoman declared, "We're not going to judge these groups by their names [or] their history. We're going to judge them by what they do, we're going to judge them by the output," those who know al-Katatni's party the best are quickly disassociating themselves from a process that they appear to believe has a predetermined outcome which is inimical to their interests.

Actually, the State Department has apparently committed itself to participating in spreading the influence of the "Arab Spring" revolutions, and [has sought \\$700 million](#) from Congress for 2013 to "support continued progress toward or lay the foundations for transitions to accountable electoral



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democracies in 11 countries in the Middle East and North Africa.” As noted previously for *The New American*, “The nebulous nature of such ‘tools and flexibility’ aside, one might wonder whether one may credibly maintain that the ‘Arab Spring,’ which was supposedly a popular uprising, actually relies upon token support from the State Department for its ultimate success or failure. While such a notion might be gratifying to the Washington elite, a far different reality exists on the streets of Cairo and Alexandria.”

A tragic legacy of fundamentally flawed experiments in nation-building does not engender confidence in the capacity of the State Department to help build a new Egyptian nation. Nor, critics would note, is it the role of that department assigned under the U.S. Constitution to fund or support such “revolutions.” “Democracy” in Egypt has yielded [a nation that is less friendly toward the United States](#) than it was under Mubarak — and that decline in good relations has taken place despite the billions of dollars the United States is providing to the Egyptian government. U.S. involvement during the “Arab Spring” and its aftermath has yielded dubious results — at best. The question remains whether the administration thinks further involvement will somehow reverse the course of events in that nation.

*Related article:* [Is the Muslim Brotherhood Plotting “Arab Springs” for Other Nations?](#)

*Photo: Saad al-Katatni, the parliamentary leader of Egypt’s largest opposition bloc, the Muslim Brotherhood, in Cairo, June 5, 2010: AP Images*



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