



Political Islam Online

Arab Identity does not exist!



This past Thursday, the well known sheikh *'A'id Al-Qarni* criticized the state of the Arab mindset, asserting that: “Contemporary Arab thoughts neither have identifiable characteristics nor follow a determined path that would distinguish them from those of other peoples and nations. Arab thoughts are mixed-up and aimless to the point that Muslim believers and atheists alike can be identified as Arabs.”

For the past century, a grand cause and two ideologies have influenced Arab ideas. The cause is the “Palestinian struggle.” Any discussion of Arab thoughts and ideas eventually lead to the Palestinian issue. The Palestinian struggle was initiated by the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine [PFLP], which was founded by George Habash¹ and was shaped by Habash’s Marxist/Leninist ideology. While the Palestinian issue remains a focal point for Arabs, the secular Marxist ideology that animated the movement and, together with the Nasserism and Baathism, gave birth to Pan-Arabism are long gone. That ideology was dealt a fatal blow when the Arabs were defeated in the 1967 war with Israel.

The PLO and Fatah, which emerged as stronger movements representing a relatively more moderate stance, still advocate an Arab secular identity with the Palestinian revolution becoming the rallying point and replacing Nasserism. However, that chapter seems to be slowly coming to an end. The West appears to have trouble acknowledging that even though this secular movement seems, on the surface, to retain some legitimacy with President Abbas, it has lost all credibility with Arabs.

The Arab desire for a unifying ideology, which did not materialize under Nasser or later through a secular Palestinian revolution, remains but currently exists in a vacuum. That vacuum is slowly being filled by an Islamic Political reform advocated by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan, Hamas in Palestine, Hizbullah in Lebanon and the PJD “Justice and Development” in Morocco. While all these movements still champion the Palestinian struggle and use it as a stimulant for their causes, their ideology centers solely on Islam and an application of Islamic socialism.

Sheikh *'A'id Al-Qarni*’s description of the current situation and his proposed solution are simple. Arabs must, according to *Al-Qarni*, declare that their uncompromising message is the one of Islam, derived from sacred inspiration and possessing a divine and Muhammadan identity. Without this Islamic identity, *Al-Qarni* asserts, the Arab mind is purposeless. Although there is no doubt that Arab thoughts have been influenced by religion, *Al-Qarni* wants Islam to be Arabism’s only *raison d’être*, eliminating not only patriotism and nationalistic tendencies but going so far as to dismiss an Arab identity separate from Islam. *Al-Qarni* contends that Arab thoughts without Islamic inspiration are responsible for all of the defeats and calamities the Arab world has experienced.

While obviously ignoring many aspects of Arab identity that shape the Arab mind, *Al-Qarni* uses the simple message that Islam has all the answers to appeal to the masses. Because the Arab world has difficulty keeping pace with the scientific advancement taking place in the rest of the world or profiting from it, it is fertile ground for this kind of message to take root and grow in popularity among a majority of the Arab population.

Source: ‘A’id Al-Qarni – Date: January 24, 2008

¹ A physician by trade, George Habash, known as “*al-Hakim*” (the wise or the physician) was a Christian Palestinian politician, who founded the PFLP and was a supporter of Nasser’s “Arab Nationalism”. George Habash stepped down as the leader of the PFLP in 2000. He died Saturday, January 26, 2008, at the age of 81.

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