



Reform in Jordan

The role of political Islamists

By Alex Glennie

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Responsibility for the report's contents rests exclusively with the author.

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Abbreviations and definitions

EMP	Euro-Mediterranean Partnership	<i>Fatwa:</i>	A scholarly opinion on a matter of Islamic law, issued by a recognised Islamic religious authority
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy		
EU	European Union		
GID	General Intelligence Department	<i>Jahiliyya:</i>	A pre-Islamic state of pagan ignorance
IAF	Islamic Action Front (Jordan)		
IMF	International Monetary Fund	<i>Shari'a:</i>	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, <i>Shari'a</i> law is based on the interpretation of a number of sources, including the <i>Qur'an</i> , traditions and sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammed and religious <i>fatwas</i> (see above).
IRI	International Republican Institute		
MENA	Middle East and North Africa		
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative		
NDI	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs		
NGO	Non-governmental organisation	<i>Takfiri:</i>	Radical Islamists who reject components of society, culture and law in Muslim countries that they consider to have slipped back into a state of <i>jahiliyya</i> (see above). Takfiris often support militancy against Muslim regimes that they consider to be <i>jahiliyya</i> .
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories		
PJD	Party of Justice and Development (Morocco)		
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation		
USAID	United States Agency for International Development	<i>Qisas:</i>	The Shari'a principle of applying a punishment commensurate with the severity of the crime.
WTO	World Trade Organization		

1. Introduction

Although use of the term ‘political Islam’ is now widespread among western media commentators and policymakers, there remains insufficient understanding of political Islamist parties and movements in the Middle East and North Africa on the part of European and North American governments. There is also a striking lack of official engagement with these movements, even though in many cases they constitute the most organised opposition to existing authoritarian regimes.

This report is part of a wider ippr project on the role of political Islamists in political reform processes in the Middle East and North Africa (known as the MENA region). An earlier report on reform in Morocco discusses the objectives and context for the project in more detail but to briefly summarise, the aim is to deepen understanding of the various forms of political Islam, to counter common misperceptions and, in so doing, to help generate more thoughtful and constructive policy responses towards it (Glennie and Mephram 2007).

The approach taken in this research project has been to analyse the ‘mainstream’ political Islamist movements in three countries in the MENA region:

- the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco
- the Islamic Action Front (IAF) in Jordan
- the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

By ‘mainstream’, we mean movements that engage and seek to engage in the legal political processes of their countries (even where that process is undemocratic and where they are discriminated against or repressed). It also means movements that have publicly eschewed violence to help realise their political objectives at the national level.

This is the second of our case study reports, and focuses on the role of the Islamic Action Front party in Jordan’s political reform process. The IAF is the political wing of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood movement, and has participated intermittently in municipal and parliamentary elections since the legalisation of political parties in 1992. Although the irregular electoral system in Jordan deliberately limits the number of seats open to Islamists, the IAF still provides a relatively strong political challenge to King Abdullah II’s regime. Western policymakers therefore have a clear interest in understanding better where this organisation comes from and what it stands for.

Methodologically, the report is based on an extensive review of the literature on the Jordanian political system and its Islamist movements and parties, discussions with western commentators and a series of interviews (15 in total) with key individuals in the IAF and with local analysts who observe the party closely. The interviews were conducted by ippr’s local partner organisation, the Amman

Centre for Human Rights Studies, and were structured around a questionnaire produced by ippr that posed questions about the IAF’s attitudes towards political pluralism, human rights, the relationship between the party and Islamic values, and foreign relations with European and North American states.

The report also draws on discussions held at a high-level ippr seminar on the role of international partners in Jordan’s domestic reform processes. This meeting, which took place in Amman in September 2007, involved members of Islamist and other Jordanian political parties, alongside local civil society groups and representatives of the international community in Jordan.

Section 2 of the report provides an overview of the recent political history of Jordan, to contextualise the rising influence of political Islamist movements there. Section 3 describes the Islamic Action Front’s emergence as a political party from the Muslim Brotherhood reform movement, while Section 4 assesses the attitudes of the IAF on a number of key issues, including political pluralism, human rights and foreign relations. A final section considers the implications of these findings in terms of how European and North American¹ policymakers might constructively engage with political Islamists in Jordan, as part of their broader support for political reform there.

The focus of this project on political Islamist movements should not be misconstrued as implicit support for their agendas. As later sections of the report demonstrate, while the Islamic Action Front party has come out strongly in favour of reforming Jordan’s political system in order to make it more representative and accountable, it has not yet developed positions that are sufficiently clear and consistent on other important issues, such as women’s rights and the implementation of Islamic law. The IAF’s emphasis on the conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and its rejection of Jordan’s peace settlement with Israel also raise serious questions for western governments about how the party would manage foreign relations if it ever came to power. However, a failure to engage with political groups such as the Islamic Action Front, even at the level of debate and discussion, will do little to clarify these points. It will also heighten the sense of mistrust and hostility that characterises current exchanges between Islamists and external actors.

European and North American governments must be extremely careful in their approach to supporting human rights and democratisation in other countries. Nowhere is this more important than in the Middle East. Recent interventions that have had the stated purpose of strengthening democracy in the region (particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan) have failed to achieve their mission, and have deeply damaged western credibility. This does not mean that Jordan’s international partners should give up on pressing for further political openings and reform. It simply suggests that they must be more sensitive and pragmatic in how they do so.

1. In this paper we use the term North America to mean the United States and Canada only.

Summary of recommendations

This report identifies four areas in which western policymakers could improve their current efforts to support reform processes in Jordan. These recommendations are summarised below, and are discussed in more detail in the final section.

1. Actively encourage the Jordanian regime to follow through on its reform promises

The government in Jordan frequently affirms its commitment to making the political system more open and participatory. However, despite sporadic bursts of activity on this front, it has so far failed to match the rhetoric with substantive change. Western governments should not attempt to dictate the process or pace of democratisation in Jordan: this is primarily a question for Jordanians themselves. However, they do need to think more creatively about which levers they can use to push the regime to move faster towards the reforms that it has already pledged to undertake. A particular focus should be pressing the Jordanian government to change the unrepresentative electoral system that privileges tribal loyalists at the expense of Islamist and other secular parties.

2. Display more consistency in supporting human rights in Jordan

The Jordanian regime has a better human rights record than other states in the region, but it continues to crack down on political opposition groups, and especially Islamist movements, when it feels threatened. There are also serious questions about the repressive powers of the Jordanian security apparatus. Western policymakers have tended to shy away from criticising the regime about these issues, but this has given the impression that they are not serious about encouraging the Jordanian government to uphold the international human rights standards and commitments to which it has formally signed up. European and North American governments should therefore be more willing to raise their concerns about Jordan's human rights issues – both publicly and privately. They should also be more consistent in condemning all human rights abuses in Jordan, including those against non-violent Islamist movements and parties.

3. Support the development of participatory politics and civil society in Jordan

Further political reform in Jordan will require a revitalisation of its political parties, most of which are disorganised and lack clear policy platforms. One way in which European and North American governments could usefully support the work being done by international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to promote democratisation would be to extend their programmes of parliamentary exchanges for Jordanian opposition politicians, including representatives of the Islamic Action Front. Tackling political disillusionment and voter apathy in Jordan will also require increased investment in civic education and training for opposition politicians, civil society groups and youth. These are areas in which organisations like the European Union are particularly well-placed to make a financial and political contribution.

4. Seek opportunities for dialogue and engagement with political opposition groups in Jordan, including the IAF

Currently, contacts between western governments and institutions and Jordan's political Islamists are extremely limited. European and North American policymakers are uneasy about the close links between some members of the Islamic Action Front and the Palestinian Hamas party, while the IAF distrusts foreign interventions in Jordan's domestic affairs, and frequently criticises the willingness of these governments to support authoritarian regimes in the region. But a failure to engage in dialogue and debate will do little to address these concerns on both sides. Western governments should be more active in seeking out opportunities for frank discussions with a range of civil society opposition groups in Jordan, including political Islamists. This will allow them to develop a more nuanced understanding of groups such as the IAF. Furthermore, this kind of exchange will hopefully encourage Islamist parties to move past their blanket condemnation of western policy in the region, and enable them to identify issues on which they could work more constructively with particular European and North American governments.

2. Recent political history of Jordan

Jordan is a relatively new state, created as a result of the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement between Britain and France, which carved up the former Ottoman Empire into spheres of influence. The Emirate of Transjordan was formally established in 1921 and was administered as a British protectorate under the leadership of Abdullah Hashem (a member of the Hijaz dynasty, which led the Arab revolt against the Ottomans during World War I). Abdullah was made king after Jordan was granted its independence in 1946, and became the first in a line of Hashemite rulers.

The fact that successive leaders of Jordan have managed to hold their artificially constructed state together in the face of significant domestic and regional challenges is the result of three key factors: external support, domestic patronage networks, and constitutional and electoral arrangements that cement the authority of the regime.

Immediately following independence, subsidies were sought from the British government. Later, the monarchy was able to persuade the United States and conservative Arab states that Jordan had a pivotal role to play in maintaining regional stability. Since then, it has relied on a relatively steady flow of financial assistance from these partners to support the country's economic development.

The creation of extensive domestic patronage networks has also been crucial to the consolidation and maintenance of regime security. To head off potential threats to his leadership from the large number of minority groups in Jordan – in particular the Christian, Circassian and Chechen communities – King Abdullah I (1921–1951) offered them government jobs and other benefits. This practice has been continued by his successors Talal (1951–1952), Hussein (1952–1999) and Abdullah II (1999 to present).

Abdullah I designed the electoral system to privilege representatives of rural areas whom he could rely on as a loyal constituency. This has resulted in the exclusion of most Jordanians of Palestinian origin from influential public roles, as they have tended to settle in urban areas. Non-Palestinian minorities and tribal communities (often referred to as 'Transjordanians' or 'East Bankers') remain overrepresented in parliament and the public sector to this day, and their support has allowed the monarchy to 'unilaterally control political life' (Choucair 2006: 4).

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). However, 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 powers 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.

As a result, the role that parliamentarians are able to play in political

decision-making processes is fairly limited. They can debate and endorse legislation, question ministers and even criticise decisions taken by the government, but they are effectively unable to veto royal decrees or royally approved policies. The elected lower house is also very much subservient to the appointed upper house, as all legislation passed by the Chamber of Deputies must be sanctioned by the Senate.

This picture is somewhat at odds with the official image of Jordan cultivated by the regime, which portrays the country as a constitutional monarchy that is democratic, observes the rule of law, and respects the rights of all Jordanian citizens. However, while Jordan cannot be considered a substantive democracy, it does not deserve to be equated with neighbouring states such as Egypt or Syria, where government repression is much greater. The pervasive state security apparatus in Jordan is feared, but it does not routinely use terror tactics to intimidate dissidents. Within the limits imposed by the law, there is also an active political culture and media. As commentators have noted, this is due largely to the character of Jordan's leaders who, although willing to use force to ensure regime security, have traditionally preferred to rule through consensus (George 2005: xii).

The regional dimension

Although the monarchy has proved fairly adept at neutralising potential domestic threats to the political status quo, Jordan has also faced some serious external challenges. It is located in an unenviable geographical position – sandwiched between Iraq, Syria, Israel and the Palestinian West Bank – and the impact of regional instability on Jordan's political dynamics and development cannot be overstated. In particular, the migration of large numbers of Palestinian refugees to Jordan following the creation of Israel in 1948, and then again after the Six Day War in 1967, has profoundly shaped the Jordanian national consciousness, and continues to act as the 'wedge issue' in national politics (Ryan 2005).

Following British and French withdrawal from the Middle East in the 1950s, a wave of pan-Arabism swept through the region, fuelled by the rising influence of nationalist and socialist movements in Egypt, Iraq and Syria. In this changing regional context, King Hussein's decision to preserve Jordan's strong relationship with the West was extremely unpopular with radicalised elements of the population, a number of whom tried to topple him by force. In 1957, after a failed coup d'état in Jordan, and a successful one in neighbouring Iraq against King Hussein's cousin Faysal, the Jordanian regime adopted a much harder line against dissidents. Parliament was disbanded, political parties were banned, and severe constraints were placed on the space available for any kind of political activity.

In 1967, regional politics once again caused problems for the Hashemite monarchy when mounting Arab-Israeli tensions erupted into direct conflict. The Six Day War, which pitted Israel against an uneasy coalition of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, ended in resounding defeat for the Arab states. Particularly destabilising for Jordan was Israel's seizure of the West Bank and East Jerusalem: territory that

had been formally annexed by King Abdullah I in 1950. As a consequence, tens of thousands of Palestinians fled across the border to Jordan's East Bank, swelling the ranks of those who had been displaced in 1948, and irrevocably changing the country's demographic make-up.

This influx of refugees also brought the Jordanian leadership into conflict with hard-line members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and other Palestinian political movements in exile in Jordan, many of whom were openly hostile towards the monarchy and called for it to be overthrown. In September 1970, regime forces took up arms against these groups, and by July of the following year most Palestinian political organisations had been expelled from Jordan. The monarchy survived this challenge to its authority, but the events of 'Black September' had a long-term and damaging effect on the already complicated Jordanian-Palestinian relationship.

A house of cards built on sand

In the late 1970s, as regional conflicts provided less of a direct threat to Jordan's stability, national attention became increasingly focused on domestic economic and political problems. Jordan has a semi-rentier economy, meaning that it depends primarily on generating revenue from external rents instead of from domestic taxation. As such, it has always been acutely vulnerable to swings in the global economy.

Initially, the Hashemite monarchy's strategy of relying on external financial support to subsidise Jordan's economy paid off. The oil price hike and the resulting regional economic boom that followed the 1973 October War between Israel, Egypt and Syria was particularly beneficial, creating a huge demand for Jordanian workers. Almost one third of Jordan's labour force was working in the Gulf by the early 1980s, making substantial contributions to the domestic economy in the form of remittances. Estimates suggest that between 1976 and 1985, these made up almost 22 per cent of Jordan's annual gross domestic product. As a 'frontline' state in the struggle against Israel, Jordan's leadership was also able to leverage significant amounts of foreign aid from its Arab neighbours (Alissa 2007).

However, when the prosperity of the 1970s gave way to recession in the 1980s, brought on by declining aid flows and the collapsing price of oil, the economy was unable to weather the resultant shocks. Unemployment rose, remittances from abroad shrank, and the value of the Jordanian dinar dropped precipitously. By 1989, with a massive balance-of-payments crisis looming, Jordan was forced to go cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a loan. The IMF's intervention succeeded in pulling Jordan out of an economic black hole, but the financial austerity measures that it compelled the government to impose led to widespread social unrest. Violent riots broke out across the country, including in rural areas such as Ma'an that had traditionally provided a strong support base for the regime.

In response to this crisis, and the calls for greater government accountability that it provoked, King Hussein decided to initiate a programme of political liberalisation. However, as analysts such as Curtis Ryan have noted, this was a 'reactive' and 'defensive' move rather than a proactive one. The regime 'never intended for the reform process to be so comprehensive as to change fundamentally

the nature of Jordan as a Hashemite monarchy. Nor did it intend to extend the liberalization process to the executive branch of government' (Ryan 2002: 25).

Limited political openings

In 1989, parliamentary elections were held in Jordan for the first time since the imposition of martial law in 1956. Although political parties were still banned at this time (and were not legalised until a new Political Parties law was passed in 1992), candidates were allowed to run as independents in these elections, which were acknowledged as being reasonably free and fair. Representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan did particularly well, winning 20 out of 80 seats. Women were also permitted to contest parliamentary seats, although none of the 12 who decided to run was elected.

Another initiative heralded as evidence of Jordan's move towards democracy was the drafting in 1990 of the *National Charter*: a document that addressed a broad range of reform issues around democratisation, the economy, foreign relations, education, the media, and the relationship between Jordanians and Palestinians. The charter called for 'political, party and intellectual pluralism', and asserted that 'the democratic option is the most efficient and appropriate means of fulfilling the aspirations of the Jordanian people' (Royal Commission on the Jordanian National Charter 1990: Chapter One). However, while these developments were welcome signs of a reformist impulse on the part of the monarchy, they did not signal the emergence of a democratic political system in Jordan. The Charter was not the outcome of a popular consultation process – rather, it was drafted by a royally appointed commission and ratified by an unelected congress.

Meanwhile, the brief opening provided by the reintroduction of elections was soon undermined by electoral gerrymandering and the imposition of the contentious 'one person, one vote' law. 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 technically undemocratic, these changes ensured that rural and traditionally pro-regime constituents who could count on support from extensive family networks did disproportionately well in the 1993 elections, largely at the expense of Islamist and other, secular, parties based in urban areas.

In 1994, King Hussein took the momentous step of normalising Jordan's relations with Israel, partly as a result of the optimism that surrounded the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords between Israel and representatives of the PLO in 1993, but primarily to boost US financial aid to Jordan (George 2005). His decision met with fierce opposition across the political spectrum, which in turn led the regime to crack down on freedoms of expression, the press, and public assembly through a series of 'temporary' laws. This gradual rollback of political freedoms continued until Hussein's death in 1999, leading most Jordanians to conclude that the liberalisation experiment had been a 'temporary tactic... to reduce opposition to unpopular economic policies' and one that had 'never intended to actually open to public choice the basic structures of the political system' (Choucair 2006: 8).

Jordan under Abdullah II

To the surprise of most, King Hussein decided in his final days to appoint his son, Abdullah, as his successor. It had been widely expected that this position would go to Hussein's brother, the Crown Prince Hassan. Although King Abdullah II was young and politically inexperienced when he came to power, he has demonstrated a keen enthusiasm for modernisation and reform. However, like his father, he has chosen to prioritise economic liberalisation over more deep-seated political change.

This focus on economic development has brought certain dividends to Jordan. Various programmes and initiatives have strengthened laws and regulations relating to intellectual property rights, arbitration and anti-trust. Privatisation has occurred in a number of sectors, which has loosened the grip that the regime has traditionally held on the economy. In addition, Jordan has signed free trade agreements with the United States and the European Union (EU), and has joined the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

While King Abdullah II has frequently asserted that the regime's programme of economic reform is the first step in a broader process of social and political democratisation, there have been few signs of this in the eight years since he came to power. Some modest steps have been taken in this direction, such as establishing the quasi-independent National Centre for Human Rights in 2002 and creating a Ministry for Political Development in 2003. He has also pushed for reforms to political party legislation to prevent a further proliferation of small and

ineffectual parties, by merging existing political organisations into three main groupings: Islamist, leftist and nationalist.

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 (International Crisis Group 2003, Ryan 2005). For example, 'temporary' laws issued by the regime between 2001 and 2003 (when parliament was dissolved and elections repeatedly postponed) increased the severity of penalties for any act deemed to threaten the security of the state, including 'outspoken journalism, illegal public gatherings... and any criticism of the royal family, the government, its allies and 'friendly' countries' (Schwedler 2002). In 2002, this led to the arrest and detainment of Jordan's sole elected female deputy at the time, Toujan Faisal, whose only offence had been to publish an open letter criticising the government for some of the aforementioned temporary laws.

Abdullah II's willingness to implement more far-reaching political reforms has been closely linked to the security situation in the region, which has deteriorated rapidly in recent years as a result of the worsening conflict between Israel and Palestine and the US-led war on Iraq. These crises have heightened the regime's sense of vulnerability, and have led it to rely more heavily than ever on the secret police and the intelligence services in its efforts to contain popular dissent. Without a significant improvement in the regional situation, and given the absence of a strong and organised domestic opposition movement, it is unlikely that the king will voluntarily elect to move further along the political reform path in the foreseeable future.

3. Political Islamist movements and parties in Jordan

Jordan is formally described as a parliamentary hereditary monarchy, but 'to date it has been more monarchical and hereditary than parliamentary' (George 2005: 174). Legislative elections have been held intermittently since 1929, but political parties have tended to be weak and ineffectual, and parliaments have generally failed to exert much of an influence on the direction of regime policies.

As discussed in the previous section, this is largely due to the top-heavy nature of the Jordanian political system, where the king acts as the ultimate arbiter on questions of domestic and foreign policy. It also reflects the unequal division of electoral power in Jordan, which privileges rural tribal groups with large familial support networks over political parties campaigning on specific issues. The years of martial law acted as a further brake on the development of political parties in Jordan. Between 1957 and 1992, 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.

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. As noted by Ellen Lust-Okar, 'the linkages between political parties and the masses appear weak, whether measured by the parties' success at the polls, their ability to mobilize the masses in the streets, or their success in establishing media outlets. Further, political parties have been largely unable to join government and influence government policy' (Lust-Okar 2001: 546).

The exception to this general picture of malaise comes from Jordan's political Islamists, who are much better organised than their secular counterparts. This section provides an overview of the mainstream political Islamist movements in Jordan, looking specifically at the Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front. It will also touch briefly on Jordan's more radical Islamist groups that are willing to use violence to achieve their aims.

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 gained 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 in Egypt and Syria). Instead, the regime has tended to view the success of the Brotherhood in a positive light, judging that its popularity has checked the power of more radical and confrontational movements, channelling Islamic activism into non-violent behaviour (Wiktorowicz 1999). 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 the king 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 the general crackdown on political activity that took place in the 1950s and 1960s.

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 NGOs was the Islamic Center Society, which was established in 1965 and has since served as the main charitable arm of the organisation. The Society runs a number of schools and hospitals, using these to disseminate Islamic principles and values as widely as possible. The provision of social services has also enabled the Muslim Brotherhood to cultivate strong ties at the grassroots level. Although many individuals do not necessarily agree with the strict Islamic ideals promoted by the Brotherhood through these charities, most appreciate the quality of education and healthcare they receive there, which is often better than in state-run institutions (Wiktorowicz 1999).

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 government 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 (Noyon 2003). Some members feared that participating 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, the Islamic Action Front party was therefore established.

The Islamic Action Front

Although the Islamic Action Front was supposed to be an ‘umbrella’ party that would include Muslim Brotherhood members and independent Islamists alike, it has essentially become the political wing of the Brotherhood (Schwedler 2006). 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 substantive 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
- the Palestinian question.

Commentators have tended to classify these factions 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.

Political participation

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 their representation within the Jordanian political system. As discussed earlier in this report, 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 their 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, particularly over the last year. In July 2007, the party made a last minute withdrawal from municipal elections, accusing the government of fraud and election-rigging. Many observers expected that they would also boycott forthcoming elections for the Chamber of Deputies, which will take place on 20 November 2007. Following a heated debate within the party, the IAF has decided to participate in these elections. However, they are only putting 22 candidates

forward and are almost certain to see the size of their parliamentary bloc shrink.

This development has been welcomed by the regime, which remains keen to limit the involvement of the IAF in government and in governance. But it would do well to 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 danger 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.

Radicalism in Jordan

Although the Islamic Action Front and other moderate Islamist parties, such as the Jordanian Wasat (Centre) Party, have stated their commitment to working peacefully 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 jihadists² who condemn the IAF for its willingness to compromise with a non-Islamic regime and 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 recently, Jordan has been 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), shattered the regime's complacency and 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 will serve only to undercut the appeal of more moderate Islamist forces in Jordan. As the International Crisis Group has argued:

'The security approach... has shown its limits: by trying to rein in opposition or criticism, the government has traded too heavily on continuing goodwill toward the monarchy. By stifling freedom of expression and providing no alternative outlet, the regime risks alienating the population further and feeding the radical fringe.' (International Crisis Group 2005a: 20)

2. Analysts disagree about the definition of 'jihadism'. Its usage in this report refers to the ideology of those individuals or groups that advocate the use of armed struggle, against either Muslim regimes they consider to be impious, foreign powers occupying Muslim territory, or western governments more generally. For further information see International Crisis Group (2005b).

4. What does the Islamic Action Front believe in?

Recent research carried out by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has highlighted a number of issues on which the thinking of Islamist parties and movements across the Arab world remains ambiguous and in need of further clarification. These so-called 'gray zones' include civil and political rights, women's rights, political pluralism, Islamic law, the rights of religious minorities, and the use of violence (Brown *et al* 2006). Given the increasing popularity of political Islamist parties such as the Islamic Action Front, it is important for western policymakers to develop a better understanding of where they stand on these questions. This section therefore looks specifically at the attitudes of members of the IAF towards recent political developments in Jordan, and assesses their policy positions and agendas on key issues such as political pluralism, human rights, and Jordan's foreign relations.

The analysis draws on public statements of policy made by Islamic Action Front deputies, including at the ippr seminar in Amman in September 2007. It is also based on 15 interviews, conducted by the Amman Centre for Human Rights Studies on behalf of ippr, with representatives of the IAF and with analysts who understand the movement well. These will not give a comprehensive picture of Islamist opinion in Jordan, but the interview process has nonetheless provided valuable first-hand information about the values and opinions of a cross-section of IAF politicians.

Human rights

This assessment of the Islamic Action Front's position on human rights focuses on three issues:

- the position of women in Jordan
- the use of capital punishment
- freedom of the press.

Women's rights

Compared to other political parties in Jordan, the Islamic Action Front has a reasonably large and active female membership and a number of women in leadership positions. In public speeches, IAF representatives frequently emphasise their commitment to women's rights, and the party's political platform endorses the legitimate entitlement of women to participate in public life, including the right to vote. However, while the party has 'never formally forbidden women to run for office, in practice it [has] actively discouraged them from doing so' (Clark 2004).

Among the IAF deputies interviewed for this report, a few considered the position of Jordanian women to be good and in no need of further enhancement, which is clearly at odds with the reality of legal, political and physical discrimination that is experienced by many women in Jordan. More conservative respondents also stressed the need for women to become more aware of their *Shari'a* rights and duties. However, the majority suggested that there was considerable room for improvement of women's rights in social and political life. A number of respondents

made vague statements about women needing to adopt a role in society 'commensurate with their abilities', but others were more specific about the problems faced by Jordanian women, with one asserting that 'women's rights to hold public posts in the various departments of the state, including education, health and the judiciary, should be secured.'

A notable omission from the answers of those interviewed was any discussion of 'honour' killings – acts of murder in which an individual (almost always a woman) is killed for actual or perceived immoral behaviour in order to 'restore' a family's reputation. This practice remains widespread in Jordan. While a substantial proportion of the political elite, including the king and queen, favour the implementation of much harsher punishments for these crimes, conservative politicians, including the Islamic Action Front, have campaigned against making any amendments to the exceptionally lenient terms of Jordan's penal code on this issue (Barsalou 2005).

Capital punishment

Jordan's criminal code allows the judiciary to apply the death penalty for a range of serious crimes, including murder, rape, terrorism, drug trafficking, treason and espionage. In 2006, King Abdullah II abolished the death penalty for a number of lesser offences, but many human rights activists have complained that this does not go far enough towards decreasing the overall number of executions that are carried out annually. When asked for their views on capital punishment, the IAF representatives interviewed for this report were almost unanimous in their belief that the death penalty should continue to be applied for certain crimes – specifically for cases of pre-meditated murder. Most respondents claimed that this form of punishment has proven value as a deterrent, and that the *Shari'a* principle of *qisas* (applying a punishment commensurate with the severity of the crime) was an appropriate method of dealing with criminals. However, while a few hard-line individuals advocated an increased use of the death penalty to punish crimes such as 'fornication', a higher proportion were in favour of applying it in 'a limited scope and under specific conditions'.

Freedom of the press

When asked about press freedom in Jordan, IAF representatives and other analysts were in agreement that this was in short supply, even if the Jordanian regime is not as repressive as others in the region. It was observed by most respondents that the government and security services exert too much influence on the press, and that there are many taboo subjects and red lines that still cannot be crossed. All were in favour of enhancing press freedom, and a few suggestions were made for how this might be achieved, including amendment of the 1998 Press and Publications Law that imposes heavy penalties on anyone who publishes information that 'offends national unity, stirs people to commit crimes, insults the dignity and personal freedoms of individuals [and] promotes fabricated rumours'.

Political reform

Analysis of the Islamic Action Front's stance on political reform considers four key issues:

- The relationship between the IAF and Islam, and the role that *Shari'a* law should play in governance
- The position of non-Muslims in the IAF
- The IAF's suggestions for how the Jordanian political system could be made more representative and accountable
- The party's views on extremism in Jordan and how the government should deal with this concern.

The relationship between the Islamic Action Front and Islam

When interviewees were asked for their assessment of the relationship between the Islamic Action Front and Islam, most responses were somewhat vague. A typical answer was that the party saw Islam as 'a system of reform, moderation, human freedom and dignity' that should govern all aspects of life. Some IAF members went further, by asserting that Islam was a religion 'fit for any time and place' and that *Shari'a* law should be 'the main source of legislation in any Islamic state'. However, a few respondents appeared to be more sensitive to the concerns often voiced by domestic and international observers about the strong religious views expressed by members of the IAF, and were keen to downplay the role of religion in the party. They stressed that the IAF did not support the creation of a theocratic state but was instead working towards the modernisation and development of Jordan, simply using Islam as a guide for their actions.

In public statements of policy, the IAF has been very careful in the way it emphasises issues relating to Islamic law. Although its 2003 political platform did call for application of *Shari'a*, observing that this was a religious obligation and the primary goal of the party, it offered few details and used 'gentle terminology' when discussing concrete measures that it supported (Brown 2006: 10). When asked if there were any additional aspects of *Shari'a* law that should be incorporated into the Jordanian legal system, most IAF members interviewed for this report answered in the affirmative, but would not be drawn on the specifics. A few respondents were more forthcoming with their opinions, arguing that Jordan's economic and social legislation and its penal code should be amended to bring them more into line with *Shari'a* principles. Others pointed out that most Jordanian laws are already derived from *Shari'a* legislation, and that all that is needed is an effort on the part of the government to apply the spirit and letter of the law more rigorously.

The role of non-Muslims in the Islamic Action Front

Compared to other Islamist movements in the region, the Islamic Action Front appears to be relatively open to the idea of non-Muslims joining the party. Indeed, in February 2007, a Christian was elected to the administrative board of the IAF's Amman branch, becoming the first non-Muslim to join the leadership of the organisation. When asked what role they saw for non-Muslims in the IAF, most party representatives interviewed for this report indicated there was no legal or practical reason why a non-Muslim should be barred from joining the party, as long as they complied with its articles of association and accepted its goals and values. Respondents stressed that the IAF was attempting to build a civil

state with an Islamic character instead of an overtly religious state, and that it accepted in its ranks 'all...citizens without any discrimination on the basis of race, religion, language or social status'. Only a few suggested that there was no constructive role for non-Muslims in a party based on religious principles, or saw only a very limited possibility of coordination on unspecified political matters.

Representation and accountability

A reform platform published by the IAF in 2005 states that the political system must be based on the rotation of executive power, and on political participation and pluralism. It also calls for a separation between the executive, legislative and judicial powers, and emphasises the need to increase the powers of parliament. This involves making all state institutions accountable to parliament and ensuring full judicial oversight of parliamentary elections (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2007).

These points were reiterated by every member of the IAF who was interviewed for this report, as well as by those who participated in an ippr seminar on reform in Jordan in September 2007. Specific suggestions for making the Jordanian political system more representative and accountable included amending the constitution to diminish the power of the executive in relation to the judiciary and the parliament, and reforming electoral laws that are heavily biased against political parties.

Extremism in Jordan

Members of the Islamic Action Front were asked whether they believed that support for groups espousing terrorist ideologies was on the rise in Jordan, and if so, what steps the government should take to deal with this. Most respondents were dismissive of claims that there had been an increase in domestic support for extremism in recent years, arguing that the threat of terrorism in Jordan had been exaggerated by the regime in order to leverage financial and political assistance from western governments. A typical response was the claim that 'terrorist and *Takfiri* ideas are not supported in Jordanian society, which is characterised with moderation and middle-of-the-road beliefs'. This perhaps reflects the party's sensitivity to critics who argue that the IAF might turn to violence in the future if it is unable to achieve its goals politically, although none of the individuals who were interviewed for this report commented on this issue.

However, a few individuals did acknowledge that the regime was providing 'fertile soil' for the growth of extremist ideas by failing to follow through on its promises of political reform, and by curtailing civil and political liberties. It was also claimed that the suppression of the Islamic movement in Jordan was harming moderate Islamists and creating a political vacuum that would be all too easily filled by hard-line voices. IAF members and other analysts interviewed for this report were unanimous in recommending that the government should move away from a security-based approach to terrorism and do more to tackle the underlying drivers of extremism in Jordan.

Foreign relations

Members of the IAF were questioned about their attitudes towards Europe and North America (the US and Canada) respectively, in an attempt to determine whether the party positively differentiates between different countries and regions, and whether it believes

that there is a constructive role for international partners to play in supporting reform in Jordan. Their responses are summarised below.

Attitudes to Europe

When asked about which issues Jordan and the European Union should work on together, respondents frequently highlighted the need for enhanced economic and technical cooperation. Some also suggested that the EU could usefully support political reform and the protection of human rights in Jordan, and could help to resolve the Palestinian conflict. However, while most IAF members seemed to believe that there were a number of issues on which the EU and Jordan could engage constructively, few respondents had anything positive to say about either of the current institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation between the EU and its immediate neighbours: the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (known as the EMP or the 'Barcelona Process') and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) – see Section 5 for further details. Interview responses suggested a general suspicion and lack of understanding about how these EU initiatives work and what they intend to achieve. Most respondents seemed to feel they were failing to improve living standards for the poorest Jordanians, and were serving only to privilege the elite few.

Others argued that the European Union's support for Israel undermined its ability to play a balanced role in Jordan and the region as a whole. For example, one IAF representative asserted that any meeting held under the auspices of promoting Mediterranean cooperation should be viewed with suspicion, as it was likely to have

the undesirable ulterior motive of 'normalising relations between Israel and the Arab countries'. At the ippr seminar on reform in Jordan, IAF members and other observers claimed that a number of European states had double standards when it came to questions of reform, and that they were more interested in ensuring Jordan's support in the fight against terrorism than in supporting reform of its authoritarian political system.

Attitudes to North America

IAF respondents were uniformly critical of the role that the United States plays in Jordan and the region as a whole, arguing that its support for the 'Zionist entity' and its aggressive pursuit of the war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan has fatally damaged its credibility as an actor in regional reform processes. A few thought that there was potential for the United States to play a more positive role in Jordan in the future if it moved away from favouring Israel and supporting 'dictatorships and corrupt regimes in the region', but most believed that the US would continue to pursue its own economic and political interests in the region, and to ignore the needs of ordinary Jordanian citizens.

Many of the individuals interviewed for this report did not differentiate between the US and Canada, or saw the latter as merely a 'satellite' of the former. However, others were more aware of the differences in policy between the two states. Some respondents praised Canada for its 'neutrality and respect for human rights', and suggested that it might play a useful role in Jordan by supporting political reform and the protection of human rights.

5. The role of international partners

As a pro-western island of relative stability in an ocean of conflict, ‘forming the pivot between Israel and Palestine to the west, Iraq to the east, Saudi Arabia and Egypt to the south and Syria to the north’, Jordan is a vital regional ally for North American and European governments (George 2005: 250). Its recent inclusion in the European Neighbourhood Policy has established it as a key link between Europe and the Arab world. The Jordanian government also has historically strong ties with the United States, based on mutual security assistance, trade and aid.

Earlier sections of this report have attempted to deepen understanding of the changing political scene in Jordan. This concluding section will now consider Jordan’s current relationships with key external partners, focusing on the EU and the US. What interests do these actors hold in relation to Jordan? And how can they most usefully support domestic reform processes? In this context, this section will also ask what kind of engagement, if any, is appropriate with Jordan’s mainstream Islamist party, the Islamic Action Front.

European partners

As mentioned in the previous section, political and economic relations between the EU and Jordan are governed by two frameworks: the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (or ‘Barcelona Process’) and the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Barcelona Process serves as a multi-track forum for regional and bilateral cooperation on a range of issues, while the ENP is more focused on developing a specific plan for reform in Jordan, and offers economic and social benefits in exchange for progress on a number of issues, including strengthening democracy, promoting the rule of law, upholding human rights, trade liberalisation, energy and transport development.

Jordan was one of the first countries in the Middle East to sign an Association Agreement with the EU, and it remains one of the Union’s most important regional partners. A recent EU strategy paper noted Jordan’s significance as a ‘stabilising and modernising influence’, and praised its ‘active role in promoting political reform and its constructive and balanced attitude to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict’ (European Union 2007a: 6). Jordan has derived substantial economic benefits from this privileged status, and is the third-largest recipient of EU assistance per capita, behind the Palestinians and Lebanon. More than €500 million has been allocated to Jordan through the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership programme since 1995, and in March 2007 the EU’s Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, announced an aid package that would total €265 million over the next four years (European Union 2007b).

Thus far, most of the EU’s financial assistance for Jordan has focused on economic and trade issues, rather than social or political reform programmes. For instance, while the funds transmitted to Jordan in 2005/06 totalled €110 million, just €5 million was earmarked for work on human rights, democratisation and governance. Encouragingly, the EU has recognised that it must

address this funding imbalance, and that supporting Jordan’s political reform – ‘including democracy, human rights, good governance, justice and co-operation in the fight against extremism’ (European Union 2007b: 17) – must be a priority in the future.

But the EU’s primary goal remains ensuring Jordan’s reliability as a partner in combating regional radicalism. This has prevented it from pressing the Jordanian government publicly on its commitments to promote political pluralism and reform. Security concerns relating to regime stability have also limited the EU’s willingness to engage with Jordan’s political opposition parties – especially the Islamic Action Front.

North American partners

Since the early 1950s, the Hashemite monarchy has had extremely close political and economic relations with the United States. After Israel, Egypt and Columbia, Jordan is the fourth-largest recipient of US foreign aid, and statistics suggest that between 1951 and 1993 Jordan received US\$3 billion in economic assistance and US\$4 billion in military assistance (Prados 2006). Although aid levels dropped in 1990 when Jordan failed to take a strong enough stance against Saddam Hussein’s occupation of Kuwait, they rose again dramatically in 1994 after King Hussein concluded the peace treaty with Israel.

Regional developments in the past few years have prompted another increase in the amount of aid transmitted to Jordan. Since the start of the Iraq war in 2003, the US has doubled its annual assistance package to Jordan from around US\$225 million (in the mid-1990s) to approximately US\$450 million. Most of this money has been used to subsidise the Jordanian treasury and to strengthen the country’s military infrastructure, although some has been put into initiatives that seek to implement reforms in Jordan’s water, education, health and governance sectors. Jordan has also received a number of grants through the US-sponsored Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), which runs projects relating to political, economic, educational and human rights issues.

In comparison to the EU, the US has been more willing to give direct democracy assistance to Jordan. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) – the federal government agency that provides economic, development and humanitarian assistance in support of foreign policy goals of the US – has been working in partnership with the Jordanian government to strengthen the rule of law and parliamentary infrastructure, to support the creation of stronger ties between parliament and civil society, and to improve the status of women. For the fiscal year 2007, USAID has allocated US\$12 million in support of democracy and governance issues (USAID 2007).

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) – non-governmental organisations that engage in overseas democracy promotion activities – have also initiated projects in Jordan that develop the advocacy and organisation skills of different political parties, although it seems unlikely that the Islamic Action Front is involved

in any of these programmes.

Yet, important as these initiatives are, they do not tackle the fundamental problems of the Jordanian political system: namely, political party weakness and a disillusioned and apathetic electorate (Choucair 2006). Their effectiveness has also been undermined by the overwhelming focus of US government aid on preserving the power of the Jordanian regime.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

Western governments face a difficult dilemma when it comes to promoting political reform in Jordan. They are understandably anxious to maintain their good relations with the Jordanian regime, which is an important ally in the fight against international terrorism and a strong regional advocate of the Middle East Peace Process. But in the long term, failing to publicly raise questions about Jordan's lack of progress on making its political system more representative is unlikely to further their stated goals of advancing democratic reform across the region.

Below, some policy recommendations are set out for how North American and European governments could strengthen their current efforts to support political reform in Jordan.

1. Actively encourage the Jordanian regime to follow through on its reform promises

Since 1999, the Jordanian government has made a strong commitment to opening up the political system and making it more participatory. For example, the royally-commissioned *National Agenda* document, published in 2006, called for a strengthening of democratic institutions and asserted that political parties were one of the 'cornerstones' of political development (National Agenda Steering Committee 2006). But so far, the rhetoric has not been matched by the reality. While it is primarily for Jordanians to decide on the most appropriate path towards democratisation and political reform, there is a role for European and North American policymakers to play in supporting this process.

The heavy dependence of the Jordanian regime 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 Jordan. This puts European governments in a particularly strong position to encourage the Jordanian regime to move faster towards the reforms that it has already pledged to undertake, including making changes to the controversial election laws and encouraging the development of stronger and more effective political parties.

2. Display more consistency in supporting human rights in Jordan

Although Jordan is less repressive than other states in the region, it has still shown a worrying propensity to crack down on opposition groups – especially those on the Islamist side of the political spectrum. There are also serious questions about the sweeping powers of arrest and detention held by Jordan's extensive security services (Human Rights Watch 2006). An encouraging sign of progress was the Jordanian government's recent decision to grant Human Rights Watch access to a number of its prisons, including the detention facility of the Jordanian General Intelligence

Department (GID) in Amman, although the subsequent report revealed that prisoners were routinely beaten and occasionally tortured (Human Rights Watch 2007).

Western governments – particularly those with strong bilateral relationships with Jordan – have been reluctant to rock the boat by commenting publicly on these issues. But this has hurt their credibility, and has led many Jordanian politicians and civil society groups to complain that international partners simply turn a blind eye when human rights abuses are committed by the regime. European and North American governments should be more willing to raise these concerns, both in private and in public, and should work constructively with the Jordanian government to address problems around enforcement of internationally recognised human rights standards that the regime has signed up to. They should also be more consistent in condemning all human rights abuses in Jordan, including those against non-violent Islamist activists.

3. Support the development of participatory politics and civil society in Jordan

Political reform in Jordan will greatly depend on a revitalisation and strengthening of its political parties, most of which are disorganised and lack clear policy platforms. A number of western NGOs (particularly the US-based NDI and IRI) already engage in political training activities relating to constituency-building and advocacy skills. European and North American governments could support this process by facilitating more parliamentary exchange programmes for Jordan's opposition politicians. Efforts should also be made to include representatives of Islamist parties in these initiatives – despite the past reluctance of IAF politicians to take part in such activities – because only consistent and principled engagement will demonstrate to Jordan's opposition parties that western governments are serious about supporting genuine political reform.

Political development programmes should not just be limited to parliamentarians. Tackling voter apathy in Jordan will require a long-term investment in political education and training, and more should be done now to involve young people and civil society groups in these processes. During the German presidency of the EU in 2007, the first Euro-Mediterranean Youth Parliament was held, bringing together young people from 38 European and Mediterranean countries to discuss a range of political and social issues (Goethe Institute 2007). European and North American governments should invest more political and financial energy in these and other similar initiatives to promote civic reform and renewal in Jordan from the ground up.

4. Seek opportunities for dialogue and engagement with political opposition groups in Jordan, including the Islamic Action Front

At present, contacts between external actors and Jordan's political Islamists are extremely limited. To a certain extent, this reflects the unease of western governments about the idea of engaging with movements such as the IAF, that appear to have close ties to Hamas (which is categorised as a terrorist organisation by both the US and the EU). However, it is also the result of deeply held suspicion and hostility on the part of the Islamist politicians towards foreign intervention in Jordan's internal affairs – particularly by the United States. Leaders of the IAF also regularly criticise the double

standards of the international community, arguing that their efforts to promote democracy are invalidated by their support for authoritarian regimes in the region (Wickham 2004). Under these circumstances, it is understandably difficult for representatives of western governments to develop a working relationship with Jordan's political Islamists. But failing to even talk to mainstream movements such as the IAF will do little to change this situation.

In September 2007, an ippr seminar brought together prominent members of a number of Jordanian political parties (including the IAF) alongside NGOs and representatives of international governments, to discuss the role of external partners in Jordan's reform process. A number of participants lacked a clear understanding of what European and North American governments

hope to achieve through their relationship with Jordan, and were dismissive of the suggestion that there was anything they could learn, but others were more receptive to the idea of engagement.

If mutual distrust and misunderstanding is to be overcome, a priority should be to facilitate more forums such as this for frank discussion of difficult political issues around foreign relations, human rights, electoral reform, and the relationship between religion and state. This will enable western policymakers to develop a more nuanced understanding of groups such as the IAF, and will also allow Islamists to express their legitimate concerns about western policy in Jordan and the region as a whole. Only then will both sides be able to work towards a more constructive mode of engagement.

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