

Habib on MB Party Program, Dialogue with West



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- Muslim Brotherhood's administrative offices discussed the party program
- Issue of non-Muslims, women running for presidency a juristic option
- Democrat rejects exploiting security services in political action
- We do not trust the US administration that sent the world back to the law of the jungle

The Muslim Brotherhood's release of the initial draft of its political party program stirred several opposing and supporting reactions. The sharp criticisms inside or outside the country revolved around three main points in the program: the religious council, nominating Copts and woman to run for presidency.

What does the Muslim Brotherhood mean by a religious council?. Does the MB really seek to establish a religious state?. What's the group's response to other juristic views that allowed women and Copts to be presidents under the view that the presidential post is not the grand leadership. Are the MB internal criticisms to the program reflect a state of weakness in the organizational commitment inside the group.

Around these points, Dr. Mohamed Al Sayed Habib, the first deputy chairman of the Muslim Brotherhood held this interview with Ikhwanweb.

Ikhwanweb: What's the mechanism according to which the MB party program was drafted?

Habib: A committee was tasked with preparing the first draft as a group of ideas, concepts and views in the political, economic, social and cultural levels and others.

When this draft took the shape of a party program, it was presented to the administrative offices of the Muslim Brotherhood in all Egyptian governorates. Some administrative offices presented it to their advisory offices and other offices discussed them in the offices only and they gave their comments and feedback. We also presented the program draft to some Muslim Brotherhood top figures who presented their feedback. The feedback was returned to the committee tasked with the party program to amend it according to this feedback. After these amendments, it was sent back for a revision. We said that it is an initial draft of a political party to be presented to the elite intellectuals to receive their feedback a month or two months later. Then we shall hold workshops or seminars to discuss or make clear any obscure point and to benefit from their opinions and views to enrich this program. This was actually the roadmap of preparing the initial draft of the Muslim Brotherhood's party program.

Ikhwanweb: Has the Muslim Brotherhood planned to present this initial draft of the program to its grassroots?

Habib: It planned to present it only to the administrative offices. However, the administrative offices are authorized to act according to their conditions. They can present it to their advisory councils or discuss it only in offices. This because if the program was presented to all Muslim Brotherhood grassroots, it would take a very long time and the feedback will be too much. This actually will require a year or two for a revision while the media and press were pressing on us and we wanted to accomplish this task as soon as possible so as not to be seen as a media bubble. We wanted: First: Accomplish this task quickly. Second: Try to show it to the biggest number possible of Muslim Brotherhood.

Ikhwanweb: Was the factor of speed negative or positive while preparing the draft of the Muslim Brotherhood Party program?

Habib: It had positive and negative effects. The positive one was that it encouraged members burdened with this task to work hard work around the clock to complete it. The negative point was that not revising it more than once led to some kind of weakness or loopholes in its formation. Generally speaking, even if we reached the final revision, we would discover that we need to revise what was written. Thus, we needed to settle it.

Ikhwanweb: The program faced so much criticism from outside and inside the group, especially regarding: the Copts, women and the Religious Council. Comment on this please.

Habib: The issue of the Religious Council needs to be clarified a bit so as to be understood in the way we wanted. We want to say to people that we do not create something new or something outside the Azhar institution. We wanted to activate some committees inside Al-Azhar to efficiently do their roles. When these committees are asked for their views regarding any issue, they become ready for this with an understanding and a view. Also, this committee should be tasked with electing Al Azhar Sheikh instead of being nominated by the president. We wanted also this committee "the religious council" to be independent. Al-Azhar institution itself should be independent to carry out its role without any pressures from the executive authority because we know the influence of the executive authority over many other bodies like the judicial and legislative authorities along with Azhar institution.

Add to this the fact that the opinion of this committee is advisory, not binding to any authority. This is actually

carried out now when the People's Assembly seeks views of clerics and researchers specialized in any field. Why don't we seek views of Sharia scholars and leave the final decision for the People's Assembly which has the right of legislation. This committee will not have any supervisory or compulsory power in order to strike a balance between authorities.

We want to say also that any body, authority or committee seeing that the law approved by the People's Assembly isn't constitutional, should challenge this only in front of the Supreme Constitutional Court which is the only competent body to rule that such a law is constitutional or unconstitutional.

As for the issue for running for presidency, for non-Muslims or women, the MB Executive Office saw that non-Muslim or women shouldn't be presidents. This is the juristic option that we adopted and we present it in our party program and if people not convinced we will clarify this view to people and show why we adopted this option and why we have taken this decision.

Ikhwanweb: Copts and other researchers and intellectuals say that this view of not allowing Copts to run for presidency contradicts with the principles of citizenship and civil state which the Muslim Brotherhood seeks?

Habib: This does not contradict with the principle of citizenship because Islamic Sharia guaranteed that Muslims and non-Muslims enjoy equal rights and duties before law. Muslims and non-Muslims are allowed to take all public jobs, ministries and institutions. Our only two exceptions are the president because he is the symbol of the country. This symbol is tasked with protecting the constitution whose second article stipulates that the religion of the state is Islam and that principles of Islamic Sharia are the main source of legislation. How can we task a non-Muslim with thinks he doesn't believe in?!! .

Ikhwanweb: London hosted a seminar about this program. This seminar included Rashid Al-Ghanoshi and Ali Sadruddine Al Bianouni and others who expressed their rejection to this point.

Habib: I'd like to reiterate a clear fact: that fatwa changes according to time and place. What's permissible in Lebanon may not be permissible in Kuwait . What is permissible in Saudi Arabia may not be permissible in Egypt .

We speak about a specific social reality. We take this social reality into consideration when we adopt a certain fatwa. However, there are dozens of countries all over the world whose constitutions stipulate a specific religion for the president and no one objects under pretext of rights of citizenship for example. We are aware of this reality and of what 's suitable here in Egypt .

Also, we see the concept of presidency of a national state as equivalent to the concept of major wilaya, according to law expert Al Sanhoury . This is because it is impossible to reunite all states under one authority in the near future.

Ikhwanweb: Al Bianouni's viewpoint was that the Muslim Brotherhood should stop short of discussing the issue of Copts and women's nomination because it is impossible for Copt to run for presidency in a mainly Muslim country?.

Habib: We actually tried to be clear with ourselves and our people to gain people's respect and appreciation. We have been told that it's impossible to elect a non-Muslim or a woman in Egypt and why we did not leave this issue? But we want to be clear and frank in this matter and not to be circumlocutive.

Ikhwanweb: The Muslim Brotherhood's program lacked the security side, why?

Habib: The Security apparatus is a national system which must stop short of interfering in politics and it shouldn't be used as an instrument to reach power or to suppress opposition.

We confirm that the Muslim Brotherhood denounces violence and is against using means of violence to reach power. It is not acceptable at all because if the one reaches power through violence one day, more powerful one will come one day to usurp this power. We confirm that our method is peaceful, means are democratic and we depend on the public opinion as a means for the circulation of power. This is because we declared previously that we accept democracy based on a political multiplicity and a peaceful transfer of power and that the nation is the only one authorized to choose rulers, representatives and to choose the program reflecting its ambitions and dreams.

Our option is that: The state should be a state of authorities on condition that there is a separation between these authorities and that no authority controls over the other and there should be a balance between them.

As we condemn any act of violence committed by individuals, we also strongly condemn the acts of violence committed by the state because the state is tasked with protecting law and the constitution, and order individuals to respect law and the constitution. When the executive authority violates the constitution, does not respect law and does not implement court rulings, it is a big problem which we condemn, reject and work for confronting through all available peaceful means.

Ikhwanweb: The Muslim Brotherhood regime has been a relation of clashes since the group was founded, why?.

Habib: All successive governments and regimes have been targeting a monopolization of power. They aimed only to keep power positions without giving people their freedom or allow them to take part in the political life and reach self-determination.

The Muslim Brotherhood's attitude was and is still fighting tyranny and rejecting corruption. As a main section of the Egyptian society, they face aggressions on their rights, they are detained and referred to military tribunals their assets and properties are frozen, boards of their companies are dissolved, they are denied the right to run for parliamentary and syndicate elections.

We have never clashed with any one. We are a group which is always under attack. We only seek freedom for ourselves and for others. We reject tyranny, we do not want repression. For this, the regime attacks us, violating the constitution and law by attacking us. Aren't these referrals to military tribunals, detentions against the Muslim Brotherhood after four court acquittals aren't these considered violations to the principles of law and constitution?.

Ikhwanweb: Some see as passive the Muslim Brotherhood's role in dealing with file of those referred to the military tribunal?

Habib: We are actually working in several paths: the media, the political and the legal paths. We have exerted our best in all these paths: through satellite channels or press outlets, working restlessly now and till this case is resolved.

As for the political path, we held conferences and seminars and the members of parliament contacted the elite to make clear this case. As for the legal path, the defence team is doing its best through offering evidences and contesting arguments and to show the court that this case is groundless and it has no legal foundation. However, we

face a very oppressive regime.

Ikhwanweb: Is there any other response to this security assault?

Habib: We are working in three paths: the media, the political and the legal paths. There is no other path to take. We campaigned against this on satellite channels and newspapers and we held seminars and conferences and we held protests and vigils. We also submitted interpellations interrogating government in parliament. We have used every possible means to do so.

Ikhwanweb: Is there a red line in the government's treatment with the Muslim Brotherhood?

Habib: I think there are some policies for dealing with this issue according to domestic, regional and international conditions.

Ikhwanweb: Some say the group has seemingly weakened following the transfer of some MB leaders to the military tribunal?

Habib: We are working in an institution. There is a work group in every field. Acknowledging that these figures (referred to the military tribunal) have a considerable weight in the group and they are effective figures, but work does not rely on them. When one disappears, he is replaced by another. The group's work, status or institutions have never been affected by this unjust action.

Ikhwanweb: We have recently noticed some voices among MB leaders speaking out about the group, its party program and others?, what is your view towards this.

Habib: Actually, any opposing view should be expressed inside the group, not through the media. Any institution gives its members the full opportunity to say whatever they want inside the institution and then comes consultation to settle any disagreement so that the group issues one single political stance. We have finally agreed on this.

Ikhwanweb: This weakness in the group is said to be due to the group's decreasing financial activities following the detention of top business moguls affiliated to the group?

Habib: This is actually untrue. The Muslim Brotherhood's decentralized activities. are so many all over Egyptian governorates including villages, districts and cities. These decentralized activities have never been affected. The centralized activities like Ramadan Iftar parties and others are also going on smoothly. Ramadan Iftar party was about to be held but for the Interior Ministry's intervention. We have fielded candidates in the Shura Council midterm elections and we did our best to do our duties nationwide

We are depending on volunteers who give their time and money which we appreciate. We are working in an environment that trusts and appreciates us, an environment that doesn't need to be bribed like what others do. They afford time and money to help. Thus, the constituency that requires millions of pounds from others, need from us only some thousands of pounds due to these voluntary activities of people.

Tawreeth

Ikhwanweb: Regarding the Tawreeth (hereditary transfer of power), some powers say that the Muslim Brotherhood

isn't clear in this issue of the hereditary transfer of power?

Habib: Our attitude is very clear, we reject the hereditary transfer of power in word and deed and we carry out the necessary means and measures. However, we see that unless there is a political movement from all people, we can never prevent the hereditary transfer of power. We say that people have the ability to face this file, but are people ready to confront this, accept the challenge and challenge and declare very frankly their views. Are people ready to sacrifice for the issues they adopt?

Ikhwanweb: The Muslim Brotherhood's attitude towards the nuclear project in general?. Does the Muslim Brotherhood see it as a serious step or is it only for propaganda?

Habib: Of course we hope that Egypt enters the nuclear age. We wished it had entered it decades ago. There are countries that started working with us but they took the lead in many fields. I think the Egyptian society isn't so enthusiastic about it because it is seemingly to propagate for Nov, 3rd NDP congress. The same issue was raised during last year's NDP congress. This is because the National Democratic Party (NDP) hasn't prepared any solutions for the day-to-day problems facing Egyptians like price hikes, unemployment, housing, education, health and environment pollution.

This issue of the nuclear project has no support given the scientific and technological backwardness as well as the state of political stagnation which Egypt is experiencing. In short, there is a huge gap between the painful reality and a project like this.

Ikhwanweb: Some observers say that Egypt has been recently witnessing a continuously growing Salafist movement? does the government support this movement?

Habib: Of course, yes. It is clear that the Muslim Brotherhood's contribution in every field is receiving people's sympathy and support in local and public levels. This is because Islam is an all-inclusive religion that organizes all sides in the life, politics, sociology, economy and media.

There are other groups that stop short of confronting the state's prevalent tyranny and corruption in all institutions and administrations in the executive authority. Such groups won't be accepted or supported unless they adopt the true image of Islam as an all-inclusive religion. Unless they take Islam as an all-inclusive religion, they will be short-lived.

Ikhwanweb: Do such movements have any effect on the message of the Muslim Brotherhood?

Habib: In the 1970s, these groups have been activated, but their activities receded. They are supported nowadays, but they will recede in the coming decades. The message of the Muslim Brotherhood will— God willing— remain high in the local and international levels.

Ikhwanweb: What is your view towards regional and international conditions?

Habib: There is an Israeli-American project that aims to humiliate the nation, weaken its beliefs, cause a moral corruption, attempt to steal and loot its wealth, eradicate its cultural privacy. This project aims to dismember the region and redraw its map. It also aims to present the project of the New Middle East, a project that divides our region into moderates and extremists (Axis of good / axis of evil). The axis of moderation includes the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Egypt, Jordan and Israel while the axis of evil and extremism includes Iran, Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. It aims to make the first axis confront the second axis to the benefit of

the Israeli-American project and to cover the US failure in Iraq and to pave the way for directing a military strike to Iran due to pressures of Israel.

The Muslim Brotherhood is fully aware of this and tries to make it clear to people and sound a wakeup call to the nation through showing them the dangers on both foreign and domestic levels, including big issues like Iraqi, Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian and Sudanese issues. The Muslim Brotherhood wants to have a role in foiling this scheme.

Dialogue with the West

Ikhwanweb: Some think tanks called for necessarily opening a dialogue between the Muslim Brotherhood and the West, but the Muslim Brotherhood's attitude of taking approval of the Egyptian regime to conduct a dialogue with the West isn't understood?

Habib: Of course, we do not trust the US administration that changes its statements and attitudes overnight. Add to this the US plot that aims to control over the region with its overwhelmingly superior media, military and economic weight. We shouldn't forget that the US administration has a project in our region. The US administration is not a charity. It has its own interests and agenda and it seeks oil wells and it wants to control the strategic site of the region and secure Israel superiority in the region as a whole. So, how can we conduct a dialogue?!

The US administration has never abided by international laws, charters or conventions and it has used force to crush legitimacy and it restored the law of the jungle. All of us still remember the one million person demonstrations all over the world, even inside the United States itself, against the war in Iraq. The US administration did not accept them and it invaded Afghanistan and Iraq and it supports Israel in speech and deed without limits at the expense of the Palestinian people whose rights are violated by this US administration. As for the European Union, we see that there is between it and the US administration a margin that may expand, shrink or disappear, as if it is acting on behalf of the US administration.

It is to our interest and to the interest of the Arab Region that this margin expands so as to conduct a dialogue between the North and the South, between our region and Europe for the good of the nations here and there. Think tanks and research centers will undoubtedly have an effective role in clarifying the image and bridging gaps. What we want is that the US administration or the European Union stop supporting of Israel at the expense of the Palestinian rights and not to back tyrannical and repressive regimes against their people.

Ikhwanweb: If rejecting dialogue is due to administrations, attitudes and projects will you conduct a dialogue without taking the permission of the Egyptian regime if these administrations, attitudes and projects changed?

Habib: We support every thing that reinforces peace, security and stability all over the world. We also support everything boosting interests of the Arab and Islamic people and interests of the Egyptian people as well. However, I think that coordinating in attitudes with the Egyptian regime for the sake of Egypt is indispensable.

Young Bloggers

Ikhwanweb: What is the Muslim Brotherhood's attitude towards MB young bloggers?

Habib: We should allow the youth to grow up, think and suggest but they should also get themselves furnished with

sufficient information about the attitudes adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood. This information will sufficiently provide them with a right understanding, a right concept, and a right attitude. We want them— before speaking out and criticize in public— to know the bases on which the the Muslim Brotherhood has adopted its attitudes, especially that our doors and hearts are wide—open for any person and there no obstacle. Our minds and hearts are wide—open for them. Before criticizing, know what you are going to do, conduct a dialogue and do what you want after that. I urge mid level leaders to give the youth the full opportunity to discuss all their ideas and propose whatever they want because this is their right and it is our duty at the same time.

Ikhwanweb: When Dr. Mohamed Morsi met them, was it out of an attitude from the group or was it a personal initiative from Dr. Morsi?.

Habib: We are actually keen to meet all people across the political spectrum. We reach out to MB youth and contact any one having a thought. This actually doesn't require any direction. This is our general policy which we have used and we are still adopting!!

Ikhwanweb: How can the Muslim Brotherhood understand the Egyptian reality and the future outlook?. Does the group have any research centers that survey and anatomize the Egyptian landscape and international changes?

Habib: First, the Muslim Brotherhood has a presence on the domestic level, in rural and urban areas, villages, districts and cities. It has its view and assessment of the reality. Second: There are related research centers that observe and provide us with all information and data that may help in forming a right view. We are open to the other and we try to reach out to, contact, and deal with all research centers to have a complete view about the reality in all fields as much as foreign and domestic policies are concerned.

Ikhwanweb: We notice that most issues adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood are political issues, ignoring social cases like drugs, sexual harassment and others although they are wide— spread and have a negative impact in the Egyptian society. Why?.

Habib: I think the MB party program has tackled some of these issues through surveys of our technical committees. Think tanks and research centres as well as Muslim Brotherhood parliamentarians have an effective role in such issues inside and outside parliament. They submit interpellations and hold the executive authority accountable for these problems. These MPs represent us and represent all people in interrogating the executive authority for its failure in tacking these issues.

I want to add something of importance: The Muslim Brotherhood is so concerned with issues of the middle class and that such a class must return because it is the real basis of the country. When this class disappeared, a sense of imbalance emerged and a huge gap emerged between the upper class that includes business moguls and people in power, and most Egyptian people. This huge gap started to spawn tensions, boiling—up that took the shape of the revolution of the thirsty, strikes and sit—ins. The latest constitutional amendments were unfortunately introduced to confirm this position and to put the final touches of the hereditary transfer of power which will only increase the gap between the upper class and the lower class. This will make chaos and instability overshadow the society.

Ikhwanweb: The Muslim Brotherhood depends mainly on education as a means for change. Are there any other mechanisms or new methods to reach out to people?.

Habib: We reach out to people everywhere and we present our ideas through all available peaceful means. We also try as much as possible to come closer to the Egyptian citizens for the sake of their good, security, freedom. We also work for spreading Islamic values good manners and commitment to fiducial factors. This is the education which we adopt. We explain our views towards every thing to care for issues of the society, focus on manners as a basis for building a civilization, protect the cultural heritage and protect the identity from merging into other identities.

We seek also to reach out to all political and national powers, especially regarding the issue of the political reform.

This is due to the fact that this can't be achieved by one political group. It actually requires a cooperation and coordination among all powers. The efforts carried out by the Muslim Brotherhood parliamentary in their constituencies and in their headquarters, including interactions with thousands of citizens, are actually adding to the issue of change.

Ikhwanweb: The Inter-Palestinian situation between Fatah and Hamas has reached its worst level. Has the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt introduced any initiative to end this political deadlock in Palestine?

Habib: We will certainly do our best if we are given the chance to help. However, the Muslim Brotherhood's offshoot in every country is more knowledgeable about its conditions and problems. We may advise and send directions and if given the opportunity to do so will study the issue, but they have the authority to make their own decisions there.