

Dawah Carriers Caught Between Egyptian President Sisi's Grip and the Demands of Islamic Shariah Law

(Translated)

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The Egyptian scene recently witnessed the announcement of a two-year training program at the Military Academy, aimed at Dawah carriers and religious preachers from the Ministry of Religious Endowments (Awqaf) who hold doctoral degrees. The program was presented in the media as a qualitative leap in “renewing religious discourse” and promoting “enlightened thought.” During his meeting with these preachers (khutbaa’), the Egyptian president made statements emphasizing that preachers are “not only guardians of religion, but also guardians of freedom,” and that individuals possess “freedom of choice in belief.”

These statements are not mere passing remarks. Instead, they carry profound political and intellectual implications. They align with a clear path the state has adopted for years in dealing with Deen, controlling discourse about the Deen, and reshaping general awareness according to its vision, in accordance with Western standards regarding so-called “religious freedoms,” which are considered one of the most important political and diplomatic conditions in relations with the West.

Why the Military Academy?

The requirement for preachers to undergo a two-year training course within a military institution, rather than at a university or religious institute, sends a clear message: the state no longer views preachers as ulema conveying Islamic Shariah rulings, but rather as employed personnel whose loyalty and discourse are being reshaped to serve the regime's strategy. This is evident in several ways:

1. Militarizing religious discourse by integrating preachers into a military system of a disciplinary nature, in order to reshape their personalities on the basis of obedience and submission, neutralizing their original preaching role and turning them into tools of societal control, and forming preachers who do not act according to Shariah texts, but according to state policies.

2. The dedication of the authoritarian reference instead of the Shariah reference in a study that extends for two years, under the supervision of non-Shariah bodies, means that the approved reference for the preacher is no longer the Shariah, but the governing regime. All this is consistent with the philosophy of the authority that deals with religion as a cultural component that must be domesticated, not a comprehensive divine system that is binding on both the ruler and the ruled.

3. By engineering a new religious awareness through curricula described as “advanced to doctoral level,” the regime attempts to lend an academic aura to this project, while its true aim is to give rise to a generation of preachers who disseminate a toothless religious discourse. This discourse presents concepts that are compatible with, and aligned with, secularism, offering Shariah justifications for the existing reality and state policies, and models of political obedience cloaked in language of the Deen.

In this way, the preacher's role is transformed from conveying the truth to protecting the official narrative.

Is Freedom of Belief Part of Islam?

In his speech, the president emphasized that humans possess “freedom of choice in belief,” and that preachers must promote this idea as a supreme human value. However, a distinction must be made, from a Shariah perspective, between two realities:

1. Free will to choose between Iman and disbelief, meaning that Allah (swt) does not compel people to believe, ﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ﴾ **“There is no compulsion in religion”** [TMQ Surah Al-Baqarah: 256], ﴿فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ﴾ **“So whoever wills - let him believe; and whoever wills - let him disbelieve”** [TMQ Surah Al-Kahf 29]. These Quran verses address the initial free will in choosing, not the Shariah permissibility of the choice of kufr. A person has the ability to choose disbelief, but it is not permissible for them to choose it in Shariah. Remaining upon disbelief is a sinful disobedience of Allah (swt), and choosing disbelief is also a sin, even whilst compelling a non-Muslim to believe in Islam is forbidden.

2. The Islamic Shariah ruling governance that governs Muslim society: Islam has provided clear Shariah rulings prohibiting transgressions against the Ummah's aqeedah, forbidding the promotion of disbelief within Islamic Ummah, and prohibiting apostasy or the dissemination of any ideas that undermine the aqeedah. Protecting the Deen is obligatory, as it is a fundamental principle. While individuals possess the ability to choose in reality, they do not possess the Shariah legitimacy to choose in matters of governance. Discourse that promotes freedom of belief as an absolute value is inherently secular and contradicts Islam and the role of the bearer of the risaalah message, which is to convey, clarify, and refute falsehoods, not to market the idea that Iman is merely a personal choice open to negotiation. Thus, it becomes clear that the regime is attempting to reinterpret Shariah texts to conform to Western standards, not to Islamic Shariah rulings.

Why is President Sisi Focusing on Freedom of Belief in the Eyes of the West?

Over the past decade, the reformation of religious discourse has become one of the issues Arab regimes present to the West, with the aim of:

1. Gaining international legitimacy. The West adopts a policy of linking political and economic cooperation to the issue of religious freedoms, state control over religious discourse, and combating what is called “intellectual extremism.” Therefore, the regime presents itself to the West as the most daring in subjugating religious institutions, capable of reshaping Islam in line with Western values, and the actor that presents itself as a cultural shield against the “Islamic threat,” and the spearhead that the West directs against the Ummah in its conflict with Islam.

2. Sending a message: “We are the safe alternative.” When Sisi says that preachers are “guardians of freedom, not just of religion,” he is addressing the West more than the domestic audience, telling them, “We are capable of presenting a new, non-confrontational, disciplined, apolitical Islam that serves the stability you desire.”

3. Using the issue of Deen as a tool for domestic and foreign pressure. Domestically, religious discourse is monopolized by the Ministries of Religious Endowments and Al-

Azhar to ensure that no discourse emerges that might displease the state. Abroad, the same discourse is used to demonstrate "progress" on issues deemed sensitive by the West, thus facilitating the acquisition of political and financial support.

What is the Correct Perspective Regarding Attempts to Reshape the Deen to Serve the Ruling Power?

Altering the Shariah rulings of Islam is one of the greatest forms of deviation. Making the state the arbiter of Shariah texts is an infringement upon the exclusive right of Allah (swt) to legislate, and directing imams to serve the ruling power is a departure from the Shariah obligation of conveying the risaalah message and commanding the right (amr bil ma'roof).

The role of the carrier of the Dawah to Islam is to speak the truth, however much it may contradict the ruling power, to confront injustice, not to justify it, to preserve the Aqeedah, not to reshape or engineer it according to the Western vision, and to spread Islam as it is, not as the ruler or the West desires. However, an imam or carrier of Dawah to Islam who is molded in a tightly controlled political environment, that imposes pre-packaged concepts upon him, loses his most important characteristic: Shariah-based independence.

The training program at the military academy, and the accompanying statements about "freedom of choice in faith," are not an innocent academic endeavor, nor a reformist step in the field of Islamic Dawah, as is being promoted. Instead, they are part of a comprehensive project to reshape the structure of the awareness of Deen in Egypt, transforming it into a calculated secular discourse, used domestically to control society, and externally to gain the favor of Western powers. This path clearly clashes with the Shariah rulings of Islam and the very nature of the Shariah Address (Khitaab), which rejects adapting to authority or assimilating into a political system that does not govern by Islam. Hence the necessity for the Islamic Ummah to possess sufficient awareness that Deen is not protected within barracks, that preachers are not formed by political decrees, and that Islam is not malleable material. Instead, Islam is a revelation to be recited, Shariah rulings to be implemented, and an Ummah to be guided to uphold it, not to reshape it to conform to the conditions of donors and the approval of the West!

O Ulema of Egypt, al-Kinanaah: You have been entrusted with a covenant to clarify the truth and not conceal it, to be a voice of truth, not a tool for justification. Do not let the pressure of authority, the fear of oppression, or the pursuit of position lead you to distort the Shariah rulings of the Deen, or to cloak falsehood in the guise of truth. Your silence is the first step towards the collapse of the Islamic Ummah, whilst your voice is the first gateway to its victory. Be as the sincere ulema throughout history have been: standing for Allah (swt), not for the ruler; speaking the truth without fear of reproach. They protect the Aqeedah from distortion and lead the Ummah to glory, not subservience.

O People of Egypt, Al-Kinanaah: Hold fast to your Deen, remain steadfast on the truth, and do not allow anyone to usurp your minds, empty your Deen of its content, or reduce it to hollow slogans.

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