

The role of religion in middle east politics



The religion for the majority of people in the Middle East is Islam. However, the main religion in Israel is Judaism, with small numbers of Jews elsewhere in the Middle East. In Lebanon, there are a lot of Maronites.

A major hindrance was the freedom of religion basically the problem was “Christians in a Muslim Egypt”.

A major hindrance to the freedom of religion is the role of the Muslim Brotherhood. Whatever some Western elites might be saying about the “new” Muslim Brotherhood, the truth of the matter is that major Islamic terrorist organizations have their roots in the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt.

The Muslim Brotherhood, the dynamic Islamist movement that has tried to navigate Egypt's semi-authoritarian system for over six decades, is facing a shrinking political space. For most of the past decade, the Brotherhood has expanded its political role, increasing from 17 to 88 members of Egypt's 620-member People's Assembly. Its success has brought increasing repression from the government. A range of measures have limited the Brotherhood's effectiveness in the People's Assembly, preventing it from forming a political party. In January 2010, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood selected Muhammad Badi as its eighth general guide. While Egypt's leading Islamist movement has sometimes hotly debated the selection of leaders in the past, this time the choice took place under an unprecedented domestic and international spotlight. Muhammad Badi was virtually unknown outside the group. And that itself may be a signal about the Brotherhood's future course. The Brotherhood is a particular target of growing restrictions on political

activity. With these developments, the prospect of a more competitive and pluralistic political system in Egypt is rapidly fading[1].

We will examine the Brotherhood's engagement in politics, how it came about, what form it took, and the agenda that the movement attempted to develop. Specifically, we will probe:

The Brotherhood's evolving approaches to politics;

The environment of shifting red lines and semi authoritarianism in which the movement has operated;

The Brotherhood's evolving political positions, especially the mixed results of its experiences exploring the possibilities of forming a political party and writing a platform;

The movement's experience in forming cross-ideological coalitions to press for further reform;

The Brotherhood's attempt to sketch out a comprehensive political, social, and economic agenda through parliamentary activity;

The evolution and costs of that parliamentary effort; and

The implications of a partial withdrawal from politics[2].

The role that religion plays in politics is embedded in the structure of the Middle East. The important role of religion in politics arises partly from the history of the region. Historically, both religion and tradition went hand in hand to form the government systems of the region. Modernity in terms of “

secularism, individualism, democracy and economic rationalism" have had little latitude over the Middle East as a whole. Hence, many governments use religion to justify their authoritative political systems within the Middle East.

In this paper I will discuss how religion in politics is the most critical issue facing the Middle Eastern countries today in regards to the region regaining its leadership role in the issue of world affairs.

The religion and politics of the Middle East have special significance in view of the history and politics of the Middle East. After all, the three great monotheistic religions find their roots in the Middle East. Judaism was founded about four thousand years ago and it is the first religion to believe in one God. Jews believe that they are the 'chosen people' by God's will and it is through this religious sentiment that their "communal identity" comes from Judaism itself (321). Hence, the Jews have placed their religion at the center of their life, community and the political arena.

Furthermore, religion in politics plays a crucial role in the current Middle East conflict. Islamic Sharia is taken into serious consideration by Islamic countries, when making political steps or creating new laws. Similarly, Jewish law known as halakah is an important facet that encompasses most laws passed by Israel. Israel is seen as the place "that would guarantee the survival and future of the Jewish people" (331). Now, if the national interest of the country is the protection of the Jewish people then obviously its political decisions will be obscured by religion.

A problem with religion in politics is that it allows for terrorist organizations such as Gush Emunim or Hamas to distort religion for political purposes. But

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in the end all these extreme groups are fighting over a small portion of land resulting from the Middle East conflict, which is the reason for their existence. Furthermore, it is interesting to see that the one thing that the League of Arab Nations comes to consensus on is their position towards the Middle East conflict. The reason the Arab nations come together over the issue of Middle East and the future of Jerusalem is because they share a common religion. Thus, it is fair to say, " Jerusalem symbolizes the significance of religion in the politics of the Middle East" (330). But the leaders of the Middle East have significantly different policies concerning world affairs.

Religion in politics is a very important issue in the Middle East because it determines the current and future role of the region in the world community. Apart from the Arab nations, " Israel's very existence and identity remains tied to Judaism" (339). Furthermore, I believe religion has allowed many of the authoritarian regimes to stay in power even in postcolonial times. For example, in the national news of Saudi Arabia the monarch, King Fahad bin Abdul Aziz, is always referred to as ' the custodial of the two holy mosques[3].

Throughout history the effect of religion on politics has been of fundamental importance. From time to time religion, or politics under the influence of religion, has actually been a determining factor. It can be argued that the Middle East is probably the sole geographic region that is situated on the axis of politics-religion-war. Even though the pax-areas, meaning the regions of pax-Romana and pax-Ottomana, influenced the region for centuries by

bringing peace, it can still be argued that regional wars have been a determining factor.