



Written by [James Heiser](#) on April 19, 2012

## Islamists Removed From Egyptian Presidential Race

Only weeks after the Muslim Brotherhood broke its promise not to enter a candidate in the upcoming presidential race in Egypt, that nation's election commission has barred 10 candidates from participating — including the one chosen by the Muslim Brotherhood. Now, the ban of a former official from the Mubarak government and two Islamist extremists has removed the three front-runners in the contest, and with the election only a few weeks away, the ban raises the question of who will be on the ballot that will be acceptable to a majority of Egyptian voters.



In the aftermath of last year's "Arab Spring," two Islamist parties — the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, and the Salafist Al-Nour Party — have consolidated their power in the parliament, and [gained control of the committee](#) charged with drafting the nation's new constitution. The move to allow only token representation to Christians in the process of writing the future of Egypt led the handful of Coptic Christians on the commission to [resign in protest](#). With clear majorities of the members of both houses of parliament in the hands of Islamists, the last remaining possible elected balance to their power would have been in the presidency.

The decision by the Freedom and Justice Party to enter Khairat el-Shater — the top financier of the party — as their candidate in the presidential contest broke their previous promise to stay out of the race. As [reported previously](#) for *The New American*, the decision is particularly shocking, because it risked splitting the Islamist vote between a variety of candidates, allowing a greater chance for a candidate allied with the military to win the office. The precise duties of the new President remain nebulous because the constitutional committee has yet to finalize the powers afforded to that office. It is quite possible that when Egyptians vote on May 23, they will still be uncertain as to exactly what powers will be exercised by the man whom they are electing.

[According to the Los Angeles Times](#), the three men who had been the lead contenders for the presidency have now all been excluded from the race:

Egypt's election commission Tuesday upheld its decision to disqualify three key presidential candidates: Omar Suleiman, former intelligence chief and vice president; Khairat Shater, onetime political prisoner and Muslim Brotherhood financier; and Hazem Salah abu Ismail, an anti-Western ultraconservative preacher.

The outcome was largely expected after the candidates appealed the commission's Saturday ruling. The saga has further muddled a chaotic presidential race and led to fear that Islamists may ignite street protests to upset the nation's transition to democracy after last year's toppling of President Hosni Mubarak.

Ismail and hundreds of his backers held a sit-in Tuesday night outside the election commission's headquarters, chanting "God is great." Clerics called for calm amid scuffles with police. No



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serious injuries were reported.

“They have decided to end the sit-in and will start planning for a million-man march on Friday,” Gamal Saber, head of Ismail’s campaign, announced later. A crowd consisting mostly of young men, however, did not disperse. “We are on the verge of a second revolution,” Saber said.

The candidates were expelled from next month’s election for personal and technical reasons. Suleiman lacked sufficient authorized signatures on his registration form. Ismail was barred over revelations that his mother became a U.S. citizen before she died. Shater’s convictions on money laundering and terrorism, although politically motivated by the Mubarak regime, disqualified him.

In the world of Islamist politics, a terrorism conviction may count as merely a “technical reason” for exclusion from the presidency. In fact, [according to an article by Patrick Goodenough for CNSNews](#), 10 candidates were excluded for a variety of reasons. With so many sudden departures so late in a presidential race, the term “front-runner” becomes a bit more nebulous; but according to Goodenough, the new candidate leading the race is one more likely to be acceptable to the military and is a holdover from the Mubarak regime:

Their departure has moved three other presidential aspirants into the spotlight — former foreign minister Amr Moussa, a Muslim Brotherhood replacement candidate Mohammed Morsi, and an Islamist ex-Muslim Brotherhood member, Abdel-Moneim Abolfotoh.

Of the three, Moussa has up to now fared best in opinion polls — an *Al Ahram* poll earlier this month placed him at the front of the pack, with 31 percent — and the removal of Suleiman is expected to give his campaign a further boost.

The 75-year-old Moussa served as secretary-general of the Arab League for a decade until last year, and was Mubarak’s foreign minister for a decade before that.

Of course, Moussa’s lead in the polls could prove ephemeral, given the agitation of the Islamist parties. With threats of a “million man march,” the *Los Angeles Times* quotes Shater as declaring, “They have excluded candidates and the Egyptian street is boiling.... This means that Mubarak’s regime is still ruling, and that enemies of the revolution and remnants of Mubarak’s regime and whoever is currently running things are working day and night to ruin the revolution.”

Accusations of “[wreckers of the revolution](#)” lurking in the wings remain evocative of the shopworn rhetoric of Stalinist purges. As the former presidential candidate that has control of Parliament and the committee drafting the new Egyptian constitution, Shater’s charge is nearly as implausible as it was when the Soviets were still using it.

Certainly the apparent unwillingness of Islamist extremists to share power in the “new Egypt” would appear to bode ill for the future. However, in the meantime, the United States will continue to funnel billions of dollars of military aid into Egypt. While the federal deficit continues to grow, the federal government apparently intends to borrow more money from China so that it can give it away to a military that may soon be completely under the control of Islamist extremists. [As noted in an article for Fox News](#), outside the Obama administration it is widely understood that giving military aid to the Muslim Brotherhood could be ill-advised:

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently raised eyebrows when she agreed to waive human rights concerns and sign off on more than 1.3 billion dollars of foreign aid to Egypt’s rulers, despite Egypt’s previous detention of several Americans including Sam LaHood, son of U.S.



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Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood.

“In the case of Egypt, that’s a textbook example of a country that will continue to get aid no matter how belligerent and antagonistic they are,” said Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican Congresswoman from Florida. “They’re holding us hostage and we’re bailing them out.”

When it takes an intervention by an elections commission to weed out a presidential candidate who has a record of terrorism, the question whether or not to continue funding that nation’s military is long overdue. The “Arab Spring” debacle has not been alleviated by means of U.S. aid, and it is reasonable to question what good is served by the infusion of more American tax money.

Photo of Khairat el-Shater when he was in prison: AP Images



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