



## Obama “Misses the Point” of Anti-Christian Violence in Egypt

The Obama administration has flaunted its advocacy of the Islamist parties that have been gaining power since the Arab Spring overturned several governments in the Muslim world the past year, and that skewed perspective is contributing to a misrepresentation of the violence that is now taking place in post-Mubarak Egypt. In the words of Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J., left), President Obama “seems to have completely missed the point” of the massacre of Coptic Christians. “This is not a situation of equal power and equal responsibility for violence,” he points out. “The Copts called on the military government to treat the Copts as equal citizens and protect their rights; the government itself turned on them with a massacre.”



A [story from](#) CNSNews highlights the disconnect which is taking place in the policy of the Obama administration. As Lucas Zellers wrote on November 16:

President Obama “missed the point” about the shooting deaths of Coptic Christians on Oct. 9 in front of the Maspero television building in downtown Cairo, Egypt, Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) said Tuesday at a congressional hearing on the violence in Egypt.

Referring to a statement released by the White House on Oct. 10, the day after the shootings, Smith said that President Obama was wrong — the shootings amounted to a one-sided “massacre” of Coptic Christians by government forces and were not just “sectarian violence,” as the White House seemed to portray them. ...

Smith, the chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Egypt, posed a tough question.

“The time has come to ask, is this government going to be better than the Mubarak thug regime?” Smith said.

If the current policy enunciated by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is any indication, the United States is likely to do very little to push the post-Mubarak regime to improve the treatment of Egypt’s Coptic minority. As reported for *The New American* on November 9, the administration is actively cultivating ties with the emerging Islamist parties, and thus has done very little to openly criticize the anti-Christian policies that are readily apparent in the new regime. Clinton’s criticism of the new government has been so mild as to simply observe that “Egyptians will have missed a historic opportunity” if “over time, the most powerful political force in Egypt remains a roomful of unelected officials.” Of course, given the Obama administration’s increasing reliance on “unelected officials”



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throughout the federal bureaucracy to legislate through increased regulation — a tactic which is often nothing more than an amplification of the practices of prior administrations — it is difficult for Clinton to criticize the Egyptian regime for a practice which is quite familiar to the Washington elite.

With anti-Christian violence on the rise in Egypt, the circumstances of daily life for Coptic Christians are rapidly deteriorating. Protests that have taken place since the October massacre have been greeted with continued violence; [a November 21 story](#) for Catholic.org reported that a march planned by two recently-formed organizations (the Free Copts and Blood of Martyrs movements) with the intention of commemorating the October massacre was greeted with new violence:

“We were marching peacefully with candles to commemorate the 26 martyrs of Maspero on the 40-day anniversary of the Maspero attacks, when several youth clashed,” Sherif Doss, the head of the Egyptian Coptic Association said.

“Some residents started throwing rocks and glass bottles from the rooftops of buildings at the crowds, which left many injured,” Doss added.

“Hundreds of police conscripts assigned by the ministry of interior to protect the march started firing tear gas canisters to stop the clashes between the unidentified men,” Sameh Mina, a Coptic protester, told television reporters.

“The Copts defended themselves and threw rocks back at the attackers until the police intervened,” Mina added.

It is an Egyptian tradition to commemorate the dead on the 40th day after death.

In other words, when Coptic Christians acted in accordance with tradition and sought to commemorate the deaths of over two dozen victims of anti-Christian violence, the response to those mourners was to afflict them with further violence. At least 32 of the marchers suffered injuries as a result of the attacks.

While the Obama administration lavishes praise on the rising Islamist parties, Christians find themselves on the political sidelines in Egypt in the wake of the Arab Spring. The Salafi Islamists believe that their hour has come for power in Egypt, and Al-Nour (the largest Salafi political party) is posturing itself for an expansion of Sharia law if it gains power in the parliamentary elections scheduled to start on November 28. A Reuters article ([“Strict Muslims stake claim on Egypt’s political scene”](#)) captures the change which the growing Islamic movement has worked in Alexandria, one of the strongholds of Coptic Christianity:

“What we want is the complete commitment to Islamic sharia law... The minimum is the constitution and then establishing a system of good governance,” said Abdel Monem el-Shahat, a scholar and spokesman for Alexandria’s leading Salafi body. ...

“Alexandria isn’t the same any more ... It’s losing its character and it will be unfeasible for it to return as the center for political and cultural freedoms,” said Sarah Hegazy, a Muslim woman who teaches at Alexandria University.

Salafis staged a show of strength in Cairo’s Tahrir Square on July 29 when they appeared en masse chanting slogans such as “Islamic, Islamic, we don’t want secular.”

At the same time, Coptic candidates for office de-emphasize their Christian beliefs if they want to seek office; for example, [the Jerusalem Post](#) highlighted the example of Shaheer Ishak — a young Copt who was active in protests earlier this year, and who is now a candidate for parliament:



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But as sectarian tensions have erupted in the weeks leading up to November 28 parliamentary elections, the young political economist is ignoring religion, both as part of his personal identify and as a campaign issue. He shares the liberal philosophy of the Egypt Freedom Party, which was founded last May by a group of activists from the revolution and to which he belongs.

“I don’t see myself as a Christian candidate,” he begins, able to multi-task at their downtown Cairo headquarters after a leadership meeting. He told The Media Line that for him, “this election is about creating national consensus and not about breaking the country into religious lines.”

With the Obama administration appearing to take it for granted that Islamist parties will continue to gain power in the wake of the Arab Spring, Coptic Christians take to the streets — and the ballot boxes — endeavoring to retain some of their political voice in the aftermath of a “revolution” in which American influence certainly has helped to tip the scales in favor of the Islamists. For those who must live with the implications of American foreign policy, the dangers of reckless interventionism may never have been so clear.



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