



Written by [James Heiser](#) on April 20, 2011

Egyptian Islamists Seek Overthrow of Coptic Governor

Islamic extremists are continuing to press their advantage in the new, post-Mubarak Egypt, and are now demanding that one of the few Christians serving in the government be removed — or else. Emad Shehata Michael, a Coptic Christian, is the newly appointed governor of Qena. The act of appointing a Copt as governor was hardly an innovation; according to the Associated Press, his predecessor “was actually a Christian and a former police general as well, but he was appointed by Mubarak and was much reviled for his incompetence, security background, and close ties to the regime, enabling the Salafis to draw on local dissatisfaction in their current campaign.”



Whatever the faults of his predecessor, the objections to the new governor are entirely religious in nature. Adherents of the so-called *Salafi* movement — Muslims claiming to take the first three generations of Mohammed’s followers as their guide — are threatening to destabilize the area and demanding that the governor be removed so a Muslim will implement Sharia law. [As reported by the AP](#):

Since the Feb. 11 ousting of President Hosni Mubarak in popular protests, Islamist groups have been flexing their muscles and are vowing to take a more active political role as Egypt is still drawing its transition to democracy. ...

"They started out by camping at the local government’s office. Then they set up a tent on the railroad tracks," said local resident Wafy Nasr. "They also tried to block the road and stopped buses to separate men and women passengers."

He said tensions were so high that the local Christian residents had to stay inside and couldn’t go to church to celebrate Palm Sunday.

[According to an April 19 story at AhramOnline](#), Egypt’s deputy prime minister has declared that Michael will keep his position. However, Ayman Nour, the chairman of the El Ghad party who is running for president, has jumped into the midst of the controversy with the inflammatory claim that Michael “was responsible for torturing him when he was arrested in July 2007 after writing an article critical of ousted president Mubarak. Nour said that he had 16 injuries in different parts of his body as a result of the torture inflicted on him.” Predictably, Nour “expressed his solidarity with the people of Qena.”

Nour’s candidacy has drawn attention — and criticism — because it is anticipated that as president he may renounce the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, maintaining that the “[Camp David era was over](#),”

With Nour playing on the sentiments of the mob, and Christians reportedly forced to hide in their homes during Holy Week, the rhetoric of Michael’s opponents makes it clear that the “hope and



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change" which many in the West blithely expected for a post-Mubarak Egypt is not working out quickly the way they imagined. The anti-Christian campaign which had already begun before the "revolution" has steadily continued, with the [burning of churches](#) and anti-Christian riots part of a trend which is familiar to Egypt's Coptic minority. The anti-Christian mobs understand something which is often forgotten by those in the West who imagined that the recent overthrow of Mubarak would bring change to Egypt: Egypt remains an Islamic state, and Western notions of separate realms of authority for "church" and "state" have no place in their ideology. As noted in the AP article:

A video posted on the YouTube website showed a speaker telling a crowd at the government office: "This won't work. A Copt won't implement Islamic law." According to the constitution, Islamic law is supposed to be the primary source of legislation in the country. ...

The country's most organized political opposition group, the long-banned Muslim Brotherhood, has also become more vocal about its plans, drawing on its large network of social groups and followers, which it had for long to operate under strict security oversight from the Mubarak regime.

A senior group leader caused an uproar after he was quoted in local papers as saying his group seeks to establish an Islamic state, imposing Islamic punishments — including amputating hands for theft.

"We can't sleep anymore, so we give room for this religion to thrive in Egypt. Don't let us waste this opportunity," Saad al-Husseini, a Brotherhood leader, said, according to the daily *Al-Masry Al-Youm*.

Each step in this year's Islamic revolutions has been greeted by those who have tried to cast events in the imagery of Willard's "[The Spirit of '76](#)." If sentiments expressed by the Muslim Brotherhood are brought to their logical conclusions, something along the lines of Jean-Leon Gerome's classic painting, "[The Slave Market](#)," is the more likely outcome. Even under the leadership of Hosni Mubarak, there was a place — albeit a small one — for Egypt's Coptic minority in the nation's government. Whether there will be a continuing role for such Christians in the leadership of their own nation remains to be seen.

Photo: Coptic church in Cairo



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