



# Building Bridges, Not Walls

Engaging with political Islamists in the Middle East and  
North Africa

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## Abbreviations and definitions

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi [Turkey]
BMENA	Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative
CONTEST	UK Strategy for Countering International Terrorism
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CTD	Counter Terrorism Department
DFID	Department for International Development [UK]
DPA	Development Partnership Arrangement
EC	European Commission
EIWG	Engaging with the Islamic World Group [UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office]
EMP	Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office [UK]
G8	Group of Eight
IAF	Islamic Action Front [Jordan]
ICM	Islamic Constitutional Movement [Kuwait]
IRI	International Republican Institute
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative
MSP	Movement for the Society of Peace (Algeria)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDI	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
NDP	National Democratic Party [Egypt]
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
PA	Palestinian Authority
PJD	Party of Justice and Development [Morocco]
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WTO	World Trade Organisation

MENA: This paper follows the World Bank definition of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, which includes: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian territories (the West Bank and Gaza Strip), Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. (See World Bank 2009)

### Arabic terms

- Fatwa*: A scholarly opinion on a matter of Islamic law, issued by a recognised Islamic religious authority
- Hadith*: A collection of sayings and actions, attributed to the prophet Mohammed, which form the basis of Islamic jurisprudence or *Shari'a* law
- Jahiliyya*: A pre-Islamic state of pagan ignorance
- Jihad*: Used in this context, a form of Islamic armed struggle that may be internal (combating Muslim regimes considered to be impious), irredentist (fighting to redeem land ruled by non-Muslims or under occupation), or global (combating the West)
- Salafism*: A Sunni movement that seeks to return Islam to its purest roots through close adherence to the teachings and practices of the Prophet and other forefathers of the Islamic faith. Salafist Islamists tend to focus on the missionary activity of *da'wa* (preaching) and on reinforcing the moral values of the *umma* (community of believers) rather than explicit political activism or the pursuit of political power. However, there are those who have abandoned this non-violent approach and who seek to achieve their objectives through armed *jihad*
- Shari'a*: The body of Islamic law that governs public life and certain aspects of private life for all Muslims. Rather than a set of codified laws, *Shari'a* law is based on the interpretation of a number of sources, including the *Qur'an*, traditions and sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammed and religious *fatwas*
- Takfiri*: Radical Islamists who reject components of society, culture and law in Muslim countries that they consider to have slipped back into a state of *jahiliyya*. *Takfiris* often support militancy against Muslim regimes that they consider to be *jahiliyya*
- Ulema*: The highest class of Muslim legal scholars. The *ulema* engage in many fields of Islamic study and are usually referred to as the arbiters of *Shari'a* law

## Executive summary and recommendations

Since the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 there has been an explosion of interest in political Islamism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Until fairly recently, analysts have understandably focused on those actors that operate at the violent end of the Islamist spectrum, including Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, some of the sectarian parties in Iraq and political groups with armed wings like Hamas in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

However, this has obscured the fact that across the MENA region contemporary politics are being driven and shaped by a much more diverse collection of ‘mainstream’ Islamist movements. We define these as

*groups that engage or seek to engage in the legal political processes of their countries and that have publicly eschewed the use of violence to help realise their objectives at the national level, even where they are discriminated against or repressed.*

This definition would encompass groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco and the Islamic Action Front (IAF) in Jordan.

These non-violent Islamist movements or parties often represent the best organised and most popular element of the opposition to the existing regimes in each country, and as such there has been increasing interest on the part of western policymakers in the role that they might play in democracy promotion in the region. Yet discussions on this issue appear to have stalled on the question of whether it would be appropriate to engage with these groups on a more systematic and formal basis, rather than on the practicalities of actually doing so.

This attitude is partly linked to a justifiable unwillingness to legitimise groups that might hold anti-democratic views on women’s rights, political pluralism and a range of other issues. It also reflects pragmatic considerations about the strategic interests of western powers in the MENA region that are perceived to be threatened by the rising popularity and influence of Islamists. For their part, Islamist parties and movements have shown a clear reluctance to forge closer ties with those western powers whose policies in the region they strongly oppose, not least for fear of how the repressive regimes they operate within might react.

This project’s focus on non-violent political Islamist movements should not be misinterpreted as implicit support for their political agendas. Committing to a strategy of more deliberate engagement with mainstream Islamist parties would involve significant risks and tradeoffs for North American and European policymakers. However, we do take the position that the tendency of both sides to view engagement as a zero sum ‘all or nothing’ game has been unhelpful, and needs to change if a more constructive dialogue around reform in the Middle East and North Africa is to emerge.

### Summary of recommendations

A number of specific recommendations flow from this analysis:

#### **1. Western policymakers need to fundamentally rethink their political strategy for engaging with Islamist parties and movements**

Policymakers must face up to the difficult reality that in order for progress to be made towards democratisation in the Middle East and North Africa, there will have to be dialogue with some of the existing mainstream Islamist movements there. Progressive western leaders must continue to voice their concerns about political and social issues where there are substantive disagreements, but will also have to be prepared to open up channels of communication with them if they are serious about supporting political reform and conflict resolution in the MENA region.

## **2. Western policymakers and non-governmental institutions should be more proactive in creating channels for serious and sustained dialogue with Islamists**

By shutting mainstream Islamist movements out of the dialogue about political reform, European and North American politicians are missing important opportunities to start building trust and overcoming the hostility and misunderstandings that have characterised relations in the past. Without giving them preferential treatment, there is scope for more consistently involving Islamists in conferences and debates about relations between the West and the Middle East and North Africa alongside other non-governmental actors, including secular opposition politicians.

## **3. This dialogue should engage with the political as well as the religious values of Islamist parties and movements**

Crucially, western policymakers should move away from the fixation on ‘testing’ the democratic credentials of Islamist movements, and focus instead on discussion of the range of political, economic and social issues that concern these groups, many of which are shared by their western counterparts. This does not mean that difficult issues should be avoided, but it does recognise that a solid basis for engagement cannot be built without some attempt to find common political ground.

## **4. Western leaders should be more even-handed in condemning all human rights abuses in authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, including against Islamists**

The failure of many western policymakers to be consistent in their criticism of human rights abuses in the MENA region has damaged their credibility, and has led many political and civil society groups in the region to complain that international partners simply turn a blind eye when human rights violations are committed by authoritarian governments. A visible change in approach could reduce some of these tensions and go some way towards repairing the West’s tarnished image in the region. Again, while Islamists do not need to be singled out for special treatment, western leaders need to be much more vocal in their condemnation of all human rights abuses in the region, including when they are directed against non-violent Islamist politicians and activists.

## **5. Western governments must display greater consistency in pressing authoritarian governments in the MENA region to open up their political systems**

If Islamist parties and movements benefit from openings in restrictive political structures, this will undoubtedly pose uncomfortable dilemmas for western governments. But an approach that seeks to ignore these political currents is neither morally nor strategically defensible. Decades of paying lip service to the idea of political freedoms while simultaneously propping up authoritarian leaders who lack democratic legitimacy have helped to create an environment that is not conducive to stability or development – yet both are needed in order for western powers to protect their considerable interests in the region, while also supporting indigenous reform processes.

## 1. Introduction

Although political Islamism has long been of interest to academics thinking and writing about Muslim-majority countries, its significance has only been recognised more widely by western policymakers in the last decade. There was some awareness of the phenomenon previously, particularly following the Iranian revolution in 1979 and during the terrorist attacks of the 1990s carried out by the violent Egyptian al-Jihad and Jamaat al-Islamiyya groups. However, it only became the subject of sustained attention after the dramatic events of 11 September 2001, when nearly 3,000 people died in the attacks on New York City and Washington DC that were orchestrated by the radical Islamist Al-Qaeda movement. Since then, terror strikes against western governments and civilians in Spain and the United Kingdom, and against western-linked targets in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bali and Egypt, have served to reinforce a belief that the struggle against radical Islam is fast becoming one of the defining foreign policy challenges of the twenty-first century (Satloff 2004).

While the profoundly shocking and highly visible nature of this new terrorist threat has led many to focus primarily on the organisations that operate at the radical and violent end of the Islamist continuum, this has obscured the fact that across the Middle East and North Africa, contemporary politics are being driven and shaped by a much more diverse group of 'mainstream' Islamist movements. As many analysts note, it is these Islamists and not the radical jihadist groups 'that will have the greatest impact on the future political evolution of the Middle East' (Brown *et al* 2006: 3).

Definitions are critical when dealing with a subject of this kind, so it is important to be clear from the outset what this report means in its use of the term 'mainstream political Islamism'.

Even among and within political movements and parties that consider themselves to be Islamist, there are clear differences of opinion about this concept. Members of the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco describe their organisation as a political party with an Islamic frame of reference, while leaders of Turkey's Justice and Development (Adalet ve Kalkinma or AKP) party frequently characterise themselves as 'conservative democrats' (Kristianasen 2003). Other Islamist parties, including the Movement for the Society of Peace (MSP) in Algeria and the Wasat (Centre) party in Egypt, present themselves as defenders of Islamic values and cultural practices within their respective societies. These sit in contrast to movements like Hamas and Hezbollah, which link their Islamic beliefs much more closely to the idea of violent resistance against external enemies. The Covenant of Hamas explicitly identifies its members as Muslims who 'fear God and raise the banner of Jihad in the face of the oppressors' (Hamas 1988).

Characterisations of political Islamism have also varied substantially among external commentators. Some define Islamists as individuals who believe that 'Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim World and who seek to implement this in some fashion' (in the words of Graham Fuller; Fuller 2003: xi). Others suggest they should be described as those who subscribe to 'an Islamic variety of religious fundamentalism' (in the words of Bassam Tibi; Tibi 2005: ix). Abdelwahab El-Affendi of the University of Westminster defines Islamist groups more precisely as those that are 'active in the political arena and call for the application of values and laws in the public and private sphere' and that 'oppose their governments and other political and social movements which they regard as either not following or opposing the teachings of Islam' (El-Affendi 2003: 7).

However, even El-Affendi's description does not apply neatly and consistently to all Islamist movements at all times. In recent years, movements such as the PJD have made a strategic decision to avoid government crackdowns by toning down their criticism of policies that they consider to be un-Islamic (for example, revisions made to the conservative Moroccan family code in 2004). Other parties, including the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) in Kuwait



and the Jordanian Islamic Action Front (IAF), have demonstrated a willingness to form alliances with secular political parties that do not necessarily share their interpretations of Islamic teachings, in order to present a more effective united front against oppressive regimes.

This research project has therefore taken a deliberately neutral approach, using the term 'mainstream' to refer to:

*those Islamist movements that engage or seek to engage in the legal political processes of their countries and that have publicly eschewed the use of violence to help realise their objectives at the national level, even where they are discriminated against or repressed.*

This definition does not make any assumptions about the content of the political platforms of such movements, but is a useful way of differentiating movements like the PJD, the IAF and the Muslim Brotherhood from those such as Hamas in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>1</sup>

To date, western policymakers have displayed a marked reluctance to engage with even those Islamist groups that have committed themselves to a strategy of peaceful participation in domestic politics, although developments in the region have necessitated some changes to this approach in recent years. For instance, western governments have normal diplomatic relations with the Islamist AKP government that came to power in Turkey in 2002. The United States, United Kingdom and others have also been drawn into extensive dealings with political Islamist movements in Iraq, particularly the Shia parties, who currently represent the largest bloc of elected representatives in the Iraqi parliament. And since the election of President Obama, there have even been signs that western governments are now taking calls to engage with the political wings of militant groups like Hamas and Hezbollah more seriously, with the UK government having announced its intention to talk to members of Hezbollah's political branch in March 2009.

However, across the MENA region as a whole, formal engagement remains the exception rather than the rule. To paraphrase Edward Djerejian, former US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, we are still building more walls than bridges in our policies towards political Islamists (Djerejian 1995).

This is partly due to the long-standing relationships between western governments and many of the regimes in the region, which tend to be vehemently opposed to external interference in their domestic political affairs. In discussions with their western counterparts, MENA rulers frequently invoke the threat of an Islamist takeover, particularly when they are being pressed to undertake political liberalisation and reform measures that would limit their own power. For example, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has long argued that the banned Muslim Brotherhood's religious views represent a clear danger to the country's security. He has warned that should this movement gain a monopoly on power, 'many will take their money and flee the country; investment ... will come to a halt; unemployment will increase; and, worse yet, Egypt will be irrevocably isolated from the world' (Mubarak 2007). Other leaders in the region have offered similar cautions, stating that any Islamist party that comes to power will implement domestic and foreign policies inimical to the interests of western governments.

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1. This research project and this, its final report do not seek to address the question of western policy towards Hamas and Hezbollah. Although both movements pursue goals that are essentially political and territorially bound in nature unlike the global neo-jihadi movement typified by groups like Al-Qaeda, their use of violence against external and internal opponents means that they do not fall within our classification of mainstream political Islamism.

In making this argument, authoritarian rulers are undoubtedly thinking about how they might limit challenges to their own power and authority. Islamist parties generally represent the best organised and most popular opposition movements throughout the MENA region, and it is reasonable to assume that any expansion of their formal political representation would create difficulties for leaders that do not have a strong base of domestic popular support and rely on intrusive security services or elaborate systems of patronage to maintain their standing.

These ulterior motives notwithstanding, the point they are making deserves serious consideration. There are legitimate concerns about the social agendas of Islamist parties, and a significant increase in their influence would likely affect western economic and security interests in the region, which include:

- Ensuring the cooperation of governing regimes in counterterrorism activities
- Preventing further regional nuclear proliferation
- Engaging in conflict resolution activities (particularly in Iraq and Israel-Palestine)
- Securing stable and reliable access to energy supplies
- Developing trade links
- Promoting the spread of democracy and good governance (in principle if not always in practice).

However, there are few signs that a continuation of current western strategies will succeed in protecting these interests in the long term.

The MENA region is enormously diverse and some of its countries are making significant progress towards economic modernisation but as a region it performs poorly on many international indicators of development, democracy and human rights. It also suffers from a widespread and entrenched authoritarianism. The dangers of this political model have been highlighted in a series of influential Arab Human Development Reports published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which identify the chronic deficit in political freedom and good governance as one of the key barriers to the emergence of a 'renaissance' that is sought by so many both inside the region and outside (UNDP 2005).

In this context, the tendency of the US and the UK and other European powers to call for greater democratisation while simultaneously propping up supportive but despotic leaders is patently counterproductive, and has caused western standing in the region to plummet over the last decade. Evidence of this can be found in a number of global opinion polls that show declining levels of Muslim approval for the actions and values of key western powers (see Esposito and Mogahed 2008, Pew Global Attitudes Project 2006, 2008).

The arrival of a new and more progressive US administration presents a valuable opportunity for change, but rhetorical promises of a different and more principled approach to engagement with the governments and people of the Middle East and North Africa will need to be followed through on if they are to have any practical effect. An alteration in policies must occur at three different levels, in terms of:

- Strategy towards the MENA region as a whole
- A more differentiated and thoughtful approach to relations with each country in the region
- Policy towards some of the mainstream Islamist movements that operate within them.

It is the last of these policy shifts with which this paper is particularly concerned.

## **Purpose and structure of the report**

This report marks the culmination of a two-year ippr research project on political Islam in the Middle East and North Africa, which has drawn on desk-based research, reviews of relevant English, French and Arabic literature, discussions with Middle Eastern, European and North American experts, semi-structured interviews with members of mainstream Islamist parties in the region and high-level seminars and conferences held in Rabat, Amman, Brussels and London. (See the Appendix for further details.)

ippr analysed and produced case studies on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Party of Justice and Development in Morocco and the Islamic Action Front in Jordan – all of which fall into the category of ‘mainstream’ political Islamist movement as defined above (see Stacher 2008, Glennie and Mepham 2007 and Glennie 2007 respectively).

Because Egypt, Morocco and Jordan are not democracies and because freedom of expression and organisation are curtailed in each of them, it is difficult to measure with precision the popularity of these movements. Nevertheless, it seems clear that they represent the best organised element of the opposition to the existing regimes in each country. For western policymakers who are calling, publicly at least, for the regimes in the region to move towards greater political pluralism, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, this raises obvious questions, namely:

- What would be the effect on the domestic and foreign policies of these countries if mainstream political Islamists were to obtain a greater share of political power and a larger say over the governance of their societies?
- How should western policy adapt accordingly?

To address these questions, this report has been structured in the following way:

- Chapters 2, 3 and 4 revisit and update our three case studies, providing an overview of the Muslim Brotherhood, the PJD and the IAF and the political environments they operate within, a summary of their policy positions on key issues, and an account of their behaviour as political actors in recent years.
- Chapters 5 and 6 consider recent western policy towards the MENA region in general and Islamist parties in particular, identifying what has and has not worked, and what some of the real barriers to dialogue and engagement are.
- A concluding chapter 7 draws together this analysis, and offers some policy recommendations for how a strategic rethink of western policy towards mainstream Islamist movements and parties might look in practice.

## 2. Political Islam in Egypt

The trajectory of Egypt's political reform programme has been highly erratic over the course of the last century. Although Britain granted Egypt formal independence in 1922, it continued to exert a great deal of influence over the country's domestic affairs for the next three decades, with power struggles between British government officials, King Fuad (and his successor King Farouk) and a Parliament dominated by the liberal Wafd party preventing the emergence of a strong indigenous political system. During the 1930s and 1940s, Parliament was frequently dissolved by the King, while the Constitution was suspended entirely between 1930 and 1936. Instability persisted in the wake of the Second World War as a military opposition movement coalesced around the figure of Gamal Abdel Nasser, and in 1952 these so-called 'Free Officers' carried out a coup that resulted in the abolition of the monarchy and the permanent expulsion of British forces.

Although new constitutions were promulgated in 1956 and 1964, these did little to encourage the growth of an independent and democratic political system (Dunne 2006). Opposition parties were abolished, and Egypt was ruled as a one-party state with Nasser firmly in control until his death in 1970. Some liberalisation occurred during the 1970s under President Anwar Sadat, who sought to empower the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood so that it might act as an effective counterbalance to leftist forces, but this brief opening was rolled back again as unpopular economic and foreign policies led to an increase in dissatisfaction with the regime and, ultimately, to the assassination of Sadat in 1981 (by a militant cell with links to radical Islamists).

Political activity resumed during the 1980s, and opposition parties were allowed to participate in parliamentary elections during this period. However, Sadat's successor, President Hosni Mubarak, restored many of the emergency laws by which Egypt had been intermittently governed since the 1950s and which placed substantial limits on the exercise of civil and political liberties. During the 1990s he also introduced a series of laws that curbed freedoms of expression and association. These were partly designed to cement the regime's authority, but were also a reaction to the emergence of extremist Islamic groups like al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, al-Jihad and Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra, which used acts of terrorism to express their hostility towards the regime. The violent activism of these groups has had a clear knock-on effect on Egypt's more mainstream political Islamist movements, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood.

Despite a brief period of tolerance during the 1970s, the Egyptian regime has consistently sought to portray the Brotherhood as a dangerous movement that is simply biding its time until it is in a position to impose its dogmatic religious convictions on the rest of the population. In early 2007, Mubarak argued that the Brotherhood's religious views posed a significant threat to state security. He cautioned that if the movement ever came to power, overseas investment in Egypt would cease, unemployment would rise and the country as a whole would become irrevocably isolated from the rest of the world. But how valid are these accusations?

### **The Muslim Brotherhood**

The Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest of the political Islamist movements established in the twentieth century, founded by Hassan Al-Banna in 1928 in response to the difficult political and economic conditions facing Egypt at that time. Al-Banna looked to religion to fill the political vacuum created by the struggle between foreign and Egyptian ruling elites, although it is notable that his writings devote less attention to discussion of how to unite the *umma* (Islamic Nation) and more time on consideration of how to solve Egypt's immediate domestic political, social and economic troubles.

Despite the Muslim Brotherhood's highly politicised origins, it took many decades to transform itself from a loosely organised and personality-driven movement into a coherent

and non-violent political institution. Early on, Al-Banna created a number of councils and committees to facilitate effective self-governance and peaceful political organisation, but many among its leadership still felt that it was necessary to maintain a paramilitary wing to try to influence domestic politics. The Brotherhood's *Tanzim al-Khas* – Special Organisations – were active in the 1940s as Egypt's political and economic situation deteriorated, and carried out a number of bombings and assassination attempts. Al-Banna lost control of these factions in 1948 when a Brotherhood member assassinated the sitting Prime Minister al-Naqrashi. Despite his appeals for calm and accommodation, state orders were given to retaliate against the organisation, and Al-Banna himself was assassinated in January 1949.

By the time the Free Officers Movement overthrew the monarchy in 1952, the Brotherhood's members and operations were highly fragmented. Relations between the new military regime and the Brotherhood were initially peaceful, if wary, until an apparent assassination attempt by the organisation on Nasser in October 1954. Although Nasser escaped unharmed, he used this event as an opportunity to crack down on the organisation as well as other potential opposition groups in the country. Many of the group's most senior leaders spent nearly two decades in Nasser's jails and were routinely exposed to inhumane treatment and harsh conditions.

During this period a number of ideological disagreements began to emerge within the movement, and many of those espousing more extreme ideas split away from the Brotherhood to form their own political groups. The best known of these dissidents was Sayid Qutb, who set out his radical views in the 1964 book *Mu'alim fil-Tariq (Signposts)*. Qutb's philosophies reflected his experience of repression in Nasser's prisons. He drew on the work of fourteenth century thinker Ibn Taymiya to justify the use of violence to overthrow governments that did not properly apply the tenets of *Shari'a* and could therefore be considered to have reverted to *jahiliyya* (a state of pre-Islamic ignorance) (Qutb 1964). In the Egyptian context, Nasser's torturous treatment of Muslim prisoners qualified his regime as *jahiliyya*, and undeserving of power or authority. Qutb saw it as incumbent on 'proper' Muslims to free themselves of these un-Islamic political systems, through preaching and proselytising where possible, but through physical power and *jihad* where not.

Although Qutb was hanged in 1966 before having the chance to describe exactly what methods this resistance movement should employ, his philosophies struck a resounding chord among many Islamist groups, and he has continued to serve as an inspiration for those organisations that employ terrorist tactics, including Al-Qaeda.

Since the 1970s, the Muslim Brotherhood has taken pains to distance itself from Qutb's writings on the use of violence and has transformed itself into a more pragmatic political force. Changes to Egypt's constitution that have made *Shari'a* the 'main source' of legislation have enabled the Brotherhood to retract its claim that the Egyptian government is apostate. Leading moderate figures within the movement such as Dr Abdul Monem Abul-Futouh have often asserted that the Egyptian state is now Islamic and not *kufr* (impious), even though it does not fully apply the Islamic principles of *hurriyya* (freedom) and *adâla* (justice) (International Crisis Group 2004).

However, Qutb's legacy remains a thorny issue for the contemporary Brotherhood. He is revered as one of the leading figures of the movement, and as commentators have observed, his views cannot be reduced to the simple advocacy of armed *jihad* (Leiken and Brooke 2007). The Brotherhood's argument that Qutb's views on the use of violence should not be taken out of context has not been unequivocal enough to reassure some observers, many of whom claim that the group has adapted to democracy on a temporary basis and may revert to violence in the future (Azarva and Tadros 2007). But the Brotherhood's mode of political engagement over the past few decades throws some doubt on these assertions.

### **The Muslim Brotherhood as a political actor**

The political space that Egyptian Islamists operate within is heavily circumscribed by the government. While the regimes in Morocco and Jordan have long sought to marginalise and undermine their Islamist opposition movements, they have stopped short of banning legitimate political parties such as the PJD and the IAF. However, the Muslim Brotherhood is designated as an illegal organisation under Egyptian law, which prohibits the formation of political parties on the basis of religion.

During the 1980s and 1990s the Brotherhood found a number of ways to circumvent these rules. Members of the movement campaigned in national elections – usually in partnership with other legal political parties – and were also active in the professional syndicates and unions. But it deliberately limited its attempts to enter the formal political system in order to avoid unnecessary clashes with the government.

This uneasy status quo changed at the end of the 1990s, as an erosion of the government's popular legitimacy forced it to reform some of Egypt's moribund political structures. In 1999 President Mubarak pledged to support a Supreme Constitutional Court ruling that called for judicial supervision of elections. He also promised to oversee a free and fair parliamentary electoral process in 2000. These developments were beneficial for the Muslim Brotherhood, which had already come to the conclusion that it should adopt a more proactive political strategy if it hoped to have any kind of influence on the direction of policy (El-Din Shahin 2007). To this end, it fielded a number of independent candidates in the 2000 parliamentary elections, winning 17 seats. Building on this success, it ran more candidates in the 2005 elections, winning an unprecedented 88 out of 444 seats, or 20 per cent of the vote.

This has not significantly augmented the Muslim Brotherhood's political power. With a majority of 73 per cent, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) has maintained its stranglehold on the parliamentary system and remains able to control the passage or rejection of legislation. The Brotherhood's unexpected gains in the 2005 elections have also led the regime to reverse some of its earlier liberalisation measures, and in 2007 a series of constitutional amendments were passed that outlawed all political activity by groups with any kind of religious frame of reference. This has given the Egyptian government greater freedom to arrest and detain Brotherhood members on the charge of belonging to a banned group.

However, the movement's inclusion in parliament since 2005 has given it useful experience of direct political participation. It has also allowed external observers to learn more about the Brotherhood's policy positions, and to gauge how it might act in the unlikely event of gaining a monopoly on parliamentary power.

Contrary to Mubarak's grim predictions, the Brotherhood's parliamentary bloc has not focused its efforts on pushing through conservative religious legislation, but has managed to coordinate effectively with other opposition groups to tackle a much broader range of challenges facing Egypt. These include a weak parliament that exists primarily to rubberstamp executive decisions, deeply-rooted economic problems and an insufficiently independent judiciary. For example, in June 2006 a number of Brotherhood MPs worked closely with the Egyptian Judges Club in an effort to achieve the passage of legislation that would increase the judiciary's autonomy from the executive branch.

Since 2004 the Muslim Brotherhood has issued a number of general statements that emphasise the group's commitment to a democratic, constitutional, parliamentary and presidential regime 'in the framework of Islamic principles', reaffirm its support for the freedoms of expression and religion and argue in favour of the practice of holding regular elections (Society of Muslim Brothers 2004: 12). It has also made specific suggestions about how political freedom in Egypt might be enhanced, such as granting citizens the right to demonstrate and assemble, removing restrictions on the formation of political parties and



limiting the authoritarian powers of the President. In short, the Brotherhood has taken a much more positive stance in promoting political openness and democratisation than most of the secular opposition parties in Egypt.

Nevertheless, there remain a number of ambiguities in the Brotherhood's positions on other issues, not least on the question of whether the movement should establish a formal political party with the capacity to compete more openly in the electoral process. Some believe that it would be wise to separate the political and the proselytising activities of the movement, following the example of Islamist parties in Morocco, Jordan, Yemen and Kuwait. Others fear that imposing this kind of distinction between political and religious values will dilute the moral authority and relevance of the movement as a whole. This dilemma remains unresolved, although the Muslim Brotherhood has recently shown signs of wanting to engage in a more public debate about the relative merits of different modes of political engagement.

In August 2007 the Brotherhood released a draft version of a comprehensive policy platform, the first of its kind in the group's eighty-year history. This was widely viewed as an attempt to address the criticism that the movement tends to fall back on vague ideological proclamations, and at 128 pages in length the document offered considerable detail on the Brotherhood's ideas about economic development, political reform and the value of promoting civil society initiatives.

Unfortunately, this did not generate the wider policy debate that the Brotherhood had hoped for. Instead, it prompted a re-emergence of concerns about the Brotherhood's stance on equalities and human rights, particularly as a result of the document's assertion that non-Muslims and women should not be allowed to hold senior leadership roles within the state. This was a departure from the Brotherhood's earlier statements on minority rights, which had been relatively liberal, if rather vague. For example, a policy document released in 2004 observed that 'Copts are part of the fabric of the Egyptian society. They are partners of the nation and destiny. Our rights are theirs, and our duties theirs' (Society of Muslim Brothers 2004: 32).<sup>2</sup> It also stressed the Brotherhood's respect for the freedom of belief and worship, and its conviction that religious cooperation and co-existence are paramount for maintaining national unity.

Conservative figures within the movement justified this apparent volte-face in policy with the observation that other societies have placed restrictions on who can and cannot be head of state (for instance, the fact that a naturalised citizen cannot become President in the US) and that Egypt should have the same right. They also reiterated their commitment to the protection of minority rights under *Shari'a* law, and the improvement of the position of women within Egyptian society. But these statements have failed to assuage the concerns of those who believe that the Brotherhood's rhetorical commitment to equal citizenship is likely to fall by the wayside if the movement ever succeeds in coming to power.

Equally contentious was the 2007 platform's suggestion that adherence to *Shari'a* law might best be ensured through the creation of an *ulema* council of religious scholars that would be able to have the final word over the legislative and executive branches in matters of religious law. This proclamation alarmed many external commentators, who regarded it as evidence of the movement taking a regressive step in a theocratic direction (Brown and Hamzawy 2008). It also surprised more moderate members of the Brotherhood's guidance council, who

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2. While the Egyptian constitution officially recognises and guarantees the freedom of religion, this principle is not always upheld in practice. In particular, Egypt's large community of Coptic Christians have frequently complained about their experience of discrimination and harassment at the hands of the state and of radical Islamic groups (although not the Muslim Brotherhood specifically). Analysts have suggested that although they constitute approximately 10 per cent of the population, Copts remain underrepresented in both the public and private sectors in Egypt (Freedom House 2007).

claimed that they had not been consulted about this last-minute insertion. A fierce public debate on this point subsequently broke out among different wings of the party, which was highly unusual for a group that prides itself on presenting a unified face to the outside world even if there are differences of opinion behind the scenes.

Since 2007, the Brotherhood has retreated somewhat from these controversial positions. The conservative wing of the party has conceded that any future *ulema* council will not be given binding authority on questions of *Shari'a* law. It has also softened its line on the question of equal political rights for non-Muslims and women, suggesting that these groups should only be barred from assuming the Egyptian presidency. However, the public airing of disputes over these issues has negatively impacted on the Brotherhood's internal cohesiveness and has damaged its reputation as a deliberative and democratic movement.

These persistent ambiguities around the Brotherhood's policy positions have also strengthened the hand of the regime in its efforts to crack down on the movement. Prior to local council elections in April 2008, around a thousand members of the Muslim Brotherhood were rounded up and arrested, and thousands more were prevented from submitting their candidacy papers. The movement ultimately decided to boycott the elections, but this has not had the desired impact of enhancing its legitimacy among the Egyptian public: if anything, it has shown the government that it can force its most organised opposition movement into submission through the use of violence and political persecution (Herzallah and Hamzawy 2008). Of course, this approach holds its own risks, for there is a possibility that if the Muslim Brotherhood gains little from engagement in the formal political process, the moderates within the movement who advocate on behalf of peaceful participation may lose ground to those who do not believe that this is an appropriate path for the Brotherhood.

### **Other Islamist movements in Egypt**

Although the Muslim Brotherhood represents most of those who belong to the Islamist-sympathising section of the Egyptian population, there are a number of other politicised Islamist groups in Egypt that offer different visions of reform. To one side of the Brotherhood sit more moderate centrist movements such as the unlicensed Wasat (Centre) party, while on the other it is flanked by radical groups willing to engage in violence to achieve their goals.

Wasat was founded in 1995 by a handful of former Muslim Brothers, including Abu Ala Madi, Salah Abd al-Karim and Essam Sultan, during a period of intense state persecution of the Brotherhood. Paradoxically, it seems that this repressive political environment actually prompted many of the Brotherhood's more liberal members to moderate their agendas, 'not only to seize new political opportunities but also to evade new political constraints' (Rosefsky-Wickham 2004: 213). The emergence of Wasat also represented the dissatisfaction of those within the Brotherhood who were chafing under a conservative leadership and wanted to speed up the process of creating a formal political party.

The Wasat is one of the most progressive Islamist groups in the region, and it has taken a relatively liberal approach on a number of issues. For example, it has allowed women to join the organisation, and it has been open to the idea of working with non-Muslims. For a time, an evangelical Christian even served on its five-person board. In its policy platforms, it advocates the creation of an Egyptian democracy based on equal citizenship, the promotion of civil society and neo-liberal economic reforms against the backdrop of Islamic heritage and values. In this sense, Wasat bears a close resemblance to other mainstream Islamist parties in the region like the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco, which portrays itself as a political party with an Islamic 'frame of reference' rather than a religious party. Indeed, Abu Ala Madi has stressed that the Wasat 'does not put forward theocratic ideas, nor envisage theocratic government [but rather] presents a civic discourse' (International Crisis Group 2004: 17).



Unfortunately, the Wasat movement has not succeeded in generating much enthusiasm for its programme. The last time that its leaders applied for a political party licence, in 2006, just over 100 people signed the group's founding documents. Meanwhile, the regime routinely denies its status as a legal political party, claiming that its platform fails to add anything novel to Egyptian political life.

It is perhaps surprising that the Wasat has not attracted more of a following, given that it has explicitly distanced itself from the Muslim Brotherhood by being more inclusive and politically palatable to non-Muslims and Christians, and that it seems to be developing a clear political and economic platform. But the institutional infrastructure that enables the Brotherhood to operate smoothly in times of political repression and seize opportunities in times of regime tolerance is absent from the Wasat's 11-year experiment. At present, it remains unclear whether the Wasat will reconstitute itself for a fourth attempt to obtain a licence, or whether it will transform itself into an organisation with social rather than political objectives.

### **Radical Islamism in Egypt**

Between the 1970s and the 1990s, Egypt experienced a wave of Qutbist-inspired violence perpetrated by radical Islamic movements. Qutb had died before setting out a comprehensive account of how 'true' Muslims should oppose the supposedly illegitimate Egyptian state. However, his ideas about the practice of *takfir* (the denunciation of 'infidel' or 'impious' individuals or political systems) were taken up and expressed by a generation of young Islamists who had been radicalised by the Palestinian conflict and the Sadat government's moves towards rapprochement with Israel in the latter half of the 1970s (International Crisis Group 2004).

This radicalism manifested itself through the activities of three main groups: the extremist but initially apolitical Al-Takfir wa-Hajra (Excommunication and Exodus), and the more militant Al-Jihad (Jihad Organisation) and its offshoot, Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group).<sup>3</sup> Al-Jama'a was particularly active in the late 1980s and early 90s, frequently engaging in armed clashes with Egyptian security forces and Coptic Christian minority groups and carrying out a number of high-profile assassinations, including the murder of a notable secularist intellectual, Farag Foda, in 1992. It also made a point of targeting tourists as a means of inflicting damage on Egypt's tourist trade and wider economy. This culminated in the massacre of 58 tourists and four Egyptians at Luxor in November 1997, which in turn prompted a huge government crackdown.

Violent activism in Egypt has been on the wane since this point, with many imprisoned jihadists having now renounced their earlier views and apologised for their crimes. However, Egypt remains a prime target for terrorist groups, as indicated by a number of serious attacks over the last five years. These include the bombings of three hotels in the Sinai Peninsula in 2004 and a series of coordinated attacks in the Egyptian resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh in 2005, which resulted in the death of 88 people and the wounding of over 150 more. This is a worrying indication of the continuing appeal of radical ideologies among certain elements of Egypt's population.

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3. For more on the emergence and ideologies of these movements, see International Crisis Group 2004.

### 3. Political Islam in Morocco

Comparatively speaking, Morocco's political system is freer than many others in the MENA region. Since inheriting the throne in 1999, King Mohammed VI has implemented a series of modernising reforms in terms of political and human rights. He has released a large number of political prisoners, amended the penal code to formally abolish torture and strengthened the Consultative Council on Human Rights that was established by his father, King Hassan II, to investigate claims of state-sanctioned human rights abuses. He has taken the unusual step of acknowledging the government's responsibility for forced disappearances and torture that took place under his father and grandfather. Some of the specific details of these abuses came out during the proceedings of an Equity and Reconciliation Commission. Mohammed VI has also pushed through progressive changes to the country's patriarchal *mudawana* – family code – and loosened some of the restrictions on press and political party freedom.

While these reform measures have had some success in making Morocco more open and less authoritarian, they have failed to dismantle the essential structures of power that have been in place since the country became independent in 1956. The Moroccan ruler is considered to be a direct descendant of the prophet and, as *Amir al Mu-minin* (Commander of the Faithful), the supreme religious authority in the country. The monarch also exerts influence and power through a network of traditional institutions called the *makhzan*.<sup>4</sup> These opaque networks often enjoy more power and access than the elected Parliament, whose activities are heavily circumscribed. In 2002, for example, Mohamed VI reverted to the old practice of naming a Prime Minister without any reference to the election results, choosing a premier not from the largest party, but a technocrat without any political affiliation.

Morocco stands apart from many of its neighbours in that it has a relatively well-established history of multi-party politics, dating back to the 1940s. In the years since independence the palace has often cracked down on political parties, but unlike other authoritarian governments in the region, it has never banned them outright or attempted to create a single party system (Ottaway and Hamzawy 2007). However, although a number of Morocco's parties have become entrenched in the political landscape, notably the Istiqlal (Independence) party and the socialist Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP), few of these currently offer a well-organised challenge to the regime. By aligning themselves with the monarchy, these parties have guaranteed their continued inclusion in government. But the trade-off has been a significant loss of popular legitimacy and support to the Islamist parties, which are widely acknowledged as having greater credibility as opposition movements and as being much more effective at delivering social services on a local level.

Political Islamist movements gained support in Morocco from the late 1960s, both as an alternative to nationalist, leftist and secular parties and in response to the failures of the regime to deliver development, jobs and justice to the population. This context created a favourable recruiting ground for those espousing more overtly religious rather than secular solutions to the country's problems. To shore up his own position and to weaken his secular opponents, the growth of political Islamist movements was actually encouraged by King Hassan II in the 1960s. Like other rulers in the MENA region, he judged – erroneously, as it turned out – that Islamist forces would be easier to co-opt and that they would serve as a useful counterweight to the Nasserites and the leftist parties. These combined factors have contributed to the growth of political Islam in Morocco over the last few decades, although some of the implications of these developments were not fully manifest until the 1990s.

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4. This is a rather imprecise term that is often used to describe 'an elite of palace retainers, regional and provincial administrators, and military officers, connected to [the regime] by entrenched patronage networks' (Ottaway and Riley 2006: 4).

## The Party of Justice and Development

The first organised political Islamist group in Morocco was the al-Shabiba al-Islamiyya (Islamic Youth Association), which was founded in 1969 by Abdelkrim Moutti, a leader of the National Teachers Union. This movement attracted a large following in the early 1970s, particularly among teachers and students. The group's stated aims included the 'moralisation' of society, the 'Arabisation' of education and the implementation of Islamic law (Howe 2005). But in the mid-1970s the movement split after its leader was implicated in the assassination of a high-profile politician and was forced into exile abroad.

Weakened by Moutti's departure, by a regime clampdown and by internal conflicts, the Association broke up into several factions. From the early 1980s the main successor group chose to adopt a less confrontational approach towards the government. This group, the Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyya (a different group from the Egyptians of the same name), sought to become a legitimate participant in Moroccan politics. However, it took a further ten years and a change in name that omitted any reference to Islam (Al-Islah wal-Tajdid) before the king chose to recognise the group as a legitimate association. The movement tried a variety of ways to engage in the political process, including an unsuccessful attempt to join the secular Istiqlal party.

In 1996, Al-Islah wal-Tajdid joined a small party, the Mouvement Populaire Démocratique et Constitutionnel (MPDC). Through this, Al-Islah was able to take over the party and put forward candidates in the 1997 elections, winning nine seats in the Parliament. In 1998, the MPDC changed its name, becoming the Party of Justice and Development. Al-Islah, following a merger with another smaller Islamist party, also changed its name to Al-Tawhid wal-Islah (Unity and Reform).

Today, these names and the formal separation persist. The PJD acts as a political party that stands in local and national elections while Al-Tawhid serves as the religious movement that engages in broader social and proselytising activities (Tamam 2007). In this emphasis on achieving change through political participation, the PJD is quite different from Morocco's other major Islamist movement, Al-Adl wal-Ihsan.

## Al-Adl wal-Ihsan

Al-Adl wal-Ihsan is thought to have around 30,000 registered members and a further 140,000 followers, but despite its popularity it is still formally banned as a political party. The charismatic Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine launched the movement in 1974 by sending an open letter to Hassan II that condemned his arrogation of religious authority in Morocco. Since this time, he has preached a message of non-violent opposition to the king, undeterred by prolonged periods of imprisonment and house arrest. While Mohammed VI freed Yassine in 2000, he continues to criticise the king and to call for far-reaching changes in Moroccan society. His daughter Nadia also serves as an unofficial spokesperson for the movement, and frequently comments on the illegitimacy of the Moroccan political system at domestic rallies and international conferences.

Although Al-Adl wal-Ihsan and the PJD are sometimes grouped together under the label of 'Islamist opposition' in Morocco, the two movements are organisationally and ideologically distinct in a number of important ways.

First, while the PJD has accepted the king's authority as the spiritual and temporal head of the country as a precondition for gaining access to the political process, Al-Adl rejects this position. Sheikh Yassine has consistently argued that Islam should define the powers and prerogatives of the monarch and as such has refused to participate in elections or the government. The movement has also strongly censured the king for using Islam to serve his own interests and maintain monarchical control rather than for the benefit of Morocco's people.

Second, as noted in the context of reforms to the *mudawana*, the PJD has demonstrated a willingness to compromise when faced with political issues that might appear to conflict with its interpretation of Islamic values. By contrast, Al Adl condemns any secular initiative aimed at separating religion and politics, and advocates the creation of an 'Islamic democracy'.

Third, while the PJD has adopted the characteristics and language of a modern political party, Al Adl is built around the central figure of Sheikh Yassine and its doctrine draws heavily on mystical *Sufi* influences. This often makes it difficult for outsiders to get a clear sense of what the movement stands for and what it hopes to achieve.

### **The PJD as a political actor**

In political statements, the PJD has affirmed its acceptance of the doctrinal and constitutional legitimacy of the monarchy's religious authority. It does not call for the creation of an Islamic state, but describes itself instead as a national political party with an 'Islamic frame of reference'. This vague terminology concerns some critics, who argue that many Islamist parties have adopted the language of democracy in a bid for legitimacy, but that their ideological positions are ultimately incompatible with the practices of democracy (Pipes 2000).

It is true that the PJD has often prioritised conservative religious issues in its public activism. In 2004, the party initially campaigned against Mohammed VI's proposed changes to the *mudawana*, which would raise the marriage age from 15 to 18, give women the right to divorce by mutual consent, put curbs on the practice of polygamy, limit the ability of men to ask for divorce unilaterally and substitute a wife's duty of obedience with the concept of joint responsibility (Ottaway and Riley 2006). Hardline members of the party were unhappy with these reforms, which they believed would be harmful to traditional concepts of family life. However, the PJD ultimately accepted the revisions to the social code on the grounds that they were the outcome of a democratic process, indicating its willingness to accept even those compromises that might appear to conflict with its values as an Islamic movement.

The PJD has further demonstrated its commitment to democratic procedures in the way that it organises itself as a party. In contrast to its 'secular' counterparts, who have been co-opted by the regime and are able to benefit from the patronage system in place in Morocco, it must rely on the strength of its ideological message and political platform to attract votes. As a result, the party has prioritised internal accountability and efficiency, and PJD deputies must adhere to an internal code of ethics that requires them to attend plenary and committee sessions, draft amendments, make legislative proposals and seek to hold parliament to account by asking oral questions. This approach has enabled the party to build up a strong organisational base and considerable popular support across the country. It has also benefited from its decision to focus on more popular and less overtly religious issues such as anti-corruption, judicial reform and political renewal (see Hamzawy 2008).

The value of this strategy was apparent during the 2002 parliamentary elections, when the PJD limited the number of districts in which it stood (a decision that the party was pressured to make by the palace), but where it still managed to win 42 of the 325 seats, establishing itself as the third largest national party after Istiqlal and the USFP.

There was a widespread expectation that the PJD would make similarly strong gains in the 2007 parliamentary elections, with some observers predicting that it would win enough seats to effectively control the parliament. In the event, the party only managed to add four seats to its previous tally, winning 46 to Istiqlal's 52.

Al Adl wal Ihsan, which has long criticised the PJD for its decision to participate in the flawed political system, suggested that its failure to receive a higher proportion of the 2007 vote reflected the party's lack of legitimacy among the country's disenfranchised Islamist constituencies – a charge which may well have some validity (Hamzawy 2008). But the PJD's surprising defeat was also a verdict on the general state of Moroccan politics. Despite

Mohammed VI's early promises to work towards democratisation and social and economic reform, Morocco remains plagued by underemployment and persistent poverty. Increasingly disillusioned by the failure of successive governments to influence the direction or content of policy, the Moroccan public appears to have lost faith in the ballot box as an instrument of political change. Voter turnout was a paltry 37 per cent in the 2007 elections, compared with 51 per cent in 2002 and 58 per cent in 1997.

Encouragingly, the PJD does not seem to have given up on its strategy of political participation in reaction to this defeat. Instead, it has intensified its focus on demanding real constitutional reforms and putting an end to electoral corruption (Al-Khalfi 2008). And in July 2008, Abdelillah Benkirane was elected as the new Secretary-General of the party, replacing Saad Eddine El-Othmani, who had been expected to win another term comfortably. This example of a transparent and peaceful transfer of power has challenged those who believe that Islamist parties only pay lip service to democracy as a means of achieving power, and reflects the PJD's ambition to serve as a 'model for respectable Islamism' (Economist Intelligence Unit 2008).

### Radical Islamism in Morocco

There are other politicised Islamic forces in Morocco: radical Islamists that advocate and practise violence and terror. From the early 1990s onwards, a number of radical imams took advantage of the more liberal atmosphere in the country to espouse hard-line and often anti-Semitic views. A particularly aggressive *fatwa* was issued just one week after the attack on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon in September 2001.

In this period a number of violent attacks were also linked to religious extremists. In 2002, the Moroccan security forces uncovered an Al-Qaeda network in Casablanca. This group was alleged to have been planning attacks against American naval vessels in the Straits of Gibraltar, and on popular Moroccan tourist destinations. A few weeks later, the authorities also made public their discovery of a clandestine network of Islamic extremists who were implicated in violence and killings.

But it was the events of 16 May 2003 that shattered the notion that Morocco was immune to the violence that affects other parts of the region: 14 Moroccan suicide bombers attacked foreign and Jewish targets in Casablanca, killing 45 people. This experience was profoundly shocking for most ordinary Moroccans. It was compounded a year later when a major terrorist attack took place in Madrid, killing 191 people and wounding 1,800. The investigation by the Spanish police and intelligence agencies revealed that it was primarily Moroccans that were implicated in the planning and execution of the bombings (Howe 2005).

Despite the government crackdown that followed these events, radical Islamism continues to find an outlet in Morocco. In March 2007, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a Casablanca Internet café in what appeared to be an isolated incident. Yet investigations uncovered a larger alleged terrorist operation to target tourist sites across the country. In April 2007, four suspects in this plot were confronted by the police. One was shot dead and the remaining three detonated explosive belts to avoid capture, killing a policeman and injuring 21 civilians. A fortnight later, another two individuals blew themselves up outside the US Consulate and Language Center in Casablanca.

These sporadic acts of terrorism have impacted negatively on more moderate groups like the PJD, who fear being tarred with the same brush as the radicals. Indeed, thousands of Islamists were rounded up and arrested in the aftermath of the Casablanca bombings, and a number of politicians from the pro-government parties called for the PJD to be dismantled (Hamzawy 2008). The party survived this public smear campaign, but it was forced to tone down its religious rhetoric and accept the passage of draconian anti-terrorism laws that greatly rolled back civil liberties and political freedoms.

## 4. Political Islam in Jordan

Jordan is often held up by western leaders as an example of a country in the MENA region that is successfully moving towards democratic reform. However, while the current king, Abdullah II, has certainly demonstrated an enthusiasm for modernisation, he has followed in his father's footsteps by prioritising economic liberalisation over more deep-seated political change. Some modest steps have been taken in this direction, such as the establishment in 2002 of the quasi-independent National Centre for Human Rights and the creation in 2003 of a Ministry for Political Development. But the value of these measures has been limited by a series of laws and decrees that have further shrunk the political space open to opposition parties, the press, non-governmental organisations and professional associations.

Since 1947, Jordan has had a bicameral legislature, with a directly elected lower house (the Majlis al-Nuwwab, or Chamber of Deputies) and a royally appointed upper house (the Majlis al-A'yan, or Senate). But these structures have done little to check the absolute authority of the king. The 1952 constitution established the monarch's immunity from any liability or responsibility, and gave him sweeping rights to promulgate and ratify laws and to appoint and dismiss the prime minister, the cabinet and the senate at will. It also allowed the king to dissolve parliament, to veto legislation and to issue 'temporary laws' in times of emergency without the approval of the government.

King Hussein (1952–1999) made liberal use of these powers throughout his reign, often resorting to martial law to quell violent popular uprisings and preserve the stability of Jordan's fragile political system. Between 1957 and 1992, political parties were banned, full elections were suspended, and the legislative functions of the lower house of parliament were severely circumscribed, with a succession of appointed governments existing primarily to give a veneer of democratic legitimacy to decisions made by the king.

Elections have been held on a sporadic basis since the early 1990s but are not generally considered to have been free or fair. There has also been some controversy over the imposition of the 'one person, one vote' law in 1993. Previously, voters had been able to cast as many votes as there were candidates in their constituency, thereby allowing them to vote along tribal or family lines as well as for more 'ideological' candidates such as the Islamists (George 2005). However, under the new system each individual could only cast one vote. While not undemocratic, these changes ensured that rural and traditionally pro-regime constituents who could count on support from extensive family networks did disproportionately well, largely at the expense of Islamist and other, secular, parties based in urban areas.

More than 30 parties have been created since King Hussein's decision to legalise political parties in 1992, but most of these lack dynamism and popular appeal and have failed to significantly influence the direction of policy. An exception to this general picture of malaise comes from Jordan's political Islamists, who are much better organised than their secular counterparts. Of these groups, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front, are the most prominent examples of non-violent Islamism in Jordan.

### **The Muslim Brotherhood**

The first organised Islamist group in Jordan was the Muslim Brotherhood – an offshoot of the religious reform movement that emerged in Egypt under the leadership of Hassan al-Banna in the late 1920s. The political influence of this organisation quickly spread beyond Egypt, with branches being set up in other Muslim countries, including Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Although these groups share a number of ideological similarities, they are organisationally distinct, and have taken different approaches to issues of political and social reform.

In Jordan, the interaction between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood has been relatively civil, with both sides recognising the mutual advantages to be derived from



cultivating a cooperative relationship. Although the government has often taken action against individual Brotherhood members, it has never attempted to ban the group outright (as has been the case in Egypt and Syria), judging that its popularity has served to check the power of more radical and confrontational movements. For its part, although the Muslim Brotherhood has often disagreed with government policies, it has refrained from challenging the legitimacy of the Hashemite monarchy and has chosen to express its dissatisfaction through political opposition rather than violent activism.

Since obtaining legal status as a charity in 1945, the Brotherhood has played an important role in Jordan's social and political development. A number of its members were offered ministerial positions in the first post-independence government, and in 1953, the movement was successful in its application to assume a quasi-political role as a 'comprehensive and general Islamic committee' (Wiktorowicz 2001: 96). This allowed the movement to spread its message of Islamic renewal and social morality in mosques and public places without too much interference from the authorities, even during a general crackdown on political activity that took place in the 1950s and 60s.

Throughout this period the Muslim Brotherhood consolidated its position through a range of social and charitable activities, and particularly through the creation of an extensive civil society network. The most prominent of these non-governmental organisations was the Islamic Center Society, which was established in 1965 and has since served as the main charitable arm of the Muslim Brotherhood.

However, the Brotherhood has not limited itself to charitable activism. During the brief political opening in Jordan at the end of the 1980s, it began to engage much more directly in formal politics. Individual members of the organisation campaigned in the 1989 elections, running on the slogan 'Islam is the solution'. Twenty Brotherhood officials and a further 12 independent Islamist candidates won parliamentary seats, gaining control of nearly half of the lower house. But its shift into the formal political arena prompted a great deal of internal discussion about what the most appropriate goals and activities of the movement should be. Some members feared that participation in political life would force them to make compromises on their Islamic values and goals. But the debate was won by those who believed that the creation of a political party would allow the Brotherhood to significantly expand its influence in society. In 1992, this led to the establishment of the Islamic Action Front party.

### **The Islamic Action Front**

Although the Islamic Action Front was supposed to act as an 'umbrella' party that would include Muslim Brotherhood members and independent Islamists alike, it has essentially become the political wing of the Brotherhood. Most members of the founding committee of the IAF were drawn from the Brotherhood, and their ideas have profoundly influenced the structure and behaviour of the party. Even now, the Muslim Brotherhood continues to be informally involved in determining the leader of the party, and the IAF often defers to its parent organisation on important political questions.

The Islamic Action Front differs from a number of other Islamist parties in the region in that it does not always speak with a common political voice (even though members ultimately respect the decisions reached by the party's leadership). There is a broad consensus within the IAF that the party's priority should be to promote the 'Islamicisation' of Jordanian society. However, there are substantial disagreements between different ideological groupings about how this goal should be achieved. There are also those who remain ambivalent about the idea of participating in politics at all, and would prefer the IAF to concentrate its efforts on questions of religious education and further application of *Shari'a* law.

Differences of opinion within the party tend to focus on three key political issues: cooperation with the Jordanian regime, the role of Islam in politics and the Palestinian

question. These factions have usually been classified as either ‘hawkish’ or ‘dovish’ but as Nathan Brown notes, the party does not divide easily into two distinct camps. Rather, ‘there are a variety of intermediate positions and significant differences even among like-minded groups about how salient each issue is’ (Brown 2006: 8). Those on the more moderate end of the spectrum tend to favour working pragmatically within and alongside the government to promote their vision of political reform, even if this means settling for a slower pace of change. Dovish groups are also willing to accept a gradual move towards the further implementation of Islamic values in Jordanian society. However, they are opposed by more hard-line individuals who refuse to compromise on any of their Islamic principles for the sake of building a good relationship with the regime.

Given the overrepresentation of Jordanian Palestinians in the party, most members of the IAF are united in their support for the Palestinian cause and in their rejection of the peace treaty with Israel. But again, there is a divergence between moderate and conservative groups about how this issue should be addressed. For example, a former leader of the IAF, Zaki Said, claimed that although he did not believe that the peace treaty with Israel was in Jordan’s interests, if the IAF ever won a majority in government the party would ‘move cautiously’ before overturning it outright, and would put the question to a referendum (Williams 2006). Other prominent IAF members are less flexible on this point. Many of these work in close coordination with Hamas, and support more extreme forms of resistance against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. It is important to note in this context that the IAF has consistently rejected the use of violence to achieve its domestic political goals, although critics worry that the growing influence of the party’s radical wing might change this situation in the future.

### **The IAF as a political actor**

To a certain extent, the struggles between different wings of the Islamic Action Front over ideology and strategy have limited its ability to develop a coherent political programme with appeal to a broad cross-section of Jordanian society. However, it is not just internal weaknesses that have prevented the IAF from increasing its representation within the Jordanian political system. As discussed above, electoral rules in Jordan are designed to limit Islamist gains in parliamentary elections. King Abdullah II has also made clear his belief that the Islamists do not share his vision of Jordan’s development path, and his reluctance to give them a larger stake in political decision-making. This has given the IAF little incentive to resolve the ambiguities in its political platform.

Although the IAF joined many other parties in boycotting the 1997 parliamentary elections as a protest against the ‘one person, one vote’ electoral system and the series of restrictive ‘temporary laws’ issued by the government in the mid-1990s, most members of the organisation appear to have reached the conclusion that the benefits of participating in politics outweigh the costs. But the party has had to be extremely pragmatic and calculated in its approach in order to avoid further crackdowns by the regime. To this end, the IAF has deliberately limited the number of candidates that it has put forward for parliamentary and municipal elections, judging that this strategy will give it some seats and display its popularity without splitting its vote or incurring the hostility of the regime. During the 2003 elections for the Chamber of Deputies, it ran just 30 candidates, winning 17 out of 110 seats.

Although the IAF is unable to exert much influence on Jordan’s policymaking structures, it has used its position as the largest single bloc in parliament to raise the profile of a number of issues that it judges to be particularly important. Given the close links of many of its members to Hamas, the Palestinian question has inevitably been a focal point of its platform. Religious and cultural issues have also featured prominently in the party’s public rhetoric. But IAF deputies have mounted robust challenges to the government on more general local and national concerns, such as corruption, poverty, widespread unemployment and the need to make the political system more representative and accountable (Brown 2006).



The Jordanian regime's lack of progress on these issues has been a source of considerable frustration for the Islamic Action Front, and in July 2007 the party made a last-minute withdrawal from municipal elections, accusing the government of fraud and election-rigging. It was widely expected that it would also boycott parliamentary elections in November 2007, but after a period of heated debate the party decided to field 22 candidates. Only six of these won parliamentary seats, representing the IAF's worst electoral performance since the legalisation of politics in the early 1990s. This prompted a significant realignment of internal party politics and in May 2008 a hardline figure within the movement, Hammam Sa'id, was elected as the IAF's General Guide.

Unexpectedly, this has not led to a significant breakdown in relations between the IAF and the government. On the contrary, Sa'id has proved willing to tone down the recent stridency in the party's statements and to work more constructively with the government on a range of domestic political issues. There has also been a greater convergence between both sides on the question of engagement with Hamas, with the IAF having helped to facilitate an opening of contacts between the Jordanian government and the Palestinian resistance movement in Gaza (Hamid 2008).

This recent rapprochement may be a temporary marriage of convenience, and the regime remains keen to limit the long-term involvement of the IAF in government and in governance. But it would do well to further open up the space for participation available to the mainstream Islamist parties, which are the most popular organised opposition forces in Jordan. There is a risk that if it does not, individuals and groups espousing more radical solutions to Jordan's problems will become increasingly attractive to those members of the population who are disillusioned with politics and angry about domestic economic conditions and regional crises.

### **Radical Islamism in Jordan**

Although the Islamic Action Front and other non-violent Islamist parties, such as the Jordanian Wasat (Centre) Party, have stated their commitment to working within existing institutional structures to achieve their goals, there are other politicised Islamic forces in Jordan that have not been prepared to take such an accommodating approach. These include *Salafi* activists, who refuse to participate in formal politics, as well as more radical jihadists who condemn the IAF for its willingness to compromise with a non-Islamic regime and who advocate the use of violence to achieve their goals (Brown 2006).

Opposition to the monarchy's policy of normalisation with Israel and its close relationship with the West has intensified over the past few years, exacerbated by the worsening situations in Iraq and Palestine. Until 2005, Jordan was spared the kind of jihadi activism and bombings seen so frequently in these states and others such as Egypt. However, horrific suicide attacks in three hotels in Amman in November 2005 that appeared to have been orchestrated by Abu Mus'ab al Zarqawi (a Jordanian-born militant who acted as a commander of Al-Qaeda in Iraq until his death in 2006) demonstrated that Jordan was not immune from extremism.

To suppress the growth of these radical ideologies in Jordan, the government has adopted an increasingly security-based approach to dissent. After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the outbreak of war in Iraq, the General Intelligence Department (GID) arrested hundreds of Islamists on the suspicion of collaboration with Al-Qaeda, and a number of those taken into custody reported their experiences of beatings and torture. A similar crackdown followed the Amman hotel bombings. But these heavy-handed tactics are unlikely to discourage popular protest, and may serve to undercut the appeal of more moderate Islamist forces in Jordan.

## 5. Western policy in the MENA region

Before drawing any conclusions about what the rising popularity and influence of non-violent Islamist parties might mean for western policymakers, it is necessary to assess the legacy of past policies towards the Middle East and North Africa. The scope of this paper does not permit a comprehensive analysis of all western policies in the MENA region but it does seek to highlight some of the most relevant initiatives, including policies on promoting political reform, economic development and the Middle East Peace Process. It also touches briefly on European and North American policies towards Iraq and Iran, recognising that these have profoundly shaped the current regional political context.

This chapter looks at the broad MENA strategies pursued by the European Union, the UK and the US, while Chapter 6 considers the extent to which these actors have engaged with Islamists, either formally or informally.

### European Union policy

The EU has a clear interest in helping to foster security and prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa. Conflict in this region has several direct consequences for European states and societies, including increased flows of political refugees, the proliferation of transnational criminal networks, a heightened risk of terrorist attacks and the disruption of critical energy supplies. Yet if managed well, cooperation between Europe and MENA countries promises considerable economic and social benefits for both regions. Recognition of this has led the EU to strive for greater policy coherence towards the Middle East in recent years.

On the security front, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) pillar of the EU has contributed to peacebuilding initiatives in the region, for example, through the UNIFIL II mission in Lebanon and the EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS) (see Council of the European Union 2009). The EU also acts in concert with other international organisations and states on certain issues, most notably through its participation in the Middle East 'Quartet' of the EU, UN, Russia and the US that exists to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Meanwhile, economic and political development and cooperation in the MENA region has been promoted through the establishment of the 'Union for the Mediterranean' (formerly the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or EMP) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

However, the EU has had difficulty delivering on many of these objectives. In part, this is a reflection of the difficulties involved in achieving consensus between EU member states on controversial political issues. The 27 states that make up the newly enlarged EU have competing interests and attitudes in relation to the Middle East and North Africa, which has often resulted in policy being reduced to the 'lowest common denominator' of what can be agreed on. Efforts to design a coherent set of policies towards the region have also been complicated by the structure of the EU, which has a six-month rotating presidency. While the challenges and opportunities in the MENA region are high on the priority list of most EU states, there are differences of opinion about how to approach questions of cooperation, conflict resolution and political and economic development, with the recent haggling over the question of replacing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership with a new 'Mediterranean Union' being just one example of this (The Economist 2008).

### Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), otherwise known as the Barcelona Process, was borne of an ambitious objective to transform the Mediterranean region through the development of a range of political, economic, social and cultural partnerships. Concerned about overwhelming European focus on the newly-liberated states of Central and Eastern Europe following the end of the Cold War, France and Spain were both particularly keen to rebalance attention on achieving closer integration of the Mediterranean region, key to both

of their economic and foreign policy interests. On the part of the Middle Eastern and North African states around the Mediterranean Sea, there was also a strong interest in concluding agreements that would give them preferential access to coveted European markets.

To this end, the EMP was launched at a meeting of Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers in Barcelona in 1995.<sup>5</sup> The objectives of this programme were threefold:

- Enhancing political and security dialogue so as to establish a common area of peace and stability
- Expanding economic and financial cooperation and working towards the creation of a regional free trade area
- Strengthening dialogue and exchange in order to promote understanding between different cultures. (European Union 1995)

These goals were to be achieved through a mixture of regional summits and activity programmes, and more targeted bilateral agreements between the EU and its Mediterranean partner states.

In spite of its admirable intentions, commentators generally agree that the EMP has struggled to make good on its promises of regional regeneration and reform. Strategic developments beyond the EU's control are partially responsible for this. The EMP was launched during a rare moment of political optimism in the MENA region – shortly after the conclusion of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) – and was therefore greatly weakened by the subsequent stagnation and collapse of the Middle East Peace Process in the late 1990s (Edwards 2008). The events of September 2001 and terrorist attacks in Madrid and London have also had the unfortunate effect of securitising the debate about Europe's relationship with its neighbours, forcing the EU to call for greater openness and cooperation while simultaneously attempting to strengthen its borders and protect itself from terrorism.

However, the EMP's failure to promote closer cooperation between states to the north and south of the Mediterranean Sea also reflects fundamental differences of opinion both between and within its member states about the purpose of the initiative that have been present since its creation. Although designed as an association of equals, some EU states clearly wanted to play independent leadership roles in their own right. For example, then-President Jacques Chirac commented at the time that France did not want to leave the direction of EMP policy in the hands of Europe as a whole, but rather was keen to serve as 'the principal architect of this "bridge" between the opposite shores of the Mediterranean' (referenced in Edwards 2008: 57). The UK's historical ties to the region have also made it reluctant to relinquish its independent policies in relation to particular Middle Eastern and North African states and adopt a pan-European approach.

Meanwhile, the attitude of some of the more authoritarian MENA regimes over the past decade has significantly undermined the EMP's credibility and effectiveness. Many have paid lip service to the Barcelona Declaration's requirement that States Parties work to develop the rule of law and democracy in their political systems and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, but few have made genuine or consistent efforts on this front. Indeed, some states have used the deteriorating security situation in the region as a pretext for cracking down on internal dissent while simultaneously requesting more support from the EU. For example, Tunisia and Egypt were granted considerable increases in MEDA aid<sup>6</sup> during the latter half of the 1990s, even as the authorities in both countries were busy limiting what political liberties did exist (Youngs 2005).

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5. At the outset, the EMP included the 15 (pre-enlargement) EU member states and Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

6. The MEDA programme is the main financial instrument of the EU for the implementation of the EMP.

The EMP should not be regarded as an unmitigated disaster. It did make progress on many of its commitments concerning the promotion of cultural understanding between EU states and non-EU Mediterranean states, notably in the creation of forums like the Ana Lindh Euromed Foundation and the Dialogue on Cultures and Civilizations. Nevertheless, it was clear by the time of the EMP's tenth anniversary in 2005 that these 'softer' activities, intending to create a conducive environment for the spread of democracy and economic growth throughout the region, had not gone far enough, and that a new approach was required.

### **Union for the Mediterranean**

At a meeting of the Heads of State and Government at the Summit for the Mediterranean held in Paris on 13 July 2008, the EMP was officially re-launched as the 'Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean'. This development was the outcome of intensive French diplomacy over the course of 2007 and 2008, fuelled by President Nicolas Sarkozy's conviction that the Mediterranean was the region 'where everything is being played out' and where it was therefore imperative for persistent hatreds to be overcome in order 'to make space for a great dream of peace and civilization' (Bennhold 2007). Yet this grand rhetoric also concealed more opportunistic political considerations on the part of the new French president, who has been consistently opposed to the idea of full Turkish membership of the EU and may have calculated that giving Turkey a prominent role in a new Mediterranean Union would satisfy its demands for inclusion.

As originally envisaged by Sarkozy, the Mediterranean Union was to include only those states with a Mediterranean coastline, namely: Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. A council of member states would hold regular summit meetings under a rotating co-presidency, and the focus of activities would be developing stronger regional cooperation mechanisms in the fields of security, energy, counter-terrorism and immigration, all underpinned by a new trade agreement and the creation of a Mediterranean Investment Bank.

While most EU members and non-EU Mediterranean partner states were in broad agreement with the stated aims and rationale of such an organisation, the early proposals faced considerable opposition from those who feared that this apparently 'new and improved EMP' would do much to advance French interests, but rather less to develop the relationship between Europe and its Mediterranean neighbours. German Chancellor Angela Merkel was particularly outspoken in her criticism, arguing that any consortium that did not include all EU countries would run the risk of undermining European ideals of a common foreign policy. Implicit in this censure was a strong aversion to the idea of using funding from the common EU pool – to which Germany is the largest single contributor – for projects which would only benefit some member states. Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul was equally dismissive of Sarkozy's plans, emphasising that Turkish involvement in a Mediterranean Union could not be regarded as a substitute for the continuation of accession talks.

The scope of the Union for the Mediterranean that has emerged from this negotiation process is therefore much less ambitious than its architects had hoped for.<sup>7</sup> Its provisions for a rotating co-presidency and a permanent secretariat staffed by officials from all of its member countries do set it apart from the EMP (see European Commission 2008) but it remains unclear whether this new initiative will be significantly more effective than its predecessor, especially since the six areas identified as immediate priorities for the Union are largely technical in nature.

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7. The Union for the Mediterranean now includes all 27 EU member states, 16 partner states from the Southern Mediterranean and the Middle East (Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey) and one observer state (Libya).

Initial projects include:

- Cleaning up of the Mediterranean Sea
- Creation of maritime and land highways
- Initiatives to combat natural and man-made disasters
- A Mediterranean solar energy plan
- Inauguration of the Euro-Mediterranean University in Slovenia
- A Mediterranean Business Development Initiative that focuses on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. (European Commission 2009a)

These are worthy projects, to be sure, but hardly bold enough in terms of driving forward political reform processes in the region.

The cohesion of the Union for the Mediterranean has also been called into serious question as a result of the Gaza-Israel war in December 2008 and January 2009. Following the end of hostilities, Egypt reportedly called for a suspension of all future meetings of the Union in light of widespread unwillingness on the part of regimes in the Middle East and North Africa to participate in any forum that included Israel. Concerted French diplomacy appears to have smoothed over this early crisis, but the episode indicates the fault lines that will continue to plague efforts to unite the EU and its partners in the MENA region if they are not addressed as a matter of urgency.

### **European Neighbourhood Policy**

Following the enlargement of the EU in 2004, the European Neighbourhood Policy was established as a complement to the Barcelona Process. Although the policy was intended to build stronger political and economic relationships with the EU's new neighbours, it was also driven by the strong sense on the part of some member states that further arrangements were needed to strengthen and secure the EU's vastly expanded borders.

While sharing many of the EMP's guiding principles and objectives, the ENP was designed to offer EU partner countries more tailored incentives to implement political, economic and social reforms through the negotiation of bilateral Association Agreements and Action Plans. According to Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations, the ENP would give each neighbour country the chance to choose its own path towards engagement with Europe (European Commission 2009b).

Since 2004, the EU has concluded ENP Action Plans with 12 of its neighbours that are ineligible for full membership: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Moldova, Morocco, the occupied Palestinian territories, Tunisia and Ukraine. Backed by approximately €12 billion in European Commission funding for the period 2007–2013, each Action Plan outlines a set of reforms that the partner country agrees to work towards in return for a variety of inducements, including financial and technical support, the prospect of participating more fully in a range of EU institutions and programmes, and enhanced access to the EU's single market.

The exact reform programme for each partner country varies in response to the specific challenges they face. However, common themes do run across a number of the Action Plans, including cooperation in the fight against terrorism, action to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and joint efforts to combat illegal migration flows.

Objectives relating to democratisation and political reform are also included in each Action Plan, although these are frequently described in unhelpfully vague terms. For example, Jordan's ENP Action Plan requires the country to 'take forward a national dialogue on democracy and political life within the framework of the national political development plan', but fails to provide a clear explanation of what this means in practice (European Commission

2005). Funding for democracy and governance-related reform projects has tended to account for a very small percentage of ENP aid, with the balance of financial resources being directed into programmes relating to economic infrastructure and institutions.

To date, the EU has proved reluctant to withhold funds from countries that renege on their obligations relating to political reform, preferring instead to rely on a system of 'positive conditionality' and reward. This likely accounts for the fact that Morocco and Egypt are two of the largest beneficiaries of the funding that is channelled through the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI), even though both countries continue to face significant challenges in terms of their levels of political freedom and openness and their respect for human rights (for information on the allocation of ENPI funds, see European Commission 2007a).

However, this approach does not seem to have been particularly successful in achieving its desired goals. Without the prospect of full EU membership or significant financial compensation to motivate them, few of the MENA countries involved in the ENP programme have demonstrated much enthusiasm for engaging in meaningful reform of their political systems.

The EU has recognised some of the ENP's shortcomings on this front. In April 2008 a first set of reports on the performance of each ENP partner country conceded that not enough progress had been made across the board in relation to political governance and identified this as a priority for the future. However, many commentators still take a rather dim view of the EU's commitment to promoting democracy in its neighbourhood, noting that the expansion of security and economic relations continues to take precedence over support for genuine political reform (Youngs 2008).

### **The EU and the Middle East Peace Process**

European states have become increasingly engaged in conflict resolution efforts in the Middle East in recent years, as the direct security and economic implications of regional conflagration for Europe have become more apparent. So far the EU has focused on achieving a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which it views as being critical to the stability of the MENA region as a whole. To this end it has provided support for Palestinian institutions and state-building projects, attempted to address the wider conflict between Israel and its neighbours and worked to create a more peaceful and prosperous regional environment through the aforementioned Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and European Neighbourhood Policy (Asseburg 2009). However, it is only very recently that Europe has moved away from its traditional role as the United States' junior partner in this field.

After the Madrid peace talks in 1991, the EU became heavily involved in the Middle East Peace Process, providing considerable monetary and technical support to both the Regional Economic Development Working Group<sup>8</sup> and to the United Nations Refugee and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA). It has also supported a variety of confidence-building civil society initiatives between Israeli and Palestinian citizens. Yet while these activities are inherently political in nature, predicated as they are on the goal of developing a viable Palestinian state that can take its place in the international community alongside Israel, the EU has been surprisingly reluctant to involve itself at the sharp end of peace negotiations, preferring to leave this to the United States (Asseburg 2009).

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8. The Regional Economic Development Working Group was established in 1992 to address the issues of infrastructure, trade, finance and tourism development in the Middle East, including the West Bank and Gaza (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2000).



This attitude has also been visible in relation to Europe's participation in the so-called Quartet on the Middle East, which coordinates UN, EU, US and Russian policy on the peace process and was responsible for developing the 2003 'road map' that has served as a plan for Palestinian sovereignty. Since 2007, the Quartet's primary objective has been to buttress the US-initiated 'Annapolis Process', which seeks to lay the groundwork for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a sustained process of political dialogue and economic support for Palestinian state-building.

Again, the EU has been particularly active on the financial front, and in December 2007 the European Commission co-chaired a donors' conference in Paris that generated over €5 billion in pledges to support the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan managed by the Palestinian Authority. European assistance accounted for almost a fifth of this total (including EC and bilateral member state contributions). Following the expiration of the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel in late 2008 and the subsequent war in Gaza, the EU announced a further pledge of €440 million in support of the Palestinian economy and the reconstruction of Gaza at a conference in Sharm El-Sheikh in March 2009 (European Commission 2009c). In theory, this economic clout gives the EU a good deal of leverage to bring to bear on the peace process. However, it has not made the most of this influence, deferring instead to the ambitious but flawed political strategy pursued by the US.

The conflict in Gaza during December 2008 and January 2009 exposed the serious limitations of the Annapolis framework as a tool capable of delivering a sustainable peace settlement in the region (Hanelt 2008). Too many key players were left out of the political dialogue from the outset, while economic aid channelled through the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank has failed to address the dire living conditions experienced by Palestinians living in Gaza. A new approach that takes into account the realities of power structures in the region is therefore urgently needed. The recent change of leadership in the US offers a valuable opportunity for a fundamental change in policies, and it must be hoped that the EU, working through the Quartet and the other regional cooperation mechanisms described above, will adopt a more proactive political strategy that makes better use of its considerable diplomatic and economic assets.

### **UK policy**

Current UK policy towards the Middle East and North Africa has been decisively shaped by its colonial history and by its 'special relationship' with the US, with the former accounting for the persistence of close ties between the UK government and a number of authoritarian regimes in the region, and the latter having drawn the British military into the US-led coalition operation in Iraq. Until very recently, this conflict was the focus of UK policy attention in the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> However, the government has a number of other strategic priorities in the region, including support for political and economic development and resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As one of the largest donor nations in the world, the UK has been a consistent supporter of development in the Middle East and North Africa, and delivers a significant amount of funding to this region through the Department for International Development (DFID) and other official government sources and through contributions to multilateral organisations such as the UN and the EU. Table 1 below shows the UK's overseas development assistance (ODA) expenditure in the MENA region over the past few years.

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9. The UK officially withdrew its military forces from Iraq in May 2009, although it will continue to support and train Iraqi security forces in Basra.

**Table 1. Overseas development assistance spent by the UK in the MENA region, 2003–2008**

Years	Total DFID bilateral programme (£000)	Aid from other UK official sources (£000)	Total bilateral gross public expenditure (£000)
2003/04	241,187	39,760	280,947
2004/05	84,113	384,010	468,123
2005/06	118,896	355,436	474,332
2006/07	104,638	42,536	147,174
2007/08	100,196	5,724	105,920

Note: These figures represent the sum total of UK aid to Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, the West Bank and Gaza (the Occupied Palestinian Territories) and Yemen.

Source: Department for International Development 2008

Reconstruction in Iraq accounts for a considerable proportion of this funding, particularly during the years 2004 to 2006. But DFID is also heavily engaged in Yemen, where it recently signed a Development Partnership Arrangement (DPA): the first 10-year DPA in the Middle East. And more than half of DFID's total programme funding in the MENA region is now concentrated in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, where it is working with the Palestinian Authority to improve the delivery of public services, to support refugees and to promote security sector reform and economic growth (DFID 2009).

This humanitarian and development assistance sits alongside the government's support for the political track of the peace process, where its stated position is that it favours a 'two state solution' to the conflict (based on 1967 borders), with Jerusalem serving as the joint capital of 'an Israel that is secure from attack and recognised by and at peace with its neighbours' and 'a democratic, viable and contiguous state of Palestine committed to live peacefully alongside Israel' (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2009).

However, this stance has not always prevented the government from being accused of partisanship in its approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with critics suggesting that UK leaders should have been much more vocal in criticising Israel during its summer war with Lebanon in 2006 and its offensive in Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009 (King 2006, Rayner 2009). The government has also come under fire for its close adherence to unpopular US policies in the MENA region since 2003, and for its reluctance to accept the idea that there may be causal links between UK foreign policy in the Middle East and radicalisation and terrorism both at home and abroad. In 2006, then Prime Minister Tony Blair argued in a speech to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council that an 'arc of extremism' was stretching across the Middle East and impacting with increasing force on countries far outside the region, but refuted claims that this development was related to western actions in Iraq (Blair 2006).

There are encouraging signs that this official stance is changing. Indeed, the most recent UK counter-terrorism strategy explicitly acknowledged the fact that the perception of British foreign policy is one of the factors driving violent extremism (Home Office 2009b). But there is still a considerable amount of work to be done to repair the UK's image in the Middle East and North Africa.

### US policy

Throughout the Cold War, support for Israel, the protection of stable energy supplies and the maintenance of good relationships with authoritarian regimes friendly to the West and hostile to the Soviet Union served as the broad objectives of US policy in the MENA region. The first two goals were unaffected by the collapse of Soviet communism at the end of the 1980s. But the altered regional political context in the post-Cold War environment did open up more space for US initiatives aimed at ameliorating the Arab-Israeli conflict. Diplomatic achievements of this period included the twin-track Madrid Peace Process launched in 1991,



and the Oslo Accords of 1993, which established a framework for direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

During the presidency of George W. Bush, core US interests in the MENA region did not change. However, the policies to deliver these goals and the political narrative that underpinned them did undergo a fundamental reorientation, particularly after the shocking events of 11 September 2001. While Presidents Bush Senior and Clinton had both regarded resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict as the key to creating a stable and peaceful Middle East, many in the 2001–08 Bush administration felt that this approach did not go far enough. In the post-9/11 period influential voices calling for a concerted effort to disrupt the activities of ‘spoiler’ states like Iraq, Iran and Syria found a receptive audience.

The outcome of this shift in thinking was the publication of a new National Security Strategy in 2002, which put forward a doctrine of pre-emptive military action against terrorists and rogue states that were believed to possess weapons of mass destruction (Dunne 2008). To mitigate the stark message sent by this change in policy, emphasis was simultaneously placed on supporting the spread of democracy and freedom around the world, and particularly in the Middle East.

This ‘Freedom Agenda’, as it came to be known, critiqued the willingness of western powers to ignore the pervasive political culture of authoritarianism and repression in the Middle East, and committed the US to mainstreaming promotion of democracy through all of its activities in the region. Undoubtedly, this doctrinal justification aimed to make the American-led invasion of Iraq more palatable to coalition partners and domestic constituencies, particularly after the failure to find evidence of an Iraqi programme of Weapons of Mass Destruction. But it did prompt a significant intensification of US democracy promotion efforts in the region between 2003 and 2006, including the expansion of existing programmes supporting political, economic and social reform<sup>10</sup>, as well as the creation of two new programmes: the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA).

MEPI was established in 2002 as an alternative to large-scale government-to-government aid policies. Taking on board the recommendations of that year’s Arab Human Development Report, it aimed to support non-governmental, academic and private sector groups working to promote political freedom, economic development, knowledge and capacity-building and women’s empowerment. MEPI has disbursed US\$530 million to more than 600 projects since its inception and despite a shaky start now stands out as one of the few success stories of US engagement on democracy promotion issues. With its focus on developing strong links between US embassies and civil society, its responsiveness to the needs and interests of citizens in the region through a programme of grant-tendering and its integration into policy planning mechanisms in Washington, it has become an effective tool of American foreign aid and diplomacy in the region (see Wittes and Masloski 2009).

Comparatively speaking, the BMENA programme has had far less of an impact. It was created under G-8 auspices in 2004 at the initiative of the US, and was intended to serve as a bridging mechanism for closer transatlantic cooperation on the question of MENA reform. However, its effectiveness was weakened from the outset by the opposition of Middle Eastern and North African leaders, many of whom believed that it was a covert attempt to impose foreign political models on the region by force. A lack of consensus between the EU and the US on BMENA’s structure and objectives has also diminished its standing, and it is

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10. In the US democracy promotion assistance is channelled primarily through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), an independent federal government agency that receives overall foreign policy guidance from the Secretary of State, as well as quasi-independent non-profit organisations like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the International Republican Institute (IRI).

now regarded as more of a talking shop than a process of dialogue capable of improving coordination of democracy promotion between western partners.

### **Policy in a post-Bush era**

Although US policy towards the Middle East and North Africa over the past eight years has been couched in terms of spreading democracy and prosperity, the outcomes could hardly be further from the stated intentions. The protracted and deeply divisive nature of the conflict in Iraq, the reviled rhetoric of the 'war on terror' and the human rights abuses perpetrated by members of the US military against captives in the Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo prisons have greatly damaged the United States' standing in the region. Emboldened by the collapse of Iraq, Iran has moved closer to achieving its goal of becoming the region's hegemon through expansion of its nuclear programme and its support for Hamas, Hezbollah, the Taliban and insurgent Iraqi Shi'a movements. Meanwhile, the Israeli-Palestinian crisis has worsened significantly, despite attempts to revive negotiations through the Annapolis process, and there have been few signs of genuine democratisation anywhere in the region.

The recent change in American leadership has raised hopes that this situation will improve, and while it is still too early to evaluate the long-term implications of President Obama's early actions in office with respect to the Middle East and North Africa, a clear shift in strategy has already been observed. During her first visit to the MENA region as Secretary of State in March 2009, Hillary Clinton spoke of the government's 'unshakable, durable, fundamental relationship and support for the State of Israel', suggesting that the US's traditional policy of unswerving support for Israel might not change (Clinton 2009).

However, Obama's policy statements in subsequent months have demonstrated his resolve to become a less uncritical friend to Israel. In a key policy speech delivered in Cairo this June, he affirmed his support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, demanding that all parties, including the US, make good on their promises in respect to delivering a sustainable peace. Unexpectedly, he also expressed clear opposition to the controversial Israeli settlement process in the West Bank, and called on Israel to 'live up to its obligation to ensure that Palestinians can live, and work, and develop their society' (BBC 2009d).

More broadly, this speech was an attempt to recalibrate relations between the US and the Muslim world and to dispel the notion that there is some kind of Manichean 'clash of civilisations' between the two. It built on earlier statements about the need to talk to all leaders in the region, whether they are friends or foes, and indeed Obama has already offered olive branches to Iran and Syria by asserting that if these countries 'are willing to unclench their fists, they will find an extended hand' from the US (BBC 2009b). Diplomatic contacts with Syria have subsequently been increased and in March 2009 Obama surprised many observers by broadcasting a recorded message for the Iranian people and leadership that called for 'new beginnings' in the relationship between the US and Iran, and claimed that the US Administration was 'now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us' (Reid 2009).

The political turmoil in Iran following the disputed presidential elections in June has not been conducive to this kind of dialogue, and it is clear that there are many within the US policymaking establishment who continue to share neoconservative concerns about regimes in Damascus and Tehran. Nevertheless, this renewed focus on improving US relations with traditional adversaries through diplomatic engagement is a positive development that should not be dismissed. The next chapter considers the prospects for a similar change in policy towards Islamist opposition movements in the region.

## 6. Western engagement with Islamist movements in the MENA region

North American and European policymakers have often been criticised for their tendency to treat political Islam as a monolithic and uniformly negative phenomenon, and for their failure to appreciate the role that non-violent Islamist parties might play in addressing political stagnation in the region. This charge is perhaps no longer as fair as it used to be. More robust research on both sides of the Atlantic and in the MENA region has led to increasing recognition of the fact that political Islam is not a fixed ideology with a clearly identifiable set of values and objectives, but rather a fluid phenomenon that encompasses a range of movements with different philosophies, principles and agendas.

However, an improved understanding of these groups has not yet produced a coherent account of how western policymakers might engage with them politically. As noted in the previous chapter, economic and security interests in the Middle East and North Africa have led western governments to place a high premium on regional stability, which has meant offering fairly uncritical support to autocratic regimes and failing to build strategic relationships with other potential reform actors, including non-violent Islamist movements. This chapter considers recent EU, UK and US policy towards the range of Islamist parties and movements in the region, looking at official policies or statements where they exist as well as more informal attempts to engage in dialogue.

### European Union policy

Official EU policy statements acknowledge the potential significance of non-violent Islamist parties as a force for change. The European Commission's most recent strategy paper for the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument noted the 'rapid rise of moderate and reformist political Islam movements' and described them as a factor putting pressure on political regimes in the region (European Commission 2007b: 7). Meanwhile, the 2005 European Union Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism asserted that the EU needed 'to empower moderate voices by engaging with Muslim organisations and faith groups that reject the distorted version of Islam put forward by [Al-Qaeda] and others' and to ensure that its own policies did not exacerbate existing tensions (Council of the European Union 2005: 4). It might have been expected that these conclusions would have led the EU to develop a strategic plan for drawing non-violent Islamists into more structured frameworks of dialogue and cooperation, but this has not yet materialised.

Less constrained by the need to achieve consensus, the European Parliament has been more forthright in its statements about engaging with Islamists. In a May 2007 'Resolution on Reforms in the Arab World' drafted by Michel Rocard, former French Prime Minister, EU parliamentarians called explicitly for Europe to provide visible political support to 'those political organisations which promote democracy by non-violent means, excluding sectarian, fundamentalist and extremist nationalist forces but including, where appropriate, secular actors and moderate Islamists' (European Parliament 2007).

European parliamentarians have also been outspoken in their condemnation of governments in the MENA regime that use arbitrary arrests and force to limit the freedom of legitimate opposition movements, which would presumably include non-violent Islamists. For example, in January 2008, a European Parliament resolution was passed urging Egypt 'to end all forms of harassment, including judicial measures, detention of media professionals and, more generally, human rights defenders and activists' and calling for a change in the law on military courts, which critics say that Egyptian authorities have sometimes used against political opponents (European Parliament 2008). This more positive approach to the question of engagement between western governments and political Islamists has gone largely unnoticed by the wider EU policymaking community (Kausch 2009).

Internal disagreements among EU member states are partially responsible for this policymaking paralysis. Some EU diplomats think that it is unnecessary to create a special

policy for engaging with Islamists, believing that they should be included in dialogue alongside other representative societal groups rather than being singled out and given disproportionate prominence. Others believe that this issue is more appropriately handled through bilateral diplomacy with the MENA countries in question, and indeed many European states have created specific departments or posts that are tasked with improving relations with the Islamic world (Kausch 2009). These include the German Federal Foreign Office's Dialogue with the Islamic World unit and the Adviser for Relations with the Islamic World in the Dutch Foreign Ministry.

However, these tentative steps on the part of individual EU member states are unlikely to be matched at the institutional level, given the absence of a shared European view on whether it is desirable to promote direct engagement with mainstream Islamist parties such as the PJD in Morocco or the IAF in Jordan, let alone groups like Hezbollah and Hamas that command reasonably high levels of popular and electoral legitimacy, but that continue to retain armed wings.

This ambivalence about engagement is not limited to EU policymakers. As surveys conducted for this research project and other studies have shown, a lack of understanding and suspicion also exists among many Islamists about what the EMP and the ENP aim to achieve and how they are relevant to the concerns or actions of Islamist political parties (see Emerson and Youngs 2007). A member of the IAF interviewed for ippr's case study expressed his misgivings about meetings organised under the rubric of 'Mediterranean cooperation', viewing these as an underhand way of 'normalising relations between Israel and the Arab countries' (Glennie 2007: 15). Others have criticised the perceived double standards inherent in Europe's declared support for the spread of democracy in the region and the refusal of the EU and the majority of its member states to engage in dialogue with Hamas when it came to power following elections that were generally considered to be free and fair.

This may reflect a failure on the part of Islamist politicians to make a concerted effort to understand the nuances of European foreign policy. However, it also suggests that the EU has a long way to go if it hopes to clarify its position on engaging with political opposition forces in the region, including non-violent Islamists.

### **UK policy**

While the UK government has been more exercised by the question of engaging with Islamists than many of its European counterparts, this has not yet translated into the formulation of a consistent stance on this issue. Official contact with some of the Islamist movements considered in this project, specifically the PJD in Morocco and the IAF in Jordan, has been relatively unproblematic, if not particularly extensive. For instance, representatives of these movements have often been granted visas to attend and speak at conferences and seminars in the UK (including at an ippr symposium on political Islam held in London in November 2008). Some contact also occurs in the region, with members of the UK's diplomatic service taking part in events where parliamentarians from these movements are expected to be present.

However, the UK government has sent mixed messages about its position on engagement through its official policies. In 2004, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office established an Engaging with the Islamic World Group (EIWG) to enable the UK to enhance its 'understanding and engagement with Muslim countries and communities' (FCO 2006). Initially this involved the disbursement of targeted funding for projects that sought to promote good governance, the rule of law and gender equality in the MENA region. However, the focus of the programme shifted after the July 2005 bombings in London, with more attention being paid to addressing the root causes of radicalisation and countering the narrative of terrorism in the UK and abroad.

The government's new priorities on this front were formalised in December 2007, when the EIWG was merged with the FCO's Counter Terrorism Policy Department to form a new

Counter Terrorism Department (CTD).<sup>11</sup> Officials claim that the new department will continue to build on earlier work to counter the frustrations that leave Muslim individuals and communities susceptible to the appeal of violent ideologies. However, while this may well be the case, the decision to fold initiatives designed to promote engagement with the Muslim world into counter-terrorism programmes does not send a positive signal to popular but non-violent Islamist groups, which might serve as partners in addressing the democratic deficits in the MENA region.

In 2006, a series of internal documents leaked by a Foreign Office official and published in the *New Statesman* revealed the extent of disagreements among senior UK policymakers about the potential benefits and costs of developing closer relationships with mainstream Islamist parties. In particular, these memos advocated the strengthening of ties between the UK and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, observing that it would be sensible to look for ways to influence this group given the extent of its grassroots support in Egypt. It was further suggested that engaging with the Brotherhood would provide an opportunity 'to challenge their perception of the West, including of the UK, and their prescriptions for solving the challenges facing Egypt and the region' (Bright 2006).

This optimistic reading of domestic currents in the MENA region was not shared by all. One former UK ambassador to Egypt was particularly scathing in his critique of the pro-engagement lobby, arguing that 'engaging with the Islamic world' should not be confused with 'engaging with Islamism', and warning against playing down 'the very real downsides for [the UK] in terms of the Islamists' likely foreign and social policies, should they actually achieve power in countries such as Egypt' (ibid).

At the time, this public airing of internal debates appeared to sap official enthusiasm for engagement with Islamist groups, despite occasional statements to the contrary by influential individuals. In 2008 for example, then-Defence Secretary Des Browne suggested that it might be necessary to talk to some elements of the Taliban and Hezbollah in order to reach political settlements in Afghanistan and Lebanon (Sylvester 2008). In a letter to *The Times* in February 2009 several respected analysts called on western policymakers to involve Hamas in Middle East peace talks (*The Times* 2009). Drawing parallels with the situation in Northern Ireland, Jonathan Powell (former Chief of Staff to Tony Blair) and Sir Hugh Orde (Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland) have gone even further by asserting that it might be worth opening some channels of communication with Al-Qaeda (Katz 2008, BBC 2008). This line of argument has had little traction among the wider foreign policymaking community in the UK, however.

In March 2009, the Foreign Office announced its intention to start engaging in dialogue with members of the political branch of Hezbollah in a statement to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee (Black 2009). FCO Minister Bill Rammell attributed this decision to 'positive developments in Lebanon, including the formation of the national unity government in which Hezbollah are participating' and indicated that the UK would explore the potential to expand certain contacts at an official level (Foreign Affairs Select Committee 2009). This statement was followed up with an invitation to a Hezbollah MP to participate in a meeting of UK parliamentarians organised to discuss regional issues. The Foreign Office's apparent reversal in policy on this issue is a contentious move, but one that has the potential to set in motion a wider strategic reorientation in the UK's approach to engaging with political Islamists across the MENA region.

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11. The CTD has been tasked with taking forward the UK government's counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST), which encompasses prevention activities (stopping people from becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism), pursuit of terrorist suspects, protection against terrorist attacks, and preparation (to mitigate the impacts of attacks that cannot be prevented). For more information, see Home Office 2009a.



## US policy

In some respects, the US has gone further than the UK and other European states in terms of its engagement with political Islamist parties and movements. It was drawn into the morass of sectarian politics in Iraq following the 2003 invasion and has had extensive dealings with the range of political Islamist groups competing for influence there, particularly the Shi'a parties. It has also pursued more informal contacts with some of the non-violent Islamist parties described in this paper through the democracy promotion efforts of quasi-governmental bodies like the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). However, the US State Department continues to place restrictions on official contacts with Islamist opposition movements, and has consistently refused to engage publicly with either Hamas or Hezbollah, which are both included on its list of foreign terrorist organisations (US Department of State 2005).

The very real ideological and political differences between the various Islamist groups in the MENA region defied the attempts of the Bush administration to develop a 'one size fits all' approach to engagement (Asseburg and Brumberg 2007). As a result, the intensity of US relations with mainstream Islamist parties over the past eight years has tended to vary considerably from country to country, fluctuating in line with wider political developments in the region. For example, US desire to maintain good relations with the regimes in Jordan and Egypt has limited its willingness to engage with Islamist parties in both of these countries. Indeed, the State Department has decreed that no formal contact can be made with members of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, given that the organisation is banned under Egyptian law. This has not always prevented US officials from taking part in meetings where members of the Brotherhood or IAF parliamentary blocs are present (Sharp 2006). But it is very different from the situation in other countries, where dialogue with Islamist opposition groups is less problematic.

In Yemen, the National Democratic Institute has had frequent discussions with moderate representatives of the Islah party, involving them in its political training programmes alongside other opposition groups (Yacoubian 2007). And in Morocco, PJD leaders have had fairly regular contact with US embassy officials and experience few difficulties in obtaining visas to the United States (Ottaway and Riley 2006). In May 2006 the PJD's then-General Secretary, Saad Eddine El-Othmani, spoke at an event in Washington organised by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. This followed a PJD conference in Rabat in March 2006 on American decision-making and its impact on Moroccan-American relations, to which American government and academic representatives were invited. The PJD's apparent enthusiasm for engaging with the US cooled over the course of 2007 and 2008 in response to American support for Israel's war with Lebanon in the summer of 2006, but may be renewed by the change of leadership in the White House.

As discussed in the previous chapter, President Obama appears far more willing than his predecessor to engage in dialogue with states or political opposition groups that hold views that are antithetical to US interests. His tentative steps towards restarting dialogue with Iran and Syria already suggest the likely contours of a new US policy in the Middle East, one which publicly emphasises dialogue and conciliation and downplays the threat of the use of force. However, this does not imply that previous thresholds for engagement with Islamist opposition groups have been completely jettisoned.

Speaking about Hamas and Hezbollah during an interview in early 2008, Obama rejected their use of violence as a tool of political change although he acknowledged their 'legitimate claims' and asserted that 'if they decide to shift, [the US is] going to recognize that' (Brooks 2008). But US foreign policy officials have reacted angrily to the UK's decision to reopen channels of communication with Hezbollah's political wing, and in a recent visit to Lebanon, Vice-President Joe Biden issued a veiled warning to those among the population considering voting for Hezbollah in parliamentary elections in June (BBC 2009c).

Similarly, it seems clear that dialogue with Hamas will only occur if politically difficult preconditions are met by the Islamist movement. Criticising former President Jimmy Carter's decision to meet with Hamas in 2008, Obama declared at the time that the US 'must not negotiate with a terrorist group intent on Israel's destruction [and] should only sit down with Hamas if they renounce terrorism, recognize Israel's right to exist and abide by past agreements' (Wulfhorst 2008). Despite reports in January 2009 that advisers close to the new president were urging him to initiate low level contacts with Hamas, there are few public signs that his position has changed significantly over the past year. It therefore remains to be seen whether developments on the ground will prompt a re-evaluation of this stance.

In the US and across Europe, there are many influential commentators who believe that engagement with any Islamist movement in the Middle East and North Africa would be a catastrophic misstep (see Maher and Frampton 2009 and Simon and Takeyh 2007). But without drawing these actors into a dialogue about reform and peace-building it is unlikely that there will be much movement in terms of addressing many of the serious political challenges facing the region. The next and final chapter considers what this might mean for policy, and offers recommendations for the UK and other western states.

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

As argued in this paper and in ippr's three case study reports on Egypt, Morocco and Jordan, non-violent Islamist parties are now playing a significant role in many states in the Middle East and North Africa. Occupying a middle ground between authoritarian regimes and violent jihadists, they represent a political force that European and North American governments can no longer afford to ignore. However, while there is evidence of a more thoughtful and nuanced discussion on this issue taking place in western policy circles, there remains a fundamental disconnect between rhetoric and political action. Rather than asking how we might engage with these movements more effectively, many are still asking whether this is either feasible or desirable.

This attitude is partly linked to concerns about the ideological positions of Islamist parties or movements and an unwillingness to legitimise groups that might hold anti-democratic views on women's rights, political pluralism, and a range of other issues. It also reflects pragmatic considerations about the strategic security and economic interests of western powers in the MENA region that are perceived to be threatened by the rising popularity and influence of Islamists. For their part, Islamist groups have displayed a marked reluctance to enter into dialogue with those western powers whose policies in the region they oppose (particularly the United States and the United Kingdom). However, while both sides have legitimate concerns about the implications of forging closer ties, a failure to even discuss the issues that divide them will do little to move the debate forward.

As a first step, western policymakers must now be clearer about their criteria for engagement with Islamists, and franker about their motives for doing so. This is not to suggest that there is some kind of objective 'test' that Islamists must be expected to pass before being deemed worthy as partners in dialogue. Islamist parties and movements rarely operate in democratic political systems, and it would be both unfair and unhelpful to judge them against standards that we do not always apply to governing regimes or other political actors in the region. However, in the absence of a more principled approach to engagement, it seems likely that the current state of political inertia on the issue will persist, and will prevent European and North American governments from developing a more consistent strategy towards political Islamists.

### **Main issues western policymakers need to take into account**

Before offering some recommendations about how such a strategy might be achieved, this concluding chapter assesses some of the difficult issues and tradeoffs that will need to be considered as western policymakers make choices about which Islamist parties and movements to engage with, and what forms this engagement should take.

#### **Political pluralism**

When challenged about their reluctance to develop more formal contacts with Islamist parties and movements, many western policymakers express their concern that opening the door to Islamist participation in politics might result in a situation of 'one person, one vote, one time'. Some make the argument that while mainstream Islamist groups claim to accept the idea of democratic participation, this stance could quickly change if they were ever to gain a monopoly on power (Pipes and Fuller 2003).

Prevailing political conditions in most MENA countries make it difficult to gauge the strength of Islamist parties' commitment to the principle of political pluralism. Most of these groups are the targets of organised repression and are unlikely to gain parliamentary majorities through legal political processes any time soon. The behaviour of the AKP in Turkey may offer a useful insight into how Islamist parties will act when faced with electoral competition, although policymakers should be wary of extrapolating too much from one example.



In determining which Islamist parties to engage with, European and North American governments should of course be looking for movements that believe in the concepts of free and fair elections and rotation of power. But they should be careful not to assume that Islamists are simply biding their time until they are in a position to establish a system of one-party rule. This ignores the fact that across the Middle East and North Africa, Islamist parties are frequently more vocal in their support for democracy than their secular counterparts.

For example, as highlighted in Chapter 3, the Islamist Party of Justice and Development in Morocco experienced an unexpected reversal of fortune in the parliamentary elections of 2007, failing to secure enough seats to guarantee inclusion in the government. At the time, there was a great deal of speculation about whether this might lead the PJD to boycott elections and withdraw from politics, or even turn to less peaceful methods of effecting political change. However, the opposite has occurred. The party has reaffirmed its commitment to following a democratic path, and has embarked on a process of internal dialogue to revise some of its positions on contentious political issues (al-Khalfi 2008).

Even Islamist movements that do not enjoy legal recognition, such as the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) in Kuwait and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, have tacitly agreed to abide by the arbitrary rules on political participation that are imposed by authoritarian regimes, and have consistently made the most of any opportunities they are given to participate in national or local legislatures. Other groups, including the Islamic Action Front in Jordan and the Islah party in Yemen, have demonstrated their willingness to share political power by entering into alliances with other – often secular – opposition groups in an effort to achieve their goals. Western policymakers should take this kind of political behaviour into account as they decide which Islamist groups they feel able to engage with.

### **Gender and minority rights**

While members of Islamist parties frequently profess their support for the idea of universal citizenship, there remain a number of inconsistencies between their rhetoric and actions. For example, the PJD in Morocco were initially resistant to proposed changes to the country's social code, which aimed to revise some of the most conservative structures governing family life. And while the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood claims to believe in equal rights for women and for Egypt's minority population of Christian Copts, it usually adds the vague disclaimer that these rights should be exercised 'within an Islamic framework'. In recent policy documents the Brotherhood has also indicated that it would not accept the election of a woman or a Copt to the position of the country's president.

Progressive policymakers and civil society organisations concerned about the promotion of equality and human rights in the MENA region may find these ambiguities difficult to square. But this only makes the case for engagement stronger, both as a means of advancing the debate about how to reform some of the more repressive political and social structures in the region, and in order to better understand the various currents of thought within Islamist movements on these issues.

For example, interviews carried out for this project with members of the Jordanian Islamic Action Front revealed interesting differences of opinion within the party on the question of women's rights. Some IAF deputies asserted that the position of women in society was in no need of further enhancement, a belief clearly at odds with the reality of the legal, political and physical discrimination that is faced by many women in Jordan. Conservative respondents also stressed the need for women to become more aware of their *Shari'a* rights and duties. However, a number of respondents suggested that there was considerable room for improvement of women's rights in social and political life, with one arguing that, 'women's rights to hold public posts in the various departments of the state, including education, health and the judiciary, should be secured' (Glennie 2007: 13).

This diversity of opinion indicates that there is room for a more constructive debate between western policymakers and Islamists around these issues. Many of the parties discussed in this report are still finding their way in terms of developing clear and consistent policy platforms, and are doing so within societies that are highly unequal and patriarchal. While sensitivity towards cultural norms will be necessary, dialogue around the promotion of human rights may be a fruitful avenue for engagement.

### **The relationship between state and religion**

For many western policymakers, one of the most troubling aspects of the political platforms of Islamist opposition parties is their lack of clarity on the relationship between religion and politics. For decades, 'Islam is the solution' has served as the campaign slogan for many Islamist groups in the region, including the Islamic Action Front in Jordan and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Similarly, the PJD in Morocco, which is one of the most moderate Islamist movements in the region, describes itself as a political party with an 'Islamic frame of reference'. But neither of these statements sheds much light on how Islamic values would apply to practical policy problems, should these parties ever achieve a political majority in their respective countries.

There are a few notable exceptions to the widespread reluctance to discuss difficult questions around the political application of religious values. For example, a team of reformist scholars at Ankara University in Turkey, acting with the support of the ruling Islamist AKP party and the *Diyamet* (the government's Directorate of Religious Affairs which oversees the country's 8,000 mosques and appoints imams), has been undertaking an ambitious project that aims to reinterpret parts of the *Hadith* (one of the key sources of Islamic law). While the '*Hadith Project*' has yet to issue a final report, its intention is to contextualise or excise some of the more contentious aspects of Islamic teachings, and to offer a revised approach to issues like the treatment of women and the use of the death penalty (Traynor 2008). If realised, this initiative could serve as a model for how a modern and progressive interpretation of Islam could potentially be incorporated into the public political sphere.

Unfortunately, opposite forces seem to be at work in Egypt at present, with the Muslim Brotherhood having released a draft party platform in August 2007 that called for the establishment of an *ulema* council of religious scholars with the power to overrule legislation not deemed to be sufficiently Islamic in nature. The document also indicated that the Brotherhood would not accept the election of a woman or a Christian as the Egyptian head of state.

In a rare display of division from a movement that prides itself on presenting a united front to the outside world, this move drew criticism from factions of moderate individuals within the Muslim Brotherhood itself, who claimed that they had not been consulted about these ideas in advance. This group argued that the Supreme Constitutional Court was the most appropriate body to decide on matters of legislation, and that the Brotherhood was required to adhere to constitutional guarantees of political equality for women and minorities.

The release of this platform was intended to reassure the movement's critics, but instead it has revealed the sharp differences of opinion and ambiguities about the relationship between religion and state that continue to plague not only the Muslim Brotherhood but many other Islamist parties and movements across the MENA region too. However, this is not a reason to abandon the idea of deepening dialogue with political Islamists. On the contrary, it suggests that there is value in pushing them to be more explicit about their views on this subject. But it does indicate that there is a need for caution on the part of those western policymakers and individuals who look to political Islamists as potential counterweights to authoritarian regimes (Brown and Hamzawy 2008).

### The use of violence

Most Islamist parties that engage in formal political processes have now renounced the use of violence as a means of achieving domestic political change. The notable exceptions are Hamas and Hezbollah, which maintain armed paramilitary wings, and which have both been involved in internal struggles for power over the past few years. However, there remains a deeply entrenched belief among Islamists throughout the region that violence is legitimate when directed against an 'external occupier', particularly in the context of the Palestinian struggle for independence from Israel. So while the Islamic Action Front in Jordan has adopted a reasonably clear stance against responding to state repression with aggression, there is a significant faction within its ranks that identifies very closely with Hamas, and backs the most extreme forms of Palestinian resistance against Israel (Brown 2006).

This poses a serious dilemma for western policymakers. Refusing to engage in dialogue with any group that does not unequivocally reject the use of violence in all circumstances would leave them with few options, given the persistent state of conflict between Israel and both Palestinian and Lebanese opposition movements. But agreeing to enter into relations with political Islamist parties that are willing to tacitly support armed resistance, including against innocent civilians, is also problematic.

The key here may be to develop contacts with more moderate individuals within these groups, as a means of holding a more constructive debate about difficult foreign policy issues, without legitimising the views of those on the more extreme end of the political spectrum. It also reinforces the urgency of finding a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not least so as to remove ongoing sources of grievance among Islamists and Muslim populations more broadly.

### Foreign relations

Few Islamist parties or movements have comprehensive policy statements detailing their positions on foreign relations. There is an understandable worry that these groups would withdraw from economic or political arrangements deemed essential to western strategic interests in the region should they come to power and indeed, senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood have indicated that they would favour putting the 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt (which remains controversial within the country to this day) to a popular referendum in the unlikely event of the movement gaining a parliamentary majority (Eltahawy 2007).

The interviews conducted for our case studies highlight the widespread opposition to US and European policies in the MENA region that exists among different Islamist parties. Responding to an ippr questionnaire, representatives of the PJD and the IAF were critical of the West's perceived double standards in their approach to democratic reform in the region, noting in particular their decision to ostracise and undermine the Hamas government that came to power in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in January 2006.

Initiatives like the European Neighbourhood Policy and the then Euro-Mediterranean Partnership were also viewed as tools to enable exploitation of the region's resources rather than as programmes designed to support political and economic development. Encouragingly, though, many respondents expressed a wish to see an improvement in relations between Islamist parties and western governments and indicated that a policy of more strategic dialogue would be of considerable value, particularly around questions of economic and development cooperation. It was also suggested that the EU could play a more positive role in promoting political reform in authoritarian states in the Middle East and North Africa (see Glennie and Mephram 2007 and Glennie 2007).

## Recommendations

Recognising that any such engagement will need to take place on a case-by-case basis and be rooted in a careful understanding of the political and social dynamics of different countries in the MENA region, ippr's analysis suggests the following:

### 1. Western policymakers need to fundamentally rethink their political strategy for engaging with Islamist parties and movements

Despite recent improvements in the tone of relations between western governments and Islamists, particularly since the election of President Obama, there is still a long way to go in terms of addressing the misperceptions and antagonisms that exist between them. As discussed in Chapter 6, there is a lack of consensus among EU member states and between the US and the EU on the question of engaging with Islamist opposition movements and parties. This has been compounded by the fact that until now, relatively few Islamist movements have been prepared to work openly with western organisations and governments, partly for fear of experiencing further government crackdowns on their activities, and partly because of their strong opposition towards western foreign policies in the Middle East and North Africa.

It is not unreasonable for policymakers to be cautious in their approach to engaging with mainstream political Islamist movements. European and North American governments have significant political, economic and security interests in the MENA region which they believe could be threatened if Islamist parties were to gain a greater share of political power in key states in the region.

In the past these interests have been relatively well served by a policy of encouraging MENA regimes to promote democratisation and good governance, while simultaneously providing them with economic and political support and tacitly accepting their containment and repression of Islamist opposition groups. But the weakness of this strategy has been exposed by the continued failure of most of these regimes to deliver on promises of engaging in meaningful reform of their undemocratic political structures. Public opinion in the Middle East and North Africa has become highly critical of these apparent double standards on the part of the West. This approach is also at odds with the changing political context in the region; as Ottaway and colleagues state, 'almost by default, Islamist parties have emerged as the core of the opposition in most Arab countries. Paradoxically, the possibility of democratic reform now depends to a great extent on Islamist parties and movements' (Ottaway *et al* 2008: 24).

Western policymakers must face up to the difficult reality that in order for progress to be made on the most intractable conflicts in the Middle East, there will have to be dialogue with some of the mainstream Islamist movements discussed in this paper.

The UK Government finally appears to be grasping the nettle here, after a period of extreme caution in its policy towards political Islamist parties and movements. In March 2009, David Miliband, the current Foreign Secretary, argued in a speech on relations between the West and the Islamic world that peace and security will only be achieved through an emphasis on building the broadest political coalitions possible, which will sometimes include 'groups whose aims we do not share, whose values we find deplorable, whose methods we think dubious' (Miliband 2009). And while the US has been less enthusiastic about the idea of direct public engagement with Islamists, President Obama has also spoken of the urgent need to recalibrate relations with the Muslim world, which will necessarily involve talking to a range of actors whose political values differ substantially from those of the US.

However, these statements of intent will only lead to a positive change in the way that western powers relate to Islamist parties and movements if they are backed up by a measurable commitment to seek out and facilitate opportunities for mutual learning and dialogue.

## **2. Western policymakers and non-governmental institutions should be more proactive in creating channels for serious and sustained dialogue with Islamists**

The methodological approach of this research project has indicated the important role that 'track two' or informal dialogue can play as a lower-risk form of engagement and confidence building between western policymakers and Islamists. While representatives of European and North American governments are often unwilling to engage in public exchanges with members of Islamist parties, mutual distrust will not be overcome without a process of dialogue. Non-governmental think tanks or research organisations like ippr are well-placed to play a bridging role here, by enabling representatives of western governments and Islamist movements to meet in a high-level but less formal setting. If managed skilfully, such forums could give Islamist politicians and activists the opportunity to voice their own concerns about western policy in the MENA region, while also allowing western policymakers to challenge them on issues where their position remains overly vague or inconsistent.

In practical policy terms, this might require North American and European officials to make a greater effort to facilitate exchanges or visits with representatives of Islamist movements, since these are regularly blocked by authoritarian regimes. For example, in 2008 the Egyptian government banned Dr Abdel Moneim Abul Fotouh, a prominent member of the more moderate wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, from accepting an invitation to the fifth summit of the US-Islamic World Forum (Ismail 2008). This was a missed opportunity to bring one of the voices of mainstream political Islam to the international political table to discuss the future of relations between Islamists and the West.

Although the European Commission has run a number of internal training courses on political Islamism in the past, these have tended not to involve dialogue with Islamists themselves, focusing instead on attempts to assess how democratic these movements and parties are. This has done little to overcome the strong resistance of many within the EU to the idea of strengthening engagement with mainstream Islamist movements, who fear that by singling them out for special attention they will damage their relations with governments in the MENA region. But by shutting Islamists out of the political dialogue, European politicians are missing important opportunities to start building trust and overcoming the hostility and misunderstandings that have characterised relations in the past.

One way to start overcoming this tension would be to reframe the process of engagement, so that representatives of Islamist movements and parties are more consistently involved in conferences and debates about broader relations between Europe and the Middle East and North Africa alongside other non-governmental actors, including secular opposition politicians. Inclusion without the appearance of preferential treatment would send a clear message that western governments are changing their approach to the idea of dialogue with Islamists, and would give both parties more regular opportunities to discuss important issues around political reform. Only sustained dialogue of this kind will help counteract the negative impressions that western policymakers and Islamists currently have of each other, and allow a more nuanced and honest debate about why these impressions exist.

## **3. The dialogue between western policymakers and Islamists should, crucially, engage with the political as well as the religious values of Islamist parties and movements**

When the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood released its first comprehensive statement of policy in August 2007, commentators focused almost exclusively on its proposal to create an *ulema* council with binding advisory powers, and its suggestion that women and Coptic Christians could not serve as head of state. These were certainly controversial ideas. But in reducing the

debate to analysis of the religious content of the Brotherhood's policy programme, an important opportunity to discuss the movement's political objectives was missed. As Mikhelidze and Tocci have noted, this reflects a wider tendency on the part of western policymakers to view political Islam as 'a different, if not unique, phenomenon, whose uniqueness defies conventional political analysis' (Mikhelidze and Tocci 2009: 151).

This attitude will need to change if European and North American governments are serious about supporting democratisation in the MENA region, given that many Islamist parties and movements now offer the most viable alternative to existing authoritarian regimes and secular opposition parties alike. A good place to start would be to move away from the fixation on 'testing' the democratic credentials of Islamist movements, and focusing instead on promoting discussion of the range of political, economic and social issues that concern these groups, many of which are shared by their western counterparts. This does not mean that difficult issues should be swept under the carpet, but it does recognise that a solid basis for engagement cannot be built without some attempt to find common political ground.

#### **4. Western leaders should be more even-handed in condemning all human rights abuses in authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, including against Islamists**

Ultimately, any change in policy towards mainstream political Islamist parties in the Middle East and North Africa will need to be set within a broader rethink of relations with the region's governing regimes. In the past, western officials have often been reluctant to overtly criticise the democratic deficit in many of these countries, loath to put their strategic interests in the region at risk by censoring important allies.

For example, on a visit to Egypt in early 2008, former President George Bush failed to comment on the unjust imprisonment of Ayman Nour (a secular opposition presidential candidate) and of scores of Brotherhood members, choosing instead to praise Mubarak's regime for having made progress towards 'greater political openness'. On this occasion the European Parliament was uncharacteristically vocal in its condemnation of the repressive Egyptian political system, passing a draft resolution urging Egypt 'to end all forms of harassment, including judicial measures, detention of media professionals and, more generally, human rights defenders and activists' (Shahine 2008). However, it stopped short of commenting on the arbitrary arrest of representatives of Muslim Brotherhood, thereby undermining the legitimacy of an otherwise important statement.

These rhetorical inconsistencies have damaged western credibility, and have led many political and civil society groups in the region to complain that international partners turn a blind eye when human rights violations are committed by authoritarian governments. A significant change in approach could helpfully reduce some of these tensions, and European and North American governments should be more assiduous in raising their concerns, both in private and in public. Again, while Islamists do not need to be singled out for special treatment here, western leaders need to be much more even-handed in their condemnation of all human rights abuses in the region, including when they are directed against non-violent Islamist politicians and activists.

More generally, policymakers should also work with allies in the region to address problems around the adoption and enforcement of internationally recognised human rights standards and legal frameworks. In this context, a number of western governments will need to look hard at their own adherence to such standards. As discussed above, the US government's policy of extraordinary rendition and its use of excessive force at the Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib prisons have greatly undermined its capacity to lead by example.

The US needs to decisively close the door on these practices, and to sign up to many of the international human rights laws, treaties and covenants it has abstained from in the past, including those on the Rights of the Child (ratified by all UN member states except the US



and Somalia), the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Forced Disappearances, Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ippr 2009). Only then will it start to rebuild the legitimacy it so desperately requires if it is to exert a positive influence on leaders in the MENA region with respect to the protection of human rights.

### **5. Western governments must display greater consistency in pressing authoritarian governments in the MENA region to open up their political systems**

In his inaugural speech, President Obama issued a stark message to authoritarian regimes around the world reliant on 'corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent' as a means of staying in power, warning that they were on the wrong side of history but offering to extend a hand to any who were willing to unclench their fists (BBC 2009a). This was a powerful address, and one with the potential to pave the way for a dramatic improvement in relations between the West and the people of the Middle East and North Africa. But this change will only come about if western governments are willing to make good on their promises to support reformers and reform processes. While it is primarily for the leaders and the peoples of the region to tackle the entrenched structures of authoritarianism that are holding back development and creating a receptive audience for the siren call of the jihadists, there is clearly a more constructive role for European and North American policymakers to play here.

In particular, a better balance needs to be struck between maintaining cooperative relationships with governing regimes around questions of international security and economic development, while also pressing them to move faster towards political reform pledges that have already been made. The dependence of many regimes in the region on foreign political and economic assistance provides western governments with forms of leverage that should be used more creatively. Making aid conditional on the progress of reform is a subject that donor governments are often unwilling to discuss. But this principle already forms the basis of cooperation agreements between the EU and MENA countries that are part of the ENP, and offers a framework for the development of a more constructive dialogue on these issues.

It should be emphasised that western powers do not need to work towards actively destabilising existing orders and governments, the limits of such a heavy-handed approach have been amply revealed by failures in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet as David Gardner observes, 'Arabs and Muslims, at the very least, have the right to expect that the USA and its allies do not actively support those who deny them their freedoms' (Gardner 2009: 18).

Real democratisation, on a scale that will lead to significant change in the regional political status quo, will be a messy business. Islamist parties and movements may well be the beneficiary of any openings in restrictive political structures, which will undoubtedly pose uncomfortable dilemmas for western governments, and it would be naïve to suggest that agreement with mainstream Islamist movements in the MENA region on key political issues is within easy reach.

However, an approach that seeks to ignore these political currents is no longer morally or strategically defensible. Decades of paying lip service to the idea of political freedoms while simultaneously propping up authoritarian leaders who lack democratic legitimacy have helped to create an environment that is not conducive to stability or development, yet both are needed in order for western powers to protect their considerable interests in the region, particularly those that relate to counter-terrorism and energy security. A reorientation of policy along the lines discussed above is also urgently required if western powers hope to improve their tarnished image across the Middle East and North Africa.

Of course, a decision to engage in dialogue with mainstream Islamist movements where appropriate and alongside other political actors, will not be a panacea for the problems that beset current western policy towards the region. But it will signal a more genuine

commitment to the idea of mutual learning and exchange than has been evident in recent years, and will send a strong message countering the argument of those who claim that a 'clash of civilisations' between the West and the Muslim world is some kind of inevitability.

At a time when there are so many walls – both political and physical – dividing people within the region and separating them from partners in the West, surely it is time to start building a few more bridges.

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## Appendix: Project methodology

A range of methodologies have been used during this project, including desk-based research, reviews of relevant English, French and Arabic literature, informal discussions with Middle Eastern, European and North American experts, high-level seminars and semi-structured interviews with members of Islamist parties in the region.

### **Case studies and commissioned research**

The project has taken a case study approach, looking at the mainstream political Islamist parties in three countries in the region: the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) in Jordan, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Published as web papers, these case studies give an overview of the recent political history in each country, with a particular focus on the emergence of political Islamist parties and movements. Through analysis of public statements made by the PJD, the IAF and the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as ippr-commissioned interview data, they also provide an insight into the positions held by these groups across a range of important political issues. Finally, they assess current European and North American policies towards political Islamists in Morocco, Jordan and Egypt, and recommend ways in which they could be strengthened, in the context of western support for political reform in the Middle East and North Africa.

All three papers are available for download at: [www.ippr.org/publicationsandreports](http://www.ippr.org/publicationsandreports)

### **Partner organisations**

This research project has been greatly enhanced by collaboration with local partners in the MENA region: the Centre for Constitutional and Political Studies at the University of Marrakech in Morocco and the Amman Centre for Human Rights Studies in Jordan. These organisations produced background briefing papers on political Islamist movements in Morocco and Jordan, and conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with key individuals from the Party of Justice and Development and the Islamic Action Front and with observers who study them closely.

Interviewees were asked about their attitudes towards political pluralism, human rights, the relationship between politics and Islamic values and foreign relations with European and North American states, based on an ippr-designed questionnaire.

### **High-level seminars**

Four events were held as part of this project:

#### **Political reform in Morocco: the role of international partners**

Rabat, Morocco, April 2007. This event was organised with the assistance of the Centre for Constitutional and Political Studies, and involved members of Islamist and other political parties, alongside local civil society groups and representatives of the international community in Morocco.

#### **Political reform in Jordan: the role of international partners**

Amman, Jordan, September 2007. This event was facilitated by the Amman Centre for Human Rights Studies, and followed a similar structure to the seminar in Morocco.

#### **Political Islam in the Middle East and North Africa: The implications for international policymakers**

Brussels, Belgium, February 2008. This one-day expert symposium was organised with the European Commission, and involved presentations from Middle Eastern and European specialists around the general theme of relations between Islamist movements and the EU.

**Political Islam in the Middle East and North Africa: An expert symposium**

London, UK, November 2008. Bringing together government officials, representatives of NGOs and think tanks, academics and the media, this symposium provided an opportunity for discussion of the interests and objectives of various Islamist groups in the region, and how these interact with the interests of western governments. Critically, this event also served to facilitate direct discussion between members of Islamist movements and western policymakers on challenging political issues.