

## Arab Reform Bulletin: April 2006

# Arab Reform Bulletin

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### Note from the Editor:

With Islamists winning electoral victories across the region, this month the *Arab Reform Bulletin* examines how Islamists operate once elected. On which issues do Islamist deputies focus in parliaments? How do they interact with other oppositionists and with governments? How does participating in legislatures—and in some cases in cabinets—affect Islamists' priorities and strategies? Our “News and Views” section also features a table showing electoral wins by Islamists over time. We hope you will find the discussion enlightening, and as always welcome your comments.

—Michele Dunne

The Arabic edition of this issue of the *Arab Reform Bulletin* will be available by April 26 at <http://www.alwatan.com.kw/arb>.

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## Insights and Analysis

### **Kuwait: Interview with Dr. Badr Al Nashi, president of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM)**

#### **How has participation in Kuwaiti governments since the 1990s affected the ICM?**

Cabinet formation is different in Kuwait than in democratic countries, where the cabinet is usually composed of members of the parliamentary majority. In Kuwait the Emir chooses the prime minister, who then nominates cabinet ministers, taking into account social classes and political orientations as well as the technical knowledge that some ministries require. Members of the ruling family occupy critical ministries such as the defense, interior, and foreign ministries. The ICM was more of a presence in the last cabinet due to the participation of Dr. Ismail Al Shatti, a member of the political office of the ICM who is also close to the Muslim Brotherhood. In general, the influence of the government on the ICM—the ICM on the government—depends on the specific individual from the Movement and the extent of his interaction with the other ministers.

#### **Have the priorities of the ICM changed due to its participation in the legislative branch since 1992?**

There has been no fundamental change in the movement's ideology due to its participation in the National Assembly, especially in regard to the implementation of sharia. A committee has been formed, directly attached to the Emir, to make preparations for completing the implementation of sharia. This is an example of how the ICM's work has moved from theory to reality.

I also believe that participating in the legislature has increased ICM interest in issues of political reform and development. Previously we focused more on general issues of morality and societal reform, but now we focus on specific issues such as educational reform, employment, the economy, and political issues such as electoral redistricting and reforming laws on publications and political parties.

#### **How do you view relations and prospects for cooperation between the ICM and non-religious political groups?**

A national dialogue continues between the ICM and liberal groups, with all issues on the table. All political forces in Kuwait agreed months ago on a list of issues including reforming the electoral system, amending the publications law, passing a law of political assembly, and reforming the judicial system. In fact, the publications law has now been amended and an electoral redistricting law is under discussion by the National Assembly.

The issues that the ICM and liberal groups disagree about are the application of sharia and personal freedoms. Liberal groups oppose complete implementation of sharia, while the ICM, Salafist Movement, and Shiite National Islamic Alliance support gradual Islamization of laws, which will affirm the social and moral values called for by Islam. This is not discussed as an issue of potential cooperation with liberals who believe, for example, that the segregation of sexes in the university imposes a limitation on society.

#### **On which issues does the ICM focus regarding the application of sharia?**

We primarily focus on the moral issues and the Islamization of laws, specifically those laws that affirm the Islamic identity and values of Kuwaiti society. Among the most significant examples are: the amendment of Article 79 of the constitution that prohibits the passage of any law that contradicts sharia; the enactment of a law of Islamic punishment; the law of zakat (charitable contributions) and philanthropy; a law for fighting drugs; and other laws related to the socialization of children.

There is a clear consensus among the deputies of the National Assembly as well as the Shiite, Salafist and tribal groups and various segments of the population on the application of sharia. This consensus does not include some liberals, although there are also liberals who agree with us on issues such as zakat, moral corruption, and narcotics.

#### **What is the ICM's position on the rights of women to vote and run for office?**

Before the National Assembly voted on the law granting political rights to women the ICM added the phrase "according to the stipulations of sharia," which was subsequently added to the text of the law. The aim of this addition was to ensure that

the law did not violate the Islamic identity of Kuwaiti society. For example, there should be separate polling places for men and women, as well as a law criminalizing the abuse by women of the right to vote. Either the Waqf (Religious Endowments) Ministry or Fatwa Council must issue a law or fatwa to organize the participation of women in elections.

### **If the ICM agrees to the participation of women, with stipulations, than why has it not placed any female candidates on its electoral lists for 2007 elections?**

The ICM believes that it is necessary to proceed slowly in this matter. The process should begin with the right to vote and later the right to run for office, after making the appropriate legal and social stipulations. Furthermore, we had completed the selection of our candidates before the passage of the new law. Also, we do not believe that the time is appropriate for female candidates from the ICM because the matter is in need of study. It is possible that the ICM will have female candidates after evaluating results of the 2007 elections.

### **What is the position of the ICM on succession and how it should be organized?**

There was a political crisis after the death of Emir Jaber Al Ahmed. The ICM has always approached the matter based on two principles. The first is that the ruling family has the right to determine the emir and his successor and there should be no external interference. The second is that in the event that the ruling family is unable to agree, there are legal and constitutional channels to resolve disputes. The ICM does not support one side against another, but when the recent crisis deepened the ICM did issue a statement requesting that Sheik Saad Al Abdullah step down due to his health. When the royal family failed to reach agreement, the ICM supported the government's request to transfer the issue to the National Assembly in order to remove Sheikh Saad and appoint Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad.

### **Does the ICM view participation in the legislature as a viable strategy to reform Kuwaiti politics?**

The Islamic Constitutional Movement, by its name and its design, has faith in the constitution, and believes it to be the central pillar of politics in Kuwait. The recent succession crisis showed that the constitution is the true authority for dealing with the most important national issues, even those connected with the head of state. The constitution provides a spur to action to political forces in Kuwaiti society. We would like for it to stimulate the organization of political activity and parties, as well as movement toward a parliamentary form of government, in order to achieve comprehensive political reform.

*This interview was conducted by Amr Hamzawy, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. It was translated from Arabic by Kevin Burnham.*

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## **Egypt: Brothers Trigger Debate but Cannot Pass Legislation**

### **Omayma Abdel-Latif**

"How do you think the Muslim Brotherhood performance has affected parliament?" The question was posted on the website of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's largest opposition group, in mid-March after 100 days in the current parliament. The results offered a boost. Sixty-eight percent of respondents said the Brotherhood's impact so far was excellent, 22 percent judged it acceptable, and 7 percent deemed it poor, while 3 percent said they did not care.

Stunned by the Brotherhood's electoral splash in the 2005 elections, when the group secured 88 of the 454 seats in the People's Assembly, observers have questioned the group's ability to serve effectively in the legislature. "Some analysts reacted to our victory as though the Brothers are a bunch of sheikhs and dervishes who were entering the political fray for the first time and had no parliamentary experience," remarked Essam Al Erian, senior member of the Brotherhood's politburo. Indeed, the Brotherhood's involvement in electoral politics dates back to 1938 when its founder and spiritual leader Hassan Al Banna ran for parliamentary elections in Ismailia. Forced to withdraw under pressure from British occupation authorities, Al Banna and other Brothers tried again in 1946 but failed to win seats

Repression by President Gamal Abdel Nasser forced the group to go underground in the 1950s-60s, and it was not until President Anwar Sadat's liberalization program in the mid-1970s that the Brotherhood was able to contest elections again. In 1976 the Brotherhood won a single seat, but it increased its presence to eight seats in 1984 and 36 seats in 1987, when it formed electoral alliances with secular parties including the Wafd, Socialist Labor Party, and Liberals Party. The 1990s saw a government clampdown on Islamists in light of terrorist attacks by extremist groups; the Brotherhood boycotted the 1990 elections and only one Brother was elected in 1995. In 2000 independent Brotherhood candidates won 17 seats, making them the largest opposition bloc in parliament at the time.

Along the course of the Brotherhood's ascendancy in politics, critics have charged that the movement's legislative agenda centered on morality rather than political issues. "Past experience shows that they were only after banning a book here or a play there. They rarely addressed real political issues," assessed political analyst Wahid Abdel Maguid. Responding to such charges, the Brotherhood recently published a book, *The Brotherhood in Parliament*, enumerating in detail the issues addressed by its deputies since 2000. Demands for constitutional amendments, expanding political freedoms, lifting the state of emergency, and raising questions about the fate of Egypt's 17,000 political detainees topped the Brotherhood's

agenda, according to the book.

An examination of the Brotherhood's record since 2000, however, shows that morality issues did feature significantly and command public attention. Brotherhood deputies demanded a ban on a novel published by the Culture Ministry, for example, because it contained sexually explicit material and mocked religion. They also frequently raised issues related to Egypt's Islamic and Arab identity in parliamentary debates. Brotherhood deputies attempted unsuccessfully to introduce legislation several times, for example a law relating to establishing an economic court and another to strengthen judicial authority. Deputies also submitted more than ten interpellations to cabinet ministers dealing with thorny issues ranging from corruption to privatization to the emergency law, most of them directed to Interior Minister Habib Al Adli.

In the current parliament, Brotherhood Supreme Guide Muhammad Mahdi Akef instructed lawmakers to give priority to exposing corruption and enhancing political freedoms. Saad Al Kattatni, head of the Brotherhood parliamentary bloc, said recently that political reform will remain central to the legislative agenda. In late March, Brotherhood deputies submitted a draft law to revise procedures licensing political parties, a hot issue because the current law gives the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) virtual veto power over its competitors.

Kattatni says that in the new parliament the Brotherhood is keen to coordinate with secular opposition forces, which hold 12 seats. That same spirit, however, does not exist between Brotherhood deputies and their National Democratic Party (NDP) counterparts. In one recent incident, an NDP deputy accused Brotherhood deputies of being "members of an illegal group who should be put in prison." The Brotherhood deputies walked out in protest, a scene that has been repeated during the current parliamentary session. The government recently banned live coverage of parliamentary sessions on state-owned Nile TV, drawing protests from Brotherhood deputies.

Brotherhood leaders make no secret of their frustration at the futility of their energetic legislative efforts in view of the NDP's two-thirds majority in parliament. "The Brotherhood performance in parliament is remarkable, said Supreme Guide Akef in a recent interview, "however it remains an effort without value." Essam Al Erian begs to differ, setting a more realizable goal: "Every issue we address in the Assembly enlightens the public and creates a debate; this is enough for the time being."

*Omayma Abdel-Latif is political affairs correspondent at Egypt's Al Ahram Weekly and has covered Islamist politics for the last decade.*

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## **Palestine: Hamas in Power**

***Nathan J. Brown***

In recent decades a number of democratic transitions began when an authoritarian government agreed to elections under rules it had designed to ensure its continued hold on power—and then lost. In the Philippines in 1985, Chile in 1988, Poland in 1989, and Yugoslavia in 2000, rulers ceded power, gracefully or not, after a surprising defeat at the polls. In Palestine in 2006, the long dominant Fatah party lost to a "Change and Reform" slate assembled by the Islamist Hamas movement.

There has been less friction than might have been expected between Fatah and Hamas during the transition, largely because President Mahmud Abbas and the new Hamas majority have been fairly conscientious in observing procedures. New parliamentarians—though inexperienced—have intently studied the constitution, legal framework, and parliamentary bylaws. For instance, when they discovered that the outgoing cabinet had not submitted a 2006 budget and that the Palestinian Authority would lose its legal authority to spend money, they refused to ignore the issue (as the outgoing parliament had often done) but instead quickly rushed through legislation allowing an extension. But there continue to be rough spots. The outgoing Fatah majority in parliament tried to rush through a set of measures (now challenged in the courts) and the incoming Hamas speaker of parliament called in public prosecutors to investigate suspected forgery of parliamentary records. And the critical issue of control of the security services has not been resolved.

Hamas's restraint regarding domestic affairs has helped. Chairmanships of parliamentary committees have been doled out among various parties rather than monopolized by the governing majority. And Hamas's legislative program is at present quite modest. Deputies have mentioned few laws that they wish to see passed; when pressed, they identify only general issues rather than specific projects. Even on religious matters Hamas seems anxious to assure Palestinians that they are in for no sudden change. Nasser Al Shaer, an Islamic law professor who doubles as Education Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, has abandoned former calls for a constitutional prohibition on legislation that violates Islamic law and promises that there will be no major changes in school curricula.

The new government is promising to focus on efficiency, clean government, and ending the disorder in Palestinian streets. Indeed, the Hamas government program says little of struggle and resistance; Islam and Islamic law are passed over in silence. But corruption is denounced three times and rule of law mentioned five times. The newly seated parliament has attracted attention for its insistence on extended prayer breaks, but the deputies themselves speak far more about transparency and economic problems than they do about the sale of alcohol or women's dress.

Much of the modesty of Hamas's objectives reflects its reading of the public mood. While some of its core constituency may wish to see a thorough Islamization of society and a return to what Hamas terms "resistance," the movement won the

election by its promise of reform and honesty. Hamas confronts some legal limitations as well, as the presidency retains certain powers and most of the bureaucracy was hired by Fatah and is protected by a strong civil service law.

While domestic affairs are proceeding quietly, however, the international environment poses a significant set of obstacles. Hamas's efforts to pull other parties into the cabinet ultimately foundered on its unwillingness to give unambiguous pledges to honor past international agreements or accept the authority of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, a largely moribund body that still claims the allegiance of Palestinians throughout the world.

Economic and fiscal limitations are most daunting. The Palestinian economy is dependent on access to Israeli markets and ports; the budget is dependent on taxes on entering goods that are actually collected by Israel as well as on foreign assistance. Hamas's victory has faced Palestinian society with the loss of all of these vital sources of economic growth and government revenues. To date Hamas has yet to deliver on a solution beyond a variety of slogans including tightening belts, eliminating the abuse of public funds, donations from friendly Arab and Muslim states, economic self-reliance, and greater economic integration with surrounding Arab states. When queried on their solution to the dire fiscal crisis, government leaders are easily able to identify actions others should take but indicate no practical solutions of their own.

In addition, it is not clear how long the lull in Israeli-Palestinian violence can survive the stubborn Hamas refusal to soften its position and the Israeli determination to pursue a unilateral solution in the absence of negotiations. Last month's Israeli raid on Jericho and the Hamas pledge not to suppress anti-Israeli violence by other Palestinian factions suggest that Palestinian electoral democracy is threatened less by Hamas's uncertain democratic credentials—indeed the party's rhetoric and positions are probably more democratic than those of any other ruling party in the Arab world—and more by the conflict with Israel, which its electoral victory has greatly deepened.

*Nathan J. Brown is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.*

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## **Jordan: Islamic Action Front Presses for Role in Governing**

**Curtis R. Ryan**

Jordan's Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political party of the Muslim Brotherhood, has had its share of electoral success and is now positioning itself to demand more of a role in governance. While terrorist bombings in 2005 left the Front worried about the new security-preoccupied government, Hamas's electoral victory in Palestine has emboldened the IAF to translate its popularity into greater political clout.

In 1989, when the Hashemite regime initiated elections for the lower house of parliament, the Muslim Brotherhood was poised to reap the benefits of decades of organization. It secured 22 parliamentary seats (out of a total of 80), while independent Islamists won an additional 12. The movement used its parliamentary strength to elect an Islamist speaker of the parliament, while other Islamists were even invited to take cabinet posts.

Under a new electoral law in 1993, however, the IAF secured only 16 parliamentary seats while independent Islamists dropped to a mere six. When the regime refused to repeal the electoral law, the IAF led the opposition in an 11-party boycott of the 1997 elections. Islamists then shifted their efforts toward the professional associations, where in short order they won the leadership posts of almost every association in the kingdom.

The 2003 elections were the first under King Abdullah II, and marked the return of the opposition to electoral politics. Seventeen IAF members gained parliamentary seats (including Hayat Al Massimi, who gained the first seat under the women's quota), along with five independent Islamists, in a parliament now expanded to 110 members.

While the IAF remained focused on its own Islamist political agenda, most legislation continued to emerge from the government itself, with the parliament serving as a debating forum that usually provided a legislative stamp of approval. The IAF had little ability to advance its broad goals of implementing Islamic law, preventing normalization of ties with Israel, and ultimately of abrogating the peace treaty entirely. The IAF did, however, align itself with other conservative forces in order to block government attempts to change Jordan's laws regarding honor crimes, specifically the lenient legal framework for sentencing men who killed female relatives suspected of shaming the family.

In November 2005 Al Qaeda suicide bombers struck three luxury hotels in central Amman, killing 60 people—mostly Jordanians—and injuring more than 100. The IAF and the Muslim Brotherhood were among the first to respond by organizing anti-al-Qaeda demonstrations. But Islamists in parliament found themselves squaring off with the government following a major cabinet reshuffle. The new government reflected a regime in security-mode, led by Prime Minister Marouf Al Bakhit (former ambassador to Israel and a security hawk) and with conservative royalists Abdul Hadi Al Majali and former Prime Minister Zayd Al Rifai as speakers of the lower and upper houses of parliament.

The government meanwhile called for preemptive war on militant forms of Islamism, which the IAF and Muslim Brotherhood feared might be used against them. In January 2006, the government charged IAF leader Jamil Abu Bakr with "harming the dignity of the state." The charges stemmed from articles on the IAF website that criticized the government tendency to appoint officials due mainly to connections rather than expertise or parliamentary consultations. The charges were dropped the following month, but the sense of harassment remained.

Just as security factors have made life more difficult for the IAF, however, the sweeping victory of Hamas in Palestinian legislative elections has re-invigorated Jordan's already well-organized Islamist movement. With its campaign emphasis on anti-corruption and social welfare activities, Hamas was in many ways adopting the tactics of Jordan's IAF and Muslim Brotherhood, with which it had even shared office space at one time. But unlike Hamas, the IAF and Muslim Brotherhood do not have a militant wing. Hamas representatives were expelled from Jordan in 1999; the IAF is now calling on the government to recognize Hamas's achievement by restoring ties.

For many Islamists, the Hamas victory was inspiring but also a reminder of their comparative limitations. While Hamas's electoral win translated immediately into a new Hamas-led government, 17 years of Islamist electoral success in Jordan has produced no chance whatsoever to form an IAF government. Consequently, IAF leaders have recently become bolder in articulating their policy priorities as well as in demanding that the government stop harming the Islamist movement through electoral laws designed to minimize their representation.

IAF deputies have charged that in freer and fairer elections they might win 40 to 50 percent of the vote. They further argue that the cabinet should be drawn from parliament rather than appointed by the palace. In the current wrangling over a new law on parties and elections, this issue of linking elections to actual governance remains a key point of struggle between the government and IAF, as they bargain over the ground rules for the 2007 parliamentary elections and the nature of the Jordanian state itself.

*Curtis R. Ryan is Associate Professor of Political Science at Appalachian State University in North Carolina, and is the author of Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002).*

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## **Morocco: PJD Works at Being New and Different**

***Eva Wegner***

The Party of Justice and Development (PJD) is the offspring of the Movement for Unity and Reform, itself an amalgam of several Islamist organizations. It has held seats in parliament since 1997 and increased its share from 14 to 42 seats in the 2002 elections, even though the party only ran in half of Morocco's electoral districts. With the exception of the 1998-2000 period, during which the PJD lent its support (but did not hold ministerial portfolios) to the government lead by Socialist Party Prime Minister Yousoufi, it has remained in opposition throughout the whole period.

The PJD is similar to other parties in that it generally competes actively with its counterparts within the parliament but displays docility toward the palace. In one telling episode, the PJD worked with other Islamist movements to mobilize against a proposed reform of personal status laws under the Yousoufi government, only to endorse the reform after it became part of King Muhammad's political agenda in 2003.

The PJD has succeeded in differentiating itself from other political parties not so much by pushing for distinctively Islamist policies but by establishing and maintaining a reputation as a party that defends the interests of the populace rather than those of a self-interested political elite. Since 1997 it has also evolved into a more open organization that increasingly attracts voters, members, and candidates from segments of Moroccan society without a background of Islamist activism. While the PJD lacks a clearly defined political program, it has focused most of its parliamentary activities on increasing transparency and fighting corruption, issues that appeal to Islamist and non-Islamist voters alike.

From the beginning, PJD interventions in parliament have focused on improved ethics in and empowerment of Moroccan political institutions. In a symbolic move against absenteeism, the party circulated an attendance list to be signed by its deputies at general assembly and committee hearings and required explanation for absence or tardiness. Similarly, in weekly hearings broadcast on Moroccan TV, the PJD repeatedly insisted on enforcing parliamentary regulations sanctioning absent deputies. PJD deputies submitted the largest number of written questions and a substantial proportion of the oral questions, and denounced government delays in replying.

Differentiating itself from other Moroccan parties is at the core of the PJD's political capital. This was demonstrated by the way the leadership formalized deputies' obligations after the 2002 elections, when the PJD parliamentary group had grown significantly. Fearing that PJD deputies would fall into bad habits as they became part of the parliament's culture, the party leadership set up an internal code requiring deputies to attend all parliamentary sessions and to be productive. Each deputy is required to draft at least one oral question per week, one written question per month, and to propose one bill per legislative year. The PJD also requires deputies to remit at least 22 percent of their remuneration to the party in order to strengthen both party finances and the reputation of PJD deputies as not working for profit.

Beyond the issue of ethics, the PJD has also worked on strengthening its ability to develop legislation, founding the "Forum du Développement" in 2000. Its tasks are to develop party policies and to support and train deputies. Most questions, amendments, and draft bills of a more technical nature—for instance, relating to the budget law rather than denouncing collaboration by leftist parties with the "Zionist entity"—have been produced by the Forum's members. These highly pragmatic technocrats are now increasingly coming to the forefront in the party. PJD leaders parachuted several of them into the top ranks of electoral lists in 2003 local elections, knowing that candidates capable of managing budgets, multi-party coalitions, and interacting with governors would be more effective than school teachers (the largest pool of PJD candidates and current deputies). By setting up projects centered on improving public services, such as low income

housing or waste management, the technocrats must now show that the party can indeed make a difference. Their experience may indicate the extent to which the PJD—or perhaps any party with an ethical message—can survive the hazards of governance in the Middle East and North Africa.

*Eva Wegner is a researcher at the European University Institute in Florence.*

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## **News and Views**

### **Islamist Groups: Electoral Outcomes**

Click [here](#) for a table showing parliamentary election results for the countries where Islamist parties and candidates have competed legally or openly in parliamentary elections.

The role of Islamist opposition parties in legislative elections varies across the Arab region. In Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Yemen, Islamist parties—parties whose main goal is the establishment of an Islamic state or the implementation of sharia—are permitted to compete in elections. In Egypt, Islamist political parties are banned, but Islamists have run for office as independent candidates, typically as members of the illegal but tolerated Muslim Brotherhood. Tunisia has a multiparty system, but forbids religiously-affiliated parties and candidates. Syria allows only candidates vetted by the ruling Baath party, which so far has excluded Islamists.

In Bahrain and Kuwait all political parties are illegal but Islamist candidates compete openly in elections as independents or with the backing of political and religious societies. Parties are also illegal in Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. Among these states only Oman, which has no notable Islamist movement, has so far held legislative elections. The UAE and Qatar have announced that they will hold legislative elections in the future. Saudi Arabia does not hold legislative elections but independent Islamists participated in the 2005 municipal elections.

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### **Palestine: Multiple Challenges for Hamas Cabinet**

Tensions are on the rise between the new Hamas-led government and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas after an April 5 decision by Abbas to assume security control over Gaza's border crossings. As head of the National Security Council, Abbas has final say over the Palestinian security forces but Prime Minister Ismail Haniyya criticized the decision as a violation of power-sharing agreements. On April 9, Abbas appointed a new commander of security forces in the West Bank and Gaza strip, a move observers believe was designed to alleviate tensions with Hamas.

The new Palestinian Authority also faces grave financial challenges. The Palestinian Authority will not be able to pay the salaries of about 140,000 government employees without foreign assistance. The European Union, the largest international donor to the Palestinians, suspended direct aid to the Palestinian Authority on April 7 because Hamas has not recognized Israel or renounced violence. European Union foreign ministers stressed they would seek alternative ways of providing money for humanitarian purposes. Click [here](#) for a list of the 24-member Hamas cabinet sworn in on March 29.

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### **Iraq: Political Impasse Continues**

Disagreement over the choice of a prime minister continues to hamper the formation of a new Iraqi government almost five months after parliamentary elections. On April 10, Kurdish and Sunni politicians reaffirmed their opposition to the continuation of interim Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari as prime minister in Iraq's new government on the grounds that he is responsible for the current rise in tensions. The United Iraqi Alliance, the parliamentary bloc with the most seats, has resisted demands that it withdraw Jafari as candidate. The parliament, which has held one session since the December 15 elections, is scheduled to meet on April 17 to discuss the formation of a new government.

Iraq's top religious leaders will meet in Amman on April 22 in an attempt to defuse the volatile situation in Iraq. The Iraqi Islamic Reconciliation Summit will be held under the patronage of Jordan's King Abdullah II and will be organized by the Arab League and the Aal Al Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.

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### **Jordan: Islamists Arrested; Debate Continues over New Press Law**

Jordanian authorities arrested more than 100 members of the Islamist Action Front (IAF), Jordan's largest political party, on April 9 for distributing flyers calling for a strike in protest of Jordan's third fuel price hike since July 2005. On March 18 Zaki Bani Irsheid, considered a moderate, replaced Hamzeh Mansour as IAF Secretary General.

In the ongoing debate over a new press and publications law, parliament's National Guidance Committee rejected on March 13 a provision in the amended draft law that would have prohibited the imprisonment of journalists charged with violating provisions of the law. The committee insisted that "journalists should not have immunity." Under the existing 1998 law, journalists may be imprisoned if they incite sectarian sedition; vilify a religion, God or a prophet; or commit slander. In response to criticism from the Jordan Press Association, government spokesperson Nasser Judeh stated on March 27 that the government continues to be committed to the principle of abolishing imprisonment of journalists. The draft law was first presented to parliament in 2004 by former Prime Minister Faisal Al Fayez's government. Click [here](#) to read a report on media freedom in Jordan in 2005 by the Arab Archives Institute.

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### **Syria: Crackdown on Human Rights and Political Activists; Opposition Alliance**

A recent wave of arrests and court sentences has targeted several human rights activists and opposition figures. On April 3, the Syrian State Security Court sentenced Kurdish human rights activist Riad Drar to five years in prison on charges of disseminating false news, inciting sectarian riots, and forming a secret organization. The court also sentenced Abdul Sattar Qattan, a member of the banned Muslim Brotherhood, to 12 years in prison on April 3 and three students accused of being Islamists to 10 years imprisonment on March 28. Syrian authorities arrested four human rights activists in the week of March 20, including the former vice president of the Human Rights Association in Syria Mohammad Najati Tayyara. Two weeks earlier Syrian security forces detained for four days Amar Qurabi, a spokesperson for the Arab Human Rights Organization in Syria, on his return from political conferences in Washington and Paris. Click [here](#) for more details on these cases by Amnesty International.

Meeting in Brussels on March 17, exiled Syrian opposition leaders announced the creation of a united front to form a transitional government to bring about regime change in Syria. Participants in the National Salvation Front include former Syrian vice president Abdel Halim Khaddam, leader of the banned Muslim Brotherhood Ali Sadreddine Al Bayanouni, and smaller Kurdish and communist parties. On April 9, a military court in Syria charged Khaddam, who has been living in Paris since he defected in December 2005, with inciting a foreign attack against Syria and plotting to take power.

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### **Egypt: Campaign to Amend Press Law; Muslim Brothers Arrested**

The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights launched a national campaign on March 13 to abolish jail sentences for press offenses, promoting a new draft press law proposed by the Journalists' Syndicate. President Hosni Mubarak announced at a February 2004 conference at the press syndicate that prison sentences for journalists convicted of libel would be abolished, but the promised reform has yet to be enacted. Click [here](#) for more details on the campaign.

In another development, Egyptian authorities arrested nine members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Alexandria on April 1, bringing to 30 the number of detained Muslim Brothers in the month of March.

Egyptian authorities released 950 members of the militant Islamist group Al Jamaa Al Islamiyya between April 2 and April 12, including several senior figures who had been imprisoned for over 20 years. Al Jamaa Al Islamiyya was responsible for a string of terrorist attacks in Egypt the 1990s but the group's leaders renounced violence and entered into a truce with the government in the late 1990s.

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### **Tunisia: Crackdown on Political Activists**

Five Tunisian opposition parties, led by the Progressive Democratic Party, have accused the government of harassing activists in civil society organizations in Tunisia. An April 10 statement by the head of the party, Najib Al Shabbi, called on the government to amend the constitution to abolish the one-party system and to amend press, political party, and electoral legislation. According to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Tunisian writer and human rights lawyer Muhammad Abbou is being mistreated in prison and his family is being harassed. Abbou was sentenced in June 2005 to three and a half years in prison because of an Internet article that allegedly "defames the judicial process" and was "likely to disturb the public order." Click [here](#) to read the CPJ statement.

Political activist Neila Chachour Hashisha and her family are being harassed by Tunisian authorities after she spoke at a seminar for Arab reformers at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington DC, according to International Freedom of Expression Exchange. Referring to the matter in an April 3 [statement](#), U.S. Department of State deputy spokesman Adam Ereli said that the U.S. government encourages the government of Tunisia to "take actions consistent with its declared

intentions to engage in democratic reform.”

A **statement** by Human Right Watch called on the Tunisian authorities to release Ali Ramzi Bettibi on the one year anniversary of his arrest for copying an online statement from a group threatening terror attacks onto a discussion forum he moderated. Human Rights Watch also pointed out that more than 300 political prisoners remain under detention after the presidential pardon announced on February 25, which freed or conditionally freed 1,650 prisoners including more than 80 political detainees.

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### **Morocco: Debate over Electoral Survey**

Morocco's Islamist Party for Justice and Democracy (PJD) has been at the center of debate after a poll by the U.S.-based International Republican Institute showed that the PJD could win 47 percent of the vote in the next legislative elections. In comments to the media, PJD representatives consistently played down the poll's results. PJD Secretary General Saad Eddin Al Othmani repeatedly emphasized that in many cases polls do not coincide with facts and reality and that Moroccans should not think too far ahead. In the same vein, senior PJD official Abdallah Kiran said on *Al Jazeera's* “**Ma Wara Al Khabar**” (Behind the News) on March 25 that the party does not desire an electoral result that Morocco would not be able to handle and referred to Algeria as an example of a case where rapid change was disastrous. He argued that Morocco needs a gradual process of political reform that reassures all the political players.

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### **Qatar: Parliamentary Elections Announced**

Qatar will hold its first legislative elections in early 2007, according to an April 1 statement by Foreign Minister Hamad Bin Jasem Al Thani. Qatar's constitution, approved in an April 2003 popular referendum, creates a legislative body with thirty members elected by universal suffrage and fifteen appointed by the emir. Currently Qatar only has an appointed council with a limited advisory role. According to the constitution, the legislature will have three main powers: to approve (but not prepare) the national budget; to monitor the performance of ministers through interpellations and no-confidence votes; and to draft, discuss, and vote on proposed legislation, which becomes law only with the vote of a two-thirds majority and the Emir's endorsement.

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### **Bahrain: Renewed Tension between Government and Human Rights Organization**

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) lost an appeal in March to a September 2004 decision by the government to dissolve the center on the grounds that it had violated the 1989 associations law. Despite the 2004 decision, however, the center has remained active. On March 8, the Ministry of Social Development warned that it will recommend legal measures against the center if it continues its activities.

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### **Kuwait: Women Vote for First Time**

Kuwaiti women voted and ran for office for the first time in Kuwait's history on April 4 in a local by-election to fill a single seat in the 16-member municipal council. Municipal elections took place in June 2005, but women could not take part in that vote because the government-sponsored suffrage bill had only been passed a month earlier.

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### **Upcoming Political Events**

- Iraq: Iraqi Islamic Reconciliation Summit, Amman, April 22.
- Lebanon: National Dialogue to resume on April 28.
- Bahrain: Municipal elections in May; legislative elections in October.
- Jordan: Municipal elections expected by mid-2006.
- Yemen: Presidential and municipal elections, September 2006.

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### **Views from the Arab Media**

Recent commentaries by prominent Islamists included:

- In an April 9 **commentary** on the Muslim Brotherhood's official website *Ikhwanonline*, deputy supreme guide Muhammad Habib calls on civil society institutions in the Arab world to uphold the demands of Arab citizens in the face of dictatorial regimes intent on crushing the democratic spirit. Habib calls on political parties, syndicates, and associations to acknowledge that comprehensive reform can only be achieved through a political reform process based on the notions of pluralism, peaceful rotation of power, free and fair elections, and separation of powers.
- In an April 4 **article** on the same website, scholar Rafiq Habib explores the question of whether newly elected governments have the right to change the existing system or if they must abide by the established rules of the game. Habib argues that in the case of the Palestinian system, the rules of the game and the nature of the relationship with Israel were not initially set in a democratic manner and the Palestinian public voted in January 2006 to change the status quo. Hamas won on an electoral platform based on a rejection of the existing system (primarily the Oslo agreement) and the movement now is responsible to its electorate to abide by these promises.
- In an **interview** in Egypt's independent daily *Al Masry Al Youm* on April 9, Islamist intellectual Fahmi Huweidi argues that the implementation of Islamic law in Egypt does not imply that Copts will become second class citizens. The real issue at hand is not whether the Muslim Brothers can provide guarantees to the Coptic community in Egypt, but rather whether Egyptian society can provide guarantees that the dignity of its citizens, Muslim or otherwise, will be respected. Currently all Egyptian citizens are treated as second class citizens by the regime.
- *Al Masry Al Youm* also published an **interview** on April 11 with Jordan's Islamic Action Front Secretary General Zaki Saad Bani Irsheid. Irsheid argues that the U.S. is pulling back from its earlier calls for democratization and instead praising the “democratic reforms” of countries like Jordan that in reality have not made any real moves to ensure political liberties. Irsheid also criticizes efforts by Arab regimes to portray Islamist movements as authoritarian entities that will exploit electoral politics to impose their vision on society. He contends that democratic practices in the Islamist parties' internal procedures demonstrate their devotion of democratic ideals.

Several commentaries in the Arab media focused on U.S. democracy promotion in the Middle East in light of the electoral victories of Islamist parties in the region:

- Speaking on *Al Jazeera's* show “**Min Washington**” (From Washington) on March 27, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Scott Carpenter denied that the results of recent elections have led the U.S. to question its democratization policy and asserted that the desire for greater political liberties and political participation is stronger than ever. He also affirmed that the U.S. will stand by its policy of not engaging with terrorist organizations, but that it is in contact with peaceful Islamist movements. Emad Shahin, political science professor at Harvard, expressed skepticism about the United States' calls for reform and argued that it continues to engage with friendly dictatorial regimes to maintain security. Carnegie scholar Amr Hamzawy observed that U.S. policy is not clear-cut but is the result of competing ideologies and strategies for the region.
- According to a March 30 opinion **article** in *Ash Sharq Al Awsat* by Amr Hamzawy, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice's latest visit to the region highlighted the ambiguities of the U.S. administration's democracy promotion policy. The recent electoral victories of Islamists groups have strengthened realists who argue that U.S. pressure on Arab regimes will result in anti-U.S. governments coming to power as well as instability. These voices also criticize the U.S. emphasis on elections rather than focusing on institution building, the rule of law, and strengthening Arab democrats.
- The Bush administration has erred in assuming that the notion of the state was consolidated in Arab countries, argues Abdullah Iskandar in an April 11 **article** in pan-Arab daily *Al Hayat*. Instead, as the examples of Iraq and Lebanon demonstrate, loyalties in the Arab world are still primarily ethnic and sectarian. Iskandar also criticizes Arabs who reject the notion of democracy on the sole basis that external actors are calling for it.

Some political shows focused on Islamist parties in particular Arab countries:

- *Al Jazeera's* political debate show “**Ma Wara Al Khabar**” (Behind the News) addressed on April 8 the tension between the new Hamas-led government and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Mohammad Nizal, member of Hamas's political bureau, accused Abbas of trying to undermine the new government by stripping it of any real powers. In response, Mohammad Dahlan, head of the security committee in the Palestinian Legislative Council, argued that Abbas is acting within his constitutional powers in appointing security chiefs. Mkhaimar Abusada,

political science professor at Al Azhar University in Gaza, affirmed that while Abbas did not technically overstep his competencies, he should have consulted with the new interior minister in this matter. Abusada added that Abbas acted responsibly in taking control of the Rafah crossing because he prevented an Israeli takeover, which would have occurred if the crossing had stayed in Hamas's hands.

- Another *Al Jazeera* live show, “**Hiwar Maftouh**” (Open Dialogue) featured a discussion on March 25 on Syrian opposition movements. Ali Sadreddine Al Bayanouni, Syria's exiled Muslim Brotherhood leader, defended the Muslim Brotherhood's alliance with Syrian former vice president Abdel Halim Khaddam (who broke with the Assad regime in December 2005) saying that Khaddam had renounced the policies of the government. Prominent Syrian activist Michel Kilo asserted he is not opposed to this alliance as long as it abides by the principles of the Damascus Declaration announced by Syrian opposition groups in November 2005. Al Aridi, director of the London-based Syria Media Center, criticized Khaddam's credibility as a reformer and posited that only the current Syrian regime is capable of delivering reforms to its citizens.

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## Read On

Islamist political participation in the Arab world has been the subject of a wide range of recent publications in English and Arabic. Publications addressing region-wide developments include:

- In “**Islamist Movements and the Democratic Process: Exploring the Gray Zones**,” Nathan Brown, Amr Hamzawy, and Marina Ottaway discuss critical areas of ambiguity in Islamists' thinking including Islamic law, the use of violence, political pluralism, civil and political rights, women's rights, and religious minorities (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Paper no. 67, March 2006).
- Al Muraqib Al Arabi (The Arab Observer) published a special issue in April 2006 on dialogue between the West and Islamist movements in the Arab world (Center for Gulf Research and Studies, London).
- The March 2006 issue of **Al Mustaqbal Al Arabi** (The Arab Future) includes analysis of the Hamas victory in the Palestinian elections as well as the future of Islamist movements in Morocco (Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut).
- Rather than supporting democracy by focusing on new Islamic thinking and parties, the United States should promote institutional reform in the Arab world, argues Daniel Brumberg in “**Islam is Not the Solution (Or the Problem)**” (*The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1, Winter 2005-06, 97-116).
- Reaching out to moderate Islamists must become part of the West's policy for promoting democratic politics in the Middle East, argues Amr Hamzawy in “**The Key to Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists**” (Carnegie Endowment Policy Brief no. 40, July 2005).
- In “**Islamists and Democracy: Keep the Faith**” (The New Republic, vol. 232, no. 4,716, June 6, 2005), Marina Ottaway argues that if the United States wants to encourage democratization it should seek to understand and support democratic trends within Islamist movements, the only groups with significant organized constituencies in much of the Middle East.
- Seyyed Vali Nasr asserts that “Muslim democracy” is an emerging electoral platform that seeks to dominate the middle by integrating Muslim values into broader socioeconomic demands, reminiscent of the Christian Democratic parties of Europe (“The Rise of ‘Muslim Democracy’,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 16, no. 2, April 2005, 13-27).
- *Dalil al harakat al islamiya fi al ‘alam* (Guide to Islamist Movements in the World) by Egyptian scholar Dia Rashwan outlines the history and agendas of violent and non-violent Islamist movements in Egypt, Turkey, Palestine, and Indonesia (Al Ahram Center for Strategic Studies, Cairo, 2005).

Recent analysis of Hamas's electoral victory in **Palestine** includes:

- In ***Hamas: Politics, Charity and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad***, Matthew Levitt refutes the notion that Hamas's militant, political, and social wings are distinct from one another and warns that for Hamas, like Hizbollah,

political participation is just another means to achieve its goals (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

- Hamas participation in mainstream Palestinian politics will not spur the group to moderate its radical goals because the conditions necessary for the co-optation of militant groups are absent in the Palestinian case, argues Michael Herzog in **“Can Hamas Be Tamed?”** (*Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2006).
- In the **“Aftermath of the Hamas Tsunami,”** Nathan Brown analyzes the reasons why Palestinians voted for Hamas, the group's priorities and legislative agenda, and options for Western donors (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Web Commentary, February 2006).
- An uncompromising U.S. position on Hamas could dangerously alter the balance of power between the movement's militant and reformist factions, warns Marina Ottaway in **“Promoting Democracy after Hamas' Victory”** (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Web Commentary, February 2006).
- **“Hamas Triumphant: Implications for Security, Politics, Economy, and Strategy”** details the strategy and tactics of Hamas, the political and security implications of its victory, and proposes options for foreign responses (Robert Satloff, ed., Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus no. 5, February 2006).
- Political integration, however challenging, is the best way to steer Hamas away from the military path, argues a new International Crisis Group report (**“Enter Hamas: The Challenges for Political Integration,”** Middle East Report no. 49, January 18, 2006).
- Graham Usher traces the evolution of Hamas in recent years in **“The New Hamas: Between Resistance and Participation”** (*Middle East Report Online*, August 21, 2005). He argues that Hamas does not yet seek leadership, but rather hegemony in Palestinian politics in order to become a blocking majority against Fatah.

Several recent publications focused on the Muslim Brotherhood in **Egypt**:

- There is no evidence that Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood would adopt more democratic values as a result of political participation, argues Magdi Khalil in **“Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Political Power: Would Democracy Survive?”** (*Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 10, no. 1, March 2006).
- The results of the 2005 parliamentary elections have made it clear that Egyptian politics, at least in the next few years, will be dominated by the relationship between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, argue Amr Hamzawy and Nathan Brown in **“Can Egypt's Troubled Elections Produce a More Democratic Future?”** (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Outlook no. 24, December 2005).
- Abul Ila Al Madi, Founding Member of Egypt's Wasat (Center) Party presents the party's view on politically relevant issues such as democracy, political reform, citizenship, and human rights in *Ru'yat al Wasat fi al siyasa wa al mujtama'* (Cairo: Al Shuruq International, 2005).
- *Al Ikhwan fi barلمان 2000* documents the performance of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood deputies in the 2000-2005 parliament (Cairo: Al Umma Center for Studies and Development and the International Media Center, 2005).
- Mona El-Ghobashy argues that the Muslim Brothers' energetic capitalization on the limited opportunities available to compete in parliamentary and other elections has had a profound effect on their political thought and organization (**“The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers,”** *International Journal for Middle East Studies*, vol. 37, 2005, 373-95).
- Hesham Al Awadi explores the reasons behind Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's policy changes towards moderate Islamists in **“Mubarak and the Islamists: Why Did the ‘Honeymoon’ End?”** (*The Middle East Journal*, vol. 59, no. 1, Winter 2005, 62-80).
- Bassma Kodmani calls for cultivating diversity within Egyptian society as an antidote to religious monopolization of the public sphere (**“The Dangers of Political Exclusion: Egypt's Islamist Problem,”** Carnegie Paper no. 63, October 2005).

Beyond the issue of Islamists, several recent publications focus on developments in **Iraq**:

- Phebe Marr examines the background and visions of Iraq's new leaders and suggests that refocusing Iraqis on economic issues would be one way to bring them back from the divide ("**Who Are Iraq's New Leaders? What Do They Want?**," United States Institute of Peace, Special Report no. 160, March 2006).
- If civil war develops in Iraq U.S. troops should be withdrawn, argues Thomas R. Mattair in "Exiting Iraq: Competing Strategies" (*Middle East Policy*, vol. 13, no. 1, Spring 2006, 69-83).
- Summan Gupta applies theories of democracy in international and transnational politics to the case of Iraq in *The Theory and Reality of Democracy: A Case Study in Iraq* (Continuum, 2006).

Several recent publications discuss reform-related developments in specific Arab countries:

- In "**The Saudi Labyrinth: Evaluating the Current Political Opening**," Amr Hamzawy argues that recent reform measures represent a significant political opening, albeit one that has not altered the authoritarian nature of the **Saudi** political system (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Paper no. 68, March 2006).
- The evolution of the **Oman's** political institutions over the last three decades is evidence that an organic mode of representative government can emerge in the Arab world, argues Charles O. Cecil in "Oman's Progress Toward Participatory Government" (*Middle East Policy*, vol. 13, no. 1, Spring 2006, 60-8).
- The indefinite postponement of the issue of Hizbollah's disarmament will make it more difficult for the United States to continue to actively support its democratic allies in **Lebanon**, argues David Schenker in "**Lebanese National Dialogue: Avoiding the Hard Questions**" (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch no. 1089, March 24, 2006).
- The urgency of reform is becoming increasingly clear to many **Yemeni** citizens, but the real question is whether President Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime will listen to outside suggestions or content itself with its historical dominance, argues Sarah Phillips in "**Foreboding About the Future in Yemen**" (*Middle East Report Online*, April 3, 2006).

Two recent publications address regional trends related to reform:

- The April issue of *Hiwar Al Arab* (Dialogue of the Arabs) is devoted to Arab liberalism. Topics addressed include the absence of Gulf secularists, liberalism and democracy, liberalism in Syria, and the possibility of reconciling Islam and liberalism.
- The International Press Institute's **World Press Freedom Review 2005** documents the attacks, harassment, intimidation, and imprisonment of journalists in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa and the role of electronic media as outlets for voicing dissent.

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