

Send Moses on a Study Tour: A Passover Memo

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This week, as Jews around the world celebrated Passover, a memo from biblical times was found in Egypt. The memo from an unknown donor agency provides new insight into the Passover story.

To: Headquarters
From: Democracy Office, Egypt
Re: Egypt Democracy Assessment
Date: 1 Nisan circa 2200

Analysis

The situation in Egypt has been encouraging in recent months. The Pharaoh has seemed increasingly interested in transitioning Egypt to a more free political system, promising legislative elections in circa 2202. Similarly, he has seemed open to liberalizing Egypt's labor laws, but is worried this will damage Egypt's rankings in the Ease of Doing Business index.

Our work with the council of advisors, the unelected and unofficial parliament of Egypt, continues to help facilitate a gradual transition from the current rule by a liberalizing monarch to true parliamentary democracy. The council has had several open hearings regarding taxation and child labor policies. The hearings were well attended and included vibrant discussion and debate. The council has not yet invited Israelites to participate in these fora, but that will be one of our program indicators in FY 2202.

The most troubling development in recent months has been the growth of increasingly radicalized leadership among Egypt's substantial Jewish minority. Moses, in particular, has grown increasingly popular. His slogan "Let my people go," (LMPG) is clever and enjoys widespread support, but it is absolutist and unrealistic. Unfortunately, this demand has been taken up by many of Moses' followers as more moderate and reasonable Jewish voices have been marginalized.

The challenge will be to keep the more radical elements of the Jewish population at bay while strengthening the liberal forces in the current Egyptian and Jewish leadership. As the Pharaoh continues his new reforms, there will be more opportunities for the council of advisors to address various economic and labor issues while gradually strengthening its institutional position.

Recommendations

We should continue our legislative strengthening program with the council of advisors. Over the next year we will develop more public hearings around issues such as agricultural policy, the education law and the election law as Egypt moves towards its historic first election in 2202.

The Pharaoh's clear interest in reform is an opportunity that should not be overlooked. Rather than lend our voice to the LMPG movement, we should continue to engage with the Pharaoh in preparation for the upcoming elections. His Future Egypt party also would benefit from extensive campaign trainings as they are likely to be the leading party in the 2202 elections. There are several other Egyptian parties with whom we should work including the National Egypt Party, the pre-Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats. At this time there are also some minor Jewish parties who would benefit from technical assistance. Although the LMPG party, which is overly dominated by Moses, is by far the most popular party of the Jews in Egypt, at this time their violent rhetoric, which has recently begun to include warnings of plagues and other natural disasters which will befall non-Jewish Egyptians if they do not change their policy regarding Jewish labor, is too radical. Therefore, we do not recommend working with them.

A top priority in upcoming months will be to nurture the less radical opposition elements in the Jewish opposition to balance out Moses' growing appeal. Some of our civil society partners have leadership training programs which should begin to help develop some new leadership soon. It is imperative that we also continue to fund the various Jewish watchdog organizations which document human rights abuses against Jewish and other workers. The information they have provided has proved very useful in various legal cases, although no worker has ever won any of these cases.

In the short term, exposing Moses and his team to other leadership models and problem solving approaches could be very valuable. A study tour to our country to meet with various interest groups would sharpen the advocacy skills of Moses and his followers and help them understand how demands of one group can best be articulated in a pluralist setting. This might lead them to embrace less divisive rhetoric and open up some space for less radical Jewish groups.

If the LMPG's radicalism can be successfully toned down, it will allow the current Egyptian leadership to liberalize in a rational way while maintaining stability in the region. Should the LMPG movement become more powerful it will likely cause a backlash against the Jews and potentially destabilize the region. Fortunately, the Pharaoh has not yet engaged very much with the LMPG, suggesting the country's stability is likely to continue for the immediate future.