

Middle East Series

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**JORDAN AND
ITS ISLAMIC
MOVEMENT:**

**The Limits of
Inclusion?**

Nathan J. Brown

**Democracy and
Rule of Law Project**



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RECENT ELECTION RESULTS IN several Arab countries have transformed formerly theoretical questions into pressing policy concerns: Can Islamist political parties operate within the boundaries of a democratic system? Will participation breed moderation? Strong showings by Hizbollah in Lebanon and by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt have made these questions seem less speculative. And the victory of Hamas in the first election it contested has made the questions impossible to avoid.

The experience of these countries has attracted tremendous international attention, but the case of Jordan has been largely neglected even though the country has had a far longer history of an Islamic party competing regularly, legally, and openly in elections and even entering the government. Although the relationship between rulers and Islamists in Jordan has often been testy, both sides have tried to avoid pushing the other into outright confrontation. In that sense, Jordan's rulers have worked to test the proposition that inclusion breeds moderation—or, more modestly, that limited inclusion coupled with periodic warnings will discourage extremism. For their part, Islamist leaders have worked to test the proposition that it is better to participate in the system than work to overthrow it—or, more modestly, that more can be gained by testing red lines and pushing them outward than by blatantly defying them. In short, both have come to regard the other as a rival to be dealt with politically rather than an implacable adversary to be crushed.

In the past, the Jordanian regime's general approach to independent and oppositional political movements, whether Islamic, nationalist, or leftist, oscillated between co-optation and repression. At present, however, it appears to be combining the two strategies at the same time—an increasingly common pattern throughout the region. It is beginning to master techniques for adopting forms of political reform (with various new campaigns, dialogues, and laws) while retreating in matters of substance.

The Islamic movement—represented by the Islamic Action Front (IAF) and its parent movement, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood—is no stranger to political anomalies. In fact, it lives with a whole series of paradoxes. The IAF is one of the few political parties in the world that deliberately loses elections. Embracing more diverse ideological currents than almost any of its sister Islamist organizations, it has suffered schisms and divisive internal debates only on short-term tactical questions. Operating in a political context in which parties and movements are organized around dominant individuals, neither the Muslim Brotherhood nor the IAF has produced a charismatic figure. Even more unusually, neither has had any of its leaders die in office; instead they retire, complete their terms, or are forced out. The IAF constantly finds the sincerity of its democratic commitments questioned—yet it has stressed issues of political freedoms and democratic institutions for half a century. Indeed, the IAF may be the most democratic party in the region in terms of its internal operations. Long reputed to be aligned with the government, it is now the only viable opposition party in the country. Long the adversary of leftist and nationalist forces, it now keeps those movements relevant through an alliance with the IAF.

Yet for all these anomalies, Jordan's Islamist movement finds itself poised on the brink of deeper conflict with the government because it has not been able to escape overriding regional realities and conflicts. Indeed, it has embraced them. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the war in Iraq, and the U.S. war on terrorism have dominated the movement's agenda in recent years and deeply colored its relations with the Jordanian regime.

This analysis of the IAF and its role in the Jordanian political system examines

- how the Islamic movement historically has remained within the law but also used it to form organizations with a broad and deep reach in Jordanian society;
- what the IAF stands for—and how much its members argue about its aims;
- the way in which participation in parliament has led leaders to conclude—despite ongoing and sometimes bitter debate—that accepting the sharp restrictions on their activities is worth the benefits that legality and official recognition offer;
- how both the regime and the Islamic movement are now debating whether or not a serious confrontation is unavoidable;
- how the Islamic movement has tried to build alliances with other opposition actors—and why the success of those efforts has come only because of the weakness of its new partners; and
- how international pressures have aggravated the tension between regime and opposition without making unbridled confrontation inevitable.

WORKING WITHIN—AND STRETCHING—THE RULES

The Jordanian political system has always placed sharp limits on political opposition, but by using a set of tools that stops short of harsh authoritarianism, it has left some openings for resourceful and cautious movements. The Islamist movement has largely accepted the limitations and worked around them to build an impressive set of social and political organizations.

The IAF operates as the political wing of Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood. Formed in 1945 and loosely affiliated with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood is broad-based and dedicated to pursuing an Islamic path through a variety of social, charitable, educational, and political activities. This wide focus helped the Brotherhood develop a deep reach in Jordanian society. Its relationship with the regime has been uneasy, punctuated by occasional periods of open conflict, but enjoying long periods in which the Jordanian regime has favored an approach of accommodation and even co-optation. The Jordanian government has never opted for the “Egyptian solution” of banning and suppressing the Brotherhood.

The relationship between the government and the Islamist opposition has been so much less antagonistic in Jordan than that prevailing in other countries that some specialists have spoken of a tacit alliance between the Brotherhood and the regime. But such a characterization clearly goes too far. Even in the protracted period of friendlier relations, the regime kept a close eye on the movement and arrested its leaders several times for political offenses. One prominent member of the Muslim

Brotherhood has even gone so far as to attempt to write a history of the movement stressing its stubbornly oppositional nature.¹

It would be most accurate to avoid extremes and describe the historical relationship between the regime and the Brotherhood as wary and guarded but not overtly hostile. When the regime confronted its most severe challenges—from nationalist movements in the 1950s and Palestinian movements after 1967—the Brotherhood stood aloof, earning a reputation as being less threatening. It was therefore allowed to operate in many social spheres and even run candidates for the parliament, often criticizing government policy (especially on cultural and Islamic issues) but not posing a direct challenge to the regime.

Historically, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has faithfully operated within the framework of Jordanian law. The government has shifted that framework to contain the Brotherhood but often merely steered it in new fields of activity.

Like its parent organization in Egypt, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood began with a general social focus, but it also moved quickly into international affairs with a heavy interest in the emerging conflict in Palestine. It stayed clear of an overtly critical position toward the government, but it never eschewed political activity. The movement ran candidates in Jordanian parliamentary elections in the 1950s and 1960s but only succeeded in less than a handful of races in each cycle. However, when parliamentary elections were resumed in 1989 after a hiatus that lasted over two decades, the Brotherhood leaped beyond its past performance to win 22 out of 80 seats.

Movement deputies used their parliamentary seats to call for implementation of Islamic law and to condemn cultural practices deemed non-Islamic (such as the visit of an ice-skating troupe that wore costumes deemed excessively revealing). The movement's position on many issues—ranging from Palestine to the Sharia—was strong and uncompromising and its language sometimes shrill. It denounced a U.S. aid offer in 1957 with the slogan “No reconciliation [with Israel], no dollar, no atheism, and no imperialism.” But the Brotherhood stayed within the boundaries of peaceful opposition. In the two most serious political crises the country faced (between the palace and the leftist/nationalist opposition in the 1950s and between the regime and Palestinian movements in the late 1960s), the Brotherhood stayed neutral. Thus, when both crises resulted in a sharp political crackdown, the Brotherhood was exempted. Although its members and even leaders were sometimes arrested for brief periods, the Brotherhood as a whole was allowed to continue operating.

In this way, the Brotherhood gradually extended its reach into new social and political fields. It began to expand first into a range of charitable activities, founding the Islamic Center Society in 1965 and a web of other organizations and societies in the decades since. Some of these nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Islamic Center are very closely associated with the Brotherhood and are virtual wings of the movement; others are run by leading Brotherhood activists but are less fully linked with the larger Brotherhood movement.

The Muslim Brotherhood moved into other fields as well: It attracted some figures in the religious establishment; ran candidates in professional association elections (such as the bar and the medical syndicate); and began to publish its own periodicals. In all these fields, however, it encountered significant legal obstacles. Its NGOs, for example, were kept under close watch. In July 2006, the Jordanian cabinet replaced the board of the Brotherhood's largest operation, the Islamic Center, charging that there had been financial improprieties. This move came in the midst of a confrontation

between the Islamist movement and the government and was widely seen as heavy-handed political pressure. The Jordanian government has also restricted movement supporters from giving sermons and attempts to regulate the content of those sermons allowed. The government has shut down newspapers associated with the movement, and in 1993 it issued a restrictive press law by decree to provide it with new legal tools. More recently, it pushed for and obtained legislation restricting the issuance of *fatwas* that do not have official sanction. The government has also contemplated moves to restrict the political activity of professional associations. While it ultimately took only mild steps in that regard, it resisted Islamic movement demands to allow the formation of a teachers union and continued to hint at legal changes for the professional associations.

The effect of these measures was not to suppress the Islamic movement but to create a set of shifting red lines and obstructions that hampered the operations of Islamist organizations but never prevented them from operating. In one important sense, the measures did have a real institutional effect by creating a movement of closely associated organizations rather than a single, centralized organization. The movement's various arms, however much they resented the legal restrictions, complied with them, establishing separate bodies in each field to ensure that each activity was based on independent and solid legal foundations. The various organizations were linked and identified themselves as part of a single movement, but they remained legally distinct, each with its own administrative and governing structure.

Thus it should be no surprise that when a new, liberalized political party law was passed by parliament in 1992, the Islamic movement did not respond by attempting to repackage the entire organization as a political party. Despite a long history of competing in elections, the movement decided to form an entirely new political party, the Islamic Action Front. The decision was not an easy one. More radical members suspected that the new party might become so anxious to succeed that it would temper opposition to (or even acquiesce in) non-Islamic laws and practices or negotiations with Israel. But others argued that the prospect of political participation was simply too attractive to turn down. Not only did it offer a secure legal vehicle for the movement's political activities and mobilization, but formation of a separate party also offered the opportunity of appealing to independent Islamists outside the Muslim Brotherhood and thus broadening the movement's reach and influence.

In the end, the supporters of the party won the day. But the issue of political participation was far from resolved. Those who were suspicious could have remained aloof but instead most joined—preventing a split between the new party and the broader movement but also ensuring that the conflicting orientations over political participation would be replicated within the party itself. The newly created IAF satisfied its supporters from the beginning: In the first election in 1993, it won 16 seats (with closely allied independents raising its parliamentary total to 18), despite the creation by dubious legal means of an electoral system specifically designed to minimize the party's influence.

The IAF has built an impressive set of democratic structures internally. Party leaders are elected by the membership, and there is a regular turnover in top positions. At key points it has polled its members for guidance on important decisions (on two occasions to decide whether or not the IAF would boycott elections). It also selects its candidates in a process that begins with branches holding primaries before forwarding names to the party leadership.

But those suspicious of the party note that the members are not the sole decision makers within the party. First, the IAF has yet to establish a separate identity from its parent movement, the Muslim Brotherhood. While the IAF and the Muslim Brotherhood have fully separate legal identities, some critical decisions by the IAF have been made after consulting with and deferring to Brotherhood leadership. In addition, the Muslim Brotherhood selects the head of the IAF (or, more formally, makes a suggestion that is always accepted).

The IAF is also haunted by charges that it is deferential not merely to the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood but to its sister organizations, particularly in Egypt and Palestine. Although the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood was formed—and continues to identify itself—as a branch of the international organization founded in Egypt, the association with the Egyptian movement has clearly grown merely collegial. It is true that the Jordanian movement did request guidance from the Egyptian movement in 1989 about whether or not to accept ministerial positions, but the response was tardy and ambiguous, hardly resolving the matter before a decision was made. Its association with Hamas is deeper, partly because of geographical proximity but also because of the heavy participation of Palestinians in the IAF, an issue more fully explored below.

There is no doubt that the IAF has had an impressive electoral success, limited in its achievements primarily by the nature of the legal framework (which has actually become more restrictive since the organization first ran) and the party's self-restraint. Although the success has largely left the proponents of a distinct Islamist party feeling vindicated, the controversy over the party's creation has carried over into its operations. Each round of parliamentary elections has set off divisive debates—sometimes leading to mild schisms—over whether or not the IAF should participate in a skewed process. While each debate ended in a decision—to participate in 1993 and 2003 and to boycott in 1997—the general terms of IAF participation in the electoral process have not been resolved, and members have continued to rehearse the arguments long after elections were held.

The formation of the IAF has not only exposed the Islamic movement to internal division but also has provoked external challenges. Jordan's rulers have come to see the formation of a network of Islamist NGOs, the activities of Islamists in the professional associations, and the electoral performance of the IAF as a significant challenge. Indeed, over the past two decades, the Jordanian regime has gradually come to regard the Islamic movement as its most significant domestic rival, taking the place occupied by Arab nationalists, leftists, and Palestinian nationalists in earlier generations. The main debate among Jordan's ruling elite seems to be whether to treat the Islamist movement as a security challenge (to be dealt with by repression) or a political one (to be contained, co-opted, harassed, and managed rather than vanquished).

WRESTLING WITH A POLITICAL PLATFORM

The IAF has developed a series of platforms that stand little chance of implementation over the short term but provide an accurate barometer of the state of consensus and disagreement within the party as well as its willingness to test the limits of loyal opposition.

Areas of Division

While able to maintain a semblance of unity (with most schisms not leading to serious splinter groups), the IAF and the Islamic movement in general remain diverse coalitions of ideological orientations. Those who follow the movement often refer to “hawks” and “doves,” while others talk of a more complex picture with a “centrist” and “ Hamas” wing. Indeed, there are rival camps within the party, and unusual for the region, these opposing camps will sometimes air criticisms of each other in public.

Three significant issues divide the IAF’s membership: attitudes toward the Jordanian system, the role of Islam, and Palestine. Each of these issues is characterized by a “hawkish” and a “dovish” position, and there is some overlap among the three issues. But movement insiders as well as close observers agree that the factionalization of the IAF and the broader Islamist movement is more complex than a simple set of two or even four camps; there are a variety of intermediate positions and significant differences even among like-minded groups about how salient each issue is. The tendencies come into clearer view every four years when the IAF and the Muslim Brotherhood elect their leaders, when the majority generally reveals itself as a coalition of smaller groups rather than a single unified camp within the movement. Because of the complex nature of such coalitions, analysts often debate what the election results indicate about the strength of various camps, but it is clear that neither hawks nor doves have succeeded in wresting control of the movement.

The first issue dividing IAF activists is their attitude toward the Jordanian political system. Those on the dovish end of the spectrum think and act very much as members of a loyal opposition, affirming their fealty to the throne and making clear their interest in participating in the political process rather than overthrowing it. Others criticize such figures as too quick to curry favor and satisfy officials; one leading hawk, for example, proclaimed that “pragmatism means conceding principles and fixed positions, and this is something we cannot do,” admonishing that “parliamentary elections are a means,” not an end. More directly and severely, another IAF leader has written that opposition should come naturally to the movement since “the Muslim Brotherhood and any regime that does not apply Islam should not be in the same trench.”

The second issue of disagreement concerns Islam. While all movement members are Islamist in the sense that they push for a greater role for Islam in public and political life, some speak of fostering the gradual evolution of Jordanian society in an Islamic direction, while others stress the application of the Islamic Sharia over the short term. Indeed, some members of the latter camp stress the need to implement Sharia to such an extent that their arguments echo those of leading radical leaders and movements, such as Sayyid Qutb or the Hizb al-Tahrir.

Palestine is the final issue dividing the movement. All leading members of the movement share a basic position: support for the Palestinian cause and opposition to the Jordanian–Israeli peace treaty and normalization of relations with Israel. But that unity cannot mask divisions over emphasis as well as willingness to identify with Hamas. Some IAF members show greater interest in other subjects and often phrase their criticism of Jordanian policy toward Israel in understated terms. Others back the most extreme form of Palestinian resistance and speak of liberation of all of Palestine. Some IAF leaders (including the current head of the movement, but not others on its executive committee) are very closely identified with Hamas—and indeed with a specific wing of Hamas, the political bureau, led by Khalid Mish‘al, a branch that tends to emphasize the uncompromising nature of the Hamas position. Thus, *Al Sabil*, the newspaper associated with the

Islamist movement, routinely publishes articles criticizing Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas at a time when Hamas leaders inside Palestine (as opposed to the external Hamas leadership backed by IAF figures) have been diplomatic in their relations with him and reticent in their rhetoric.

Forming a Platform

Since the IAF encompasses a variety of ideological orientations and positions, it should be no surprise that its various members present different faces to various actors outside the movement. This has led to some ambiguity in the IAF's positions, as its critics often point out. King Abdullah has spoken of the Muslim Brotherhood operating in a "gray area," positioning itself differently in accordance with the demands of the situation. Indeed, the variations in the IAF position reflect not simply differences within the movement but—as is natural for any political movement—the specific context. When mobilizing constituents in the general population, the IAF and the Brotherhood tend to emphasize broad issues with wide appeal, especially those related to Palestine and, more recently, Iraq. When working to reach more religious or socially conservative parts of the population, social issues figure prominently. And in election campaigns, the party emphasizes its lack of corruptibility and focuses on demands for a more responsive and less authoritarian political system.

It is precisely in election campaigns—when the party is compelled to put together a platform—that it might be expected to hone a specific message, reconcile contradictions, and contain internal divisions. But because the IAF has no chance of winning an election and thus is not faced with the possibility that its electoral commitments might have to be transformed into a set of governing guidelines, its electoral program can still contain a considerable amount of ambiguity and grandstanding. Still, in elections, various parts of the party come together to hammer out a more specific set of positions than it normally is required to articulate.

The IAF's electoral platforms have resembled those of its sister Islamist movements in recent years by giving great emphasis to political reform. But its evolution on reform issues is unusual. In earlier years, the Jordanian Islamist movement was something of a trendsetter for its Arab counterparts, since the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood (when it was the body running candidates before the formation of the IAF) always placed a great stress on political freedoms. But despite a long and nearly continuous history of calling for political reform, the Jordanian movement has begun to lag behind other Islamist movements in the region in focusing on internal issues. Just as it was joined by other Islamist movements from Morocco to Palestine in developing comprehensive programs of political reform, the IAF has perhaps stepped back from the subject, or at least not emphasized it as much as its sister movements have done recently. Political reform is still a very significant and even central theme in its electoral platform, but its relative role is less than might be expected given its long history of involvement in the issue. In October 2005, the IAF issued its most detailed reform program—a document so full of liberal and democratic ideas and language that a leader of a secular opposition party was forced to confess that it differed little from the programs of other parties. Yet the level of detail on reform could not obscure the greater passion most movement leaders felt for a variety of international causes (especially Palestine and Iraq).

Besides political reform, IAF platforms have emphasized two other issue areas. First, as might be expected, regional conflicts have figured in IAF campaigns, although the movement has had to tread carefully in its rhetoric. The IAF is deeply opposed to normal relations with Israel and has taken a leading role in resisting normalization. But since the 1994 Jordanian–Israeli peace treaty, the country

has been clearly committed to a peaceful relationship with Israel. The treaty was a royal initiative, making it more politically difficult to criticize. Indeed, IAF deputies absented themselves from the vote on the treaty rather than vote against it. The treaty is also hard to assail on legal grounds because it was ratified by the Jordanian parliament. In the 2003 elections, however, the IAF ignored such concerns and issued a strident platform referring repeatedly to the “Zionist enemy,” and leaving little to the imagination:

Palestine is Arab and Muslim and its liberation is a duty for all Arabs and Muslims. In all cases, working to liberate Palestine is a central concern in relation to all Muslims. No entity has the right to concede any part of Palestine or give legitimacy to the occupation on any part of its holy land. Our struggle with the Jews is creedal and civilizational. It cannot be ended by a peace treaty. It is a struggle over existence, not borders.²

Less severe voices within the IAF have called for a popular referendum on the peace treaty as a way of seizing the democratic high ground and preserving the movement’s strong opposition without directly criticizing a core regime policy. In recent years the IAF has branched into other international areas as well, most notably Iraq. While the Jordanian government maintained quiet cooperation with the U.S.-led occupation of the country, the IAF assailed the war and occupation in very strong terms and made clear that the insurgency was legitimate resistance similar to the Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. Some of the more extreme IAF members have gone so far as to praise some of the actions of Abu Al Musab Al Zarqawi. Given Al Zarqawi’s involvement in attacks in Jordan itself, such a position could easily be portrayed as treasonous—and indeed, four IAF members of parliament (MPs) who visited the funeral tent erected by Al Zarqawi’s family were arrested and charged with inciting violence. Once again, less extreme members of the IAF were clearly embarrassed by some of the radical language of their colleagues (although they charged that the arrests were illegal and an unacceptable infringement on freedom of speech and on parliamentary prerogatives).

Finally, the IAF has emphasized Islamic issues, although here its various electoral platforms have been remarkably restrained for an Islamist organization. The IAF’s 2003 platform did call for application of the Islamic Sharia, identifying it as a religious obligation and basic goal of the party. But it gave remarkably few details, and where it cited examples, it used very gentle terminology—such as suggesting that certain parts of commercial law be modified in a way that was consistent with the Sharia. The platform points to the “supreme goals” of the Sharia, a common way for Islamist movements to emphasize ways in which pursuit of the Sharia is consistent with public welfare and not an imposition or set of burdensome restrictions. The overall approach is one of firm dedication to Islam and Islamic legal principles but also an inclination toward gradualism and persuasion rather than radical and imposed change. But, as will be seen below, the IAF’s formulation has not eliminated all suspicions of the movement among its opponents.

PARTICIPATING IN PARLIAMENT

The IAF is forced to operate under an electoral framework deliberately designed to keep it a parliamentary minority, which has necessarily deeply affected the decisions and strategy of the group. Although the matter remains a subject of continuous debate within the movement, IAF leaders from most factions have become convinced that the benefits of participation in parliament—open

and legal operations and a fairly free voice—are enough to outweigh the costs and severe limitations placed on them.

The IAF was formed to take advantage of a liberalizing political atmosphere in Jordan, but it discovered the limits of political liberalization even before it had contested its first election. In August 1993, shortly before the November polling date, the king issued a decree changing the electoral system. Not only were districts skewed in size—so that those that were strongly Palestinian (and, not coincidentally, IAF strongholds) were underrepresented—but voters in each multimember district were allowed to vote for only one candidate. In the previous election, voters had as many votes as there were seats in the district (so that voters would select three candidates in a three-member district, with the top three vote-getters gaining election). With voters only selecting a single candidate from a long list, many inclined toward familiar family or tribal names—thus diminishing the effect of party and ideological orientations on the outcome. (For an overview of IAF performance in parliamentary elections, see the table below.)

Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Action Front Parliamentary Performance

Year	Number of Candidates Running	Number of Winners	Number of Seats in Parliament
1954		4	40
1957		4	40
1963		2	40
1967		2	60
1984 (by-elections)		3	8 seats needed to be filled
1989	29	22	80
1993	36	16	80
1997	Boycotted		80
2003	30	17	110

Note: In some elections (especially early ones), candidates ran as individuals not formally supported by the movement so that the number of movement candidates is difficult to measure. In later elections, the size of the parliamentary bloc was enhanced by independents closely allied with the movement.

These amendments to the electoral law were issued under a constitutional authorization to the cabinet and the king to issue provisional laws when parliament was not in session “in matters which admit no delay.” Since the motivation for this law had nothing to do with any emergency but only with a desire to circumvent parliament and diminish IAF representation, its constitutionality was quite dubious. But when Jordan’s High Court struck down a press law issued under similar circumstances, it earned a public rebuke from the king and its chief justice was retired.

Thus the IAF was presented with an electoral law it could not contest. But after some hesitation, it decided to run candidates anyway. In 1997 the IAF managed to assemble a coalition of opposition parties that joined in a threat to boycott the elections if the law were not changed—a threat that they carried out, with the result that the IAF was absent from parliament until the 2003 elections. While the 1997 boycott was popular with much of the rank-and-file of the movement, many leaders concluded that they had erred in withdrawing from the parliament, the least restricted political sphere in which they can operate. By 2003, the balance of opinions had shifted within the party, and the IAF ran again.

Remarkably, in both elections in which it participated (1993 and 2003), IAF success was limited not only by the electoral law but also by its self-restraint. Only 36 candidates ran in 1993, competing in a parliament of 80 seats; in 2003, 30 candidates competed in a parliament of 110 seats. The IAF's decision not to run a full slate of candidates was partly motivated by the law: Leaders of the movement concluded after the 1989 elections that they won fewer seats because they ran too many candidates, leading their supporters to split their vote. But the decision had deeper roots that stem from a political calculation that the regime will not allow the party to win a parliamentary majority and will use whatever means necessary to prevent that outcome.

Thus, running only a limited number of candidates appears to be an optimal strategy: It guarantees the victory of some candidates, avoids splitting the party's vote, communicates the IAF's popularity, and gains seats in parliament. It is true that the IAF cannot gain a parliamentary majority unless it runs a greater number of candidates, but party leaders feel that a parliamentary majority is politically impossible at present. This is not because of a lack of confidence in their popularity—many party leaders feel that with a different electoral law they could win a majority. It is clear that the regime fears that Islamist leaders may be right since they have steadily deferred talk of electoral reform. While the IAF has taken no decision on the next round of parliamentary elections, the same strategy of self-restrained participation will likely be used again. Party activists explain that support for a boycott has dwindled within the party but running a full slate in the current environment and with the current law offers more liabilities than opportunities.

Watching events in neighboring Palestine has lessened the desire of some leaders to win more seats. Not only are the international and domestic political environments perceived as extremely hostile, but the prospect of victory is far less enticing than one might think. Attaining a majority in the parliament would confront the party with extremely hard choices and the necessity to resolve internal differences that it has papered over with slogans in the past. Immediately after the Hamas victory in Palestine, some IAF figures were tempted to think about winning elections. Indeed, a few days after the Palestinian results were announced, the leader of the IAF's parliamentary bloc startled Jordanians by going beyond the claim that under a fair law "Islamists in Jordan would obtain a majority" to assert that they "are prepared to assume control over the executive branch to realize the hopes of the people."³ But a few months later, when asked whether the IAF would run a full slate of candidates in the next parliamentary elections, one prominent leader of the Muslim Brotherhood responded, "We will not repeat the disaster of Hamas."⁴

Thus, current political circumstances guarantee the IAF a voice in the parliament but also virtually ensure that it can be outvoted on any issue. Even when the IAF reaches out to other opposition movements to form a coalition (as it has increasingly done), the party gains a few votes at most because the opposition parties have been singularly unsuccessful in creating strong electoral bases.

How then does the IAF use its seats in parliament? As with many regional Islamist movements, it is careful, disciplined, and strategic. Just as the Muslim Brotherhood exercises a supervisory role over the IAF, the IAF keeps a close watch on deputies, beginning with the nomination process. It allows local units to hold primaries, ensuring both a measure of party democracy and a slate of candidates popular in their district. But the national organization does not simply approve the list of local primary winners; it seeks to create a balanced national ticket and one that reflects ideological currents within the party. It also makes its own assessment of the electoral attractiveness of various candidates, favoring those who are effective speakers. And party oversight does not stop with candidate selection. The composition of the platform—a document that the IAF takes quite seriously, viewing it as something of a binding contract with voters—is a party responsibility. Once they reach parliament, the party retains the authority to make major strategic decisions (such as whether to vote for or against the government in a vote of confidence), although day-to-day parliamentary affairs are entrusted to the parliamentary caucus.

Mindful of their limited ability to affect the composition of the government or pass legislation, parliamentary deputies from the IAF are still extremely active in using the parliament as a platform to raise specific kinds of issues. In recent years, they have focused on several key concerns:

- *Palestine*: While the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan is in full effect, there are many opportunities for the IAF to raise issues related to Palestinian affairs and other issues—whether calling for the Jordanian government to resolve its differences with Hamas or issuing a *fatwa* (a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority) that supporting Hizbollah in its conflict with Israel is a religious obligation.
- *Economic issues*: IAF members of parliament use their positions to highlight the material concerns of Jordanian citizens. In early 2006, for instance, they took the lead in denouncing fuel price increases, even leading public marches calling for a rollback. They focus on local concerns as well, such as complaints from members about problems in their individual districts.
- *Corruption and waste*: Although the party may lack the parliamentary weight to push through legislation, it can use parliamentary questioning to raise specific issues, and it has done so to force government responses on issues of wasteful government expenditures and favoritism in awarding contracts.
- *Political reform*: Long a focus of Islamist demands, IAF deputies continue to call for an end to restrictions on the political process—whether the subject is demonstrations, arrests of political activists, prisoner rights, appointment (rather than election) of some local officials, press restrictions, election law, or government moves against professional associations.
- *Social, cultural, and religious issues*: The IAF has traditionally focused on perceived infringements on Jordanian and Islamic values. While the party's rhetoric on the Islamic Sharia has grown fairly general, deputies still raise specific questions, especially when they are likely to have some popular resonance. For instance, in 2006, IAF deputies complained about the sale of alcohol to minors and the use of English in higher education.

These various spheres seem fairly disparate, but the Jordanian political environment—and the approach of the IAF—ensure that they have become deeply intertwined. For example, the IAF's interest in undermining normalization with Israel and its dedication to issues of daily life led it to

charge Israel with exporting spoiled meat; the focus on material and moral corruption are often implicitly linked in the righteousness of its rhetoric on such issues. As one observer of Jordanian politics puts it: “In Jordan, if you talk about corruption, you are talking about the circle around the king. If you talk about democracy, you are talking about the Palestinian issue [because of the Palestinian majority].” Fundamental political disputes underlie daily disputes, and underlying all fundamental political disputes is the issue of Palestine. When IAF deputies representing a Palestinian refugee camp call for provision of services to their constituents, their audience hears a demand for Palestinian rights. When they press for more equitable distribution of parliamentary seats, they hear a call for an end to the lopsided districts that prevent a Palestinian majority in parliament.

With its close identification with the Palestinian issue, its support base in the Palestinian population, and its close links to Hamas, the IAF cannot (and does not) seek to disassociate itself with the Palestinian cause. Some observers go so far as to describe the IAF as a surrogate for a Palestinian political movement in Jordan. To be sure, the identification is not complete: Some IAF leaders do wish to develop a more broad-based agenda, and many native Jordanians support the IAF. But even when the IAF tries to move beyond the Palestine issue, it finds that it is not alone in connecting Palestine to other major political disputes. For instance, when the government calls for professional associations to concentrate on issues of professional concern, the clear intent is to minimize public criticisms of government policy regarding normalization and criticism of the peace treaty.

The effectiveness of the IAF in influencing Jordanian policy has been limited not simply by the interlinking nature of issues but also by the small number of its deputies and the constitutional limitations of the parliament (coexisting with a palace that is willing to use its constitutional tools with no trace of bashfulness or self-restraint). The IAF is thus unable to bring down the government or pass legislation.

On occasion, its parliamentary role has led the IAF to obstruct or delay government action, though not because of any parliamentary vote. On some occasions, the movement has wrested concessions through direct bargaining or confrontation (rather than parliamentary procedures) from a government not anxious to court controversy. Generally, in order to obtain concessions the IAF must speak for a unified opposition (and not merely its own interests) against an uncertain or divided government—such as when the parliament delayed consideration of an amended law of professional associations in 2005. Sometimes extraparliamentary forums provide similar opportunities, such as the National Charter of 1991 or the National Agenda of 2005, in which some members of the Islamic movement participated and were able to press issues. In short, the IAF can exercise a veto when Jordan’s rulers agree—in the interests of national unity—to grant it veto power, but it cannot force policy to reflect its preferences in any other circumstances.

Thus, the chief reward of parliamentary participation has been the ability to operate openly as a political party and to raise issues and visibility. The IAF’s steady participation in parliament has given it considerable experience in using the body as a platform, and in recent years its abilities have been enhanced by its increased attention to forging opposition alliances, chiefly with nationalist and leftist parties. While those parties have very little to contribute in terms of popular base, the opposition front (which the IAF can dominate) allows the movement to speak as something more than a narrow political party. The opposition generally presents itself implicitly as the nation’s conscience, raising awkward issues, nationalist complaints, and reform demands with all the

uncompromising dedication that can come from being deprived of any responsible political or decision-making position.

FORMING A POLITICAL PARTY: AT WHAT COST TO ISLAMIST–REGIME RELATIONS?

The relationship between the IAF and the Jordanian regime has become steadily more adversarial since the party's founding at the height of Jordan's experiment with political liberalization in the early 1990s. Starting in early 2005, the two sides sparred over a series of legislative initiatives by the regime (most notably to the professional associations but then extending to political parties, terrorism, and other subjects) generally packaged as reform but sometimes amounting to subtle restrictions on various areas of political life. By 2006—in the wake of the Amman hotel bombings and the Hamas electoral victory—the two sides were engaged in open confrontation, bounded only by the IAF's determination to protect its gains and the regime's desire to keep the center of gravity of the Islamic movement from passing from loyal to disloyal opposition. There is also some sign of debate on both sides on how much to contain the current confrontation.

Although the Islamic movement has always criticized the regime's failure to follow Islamic principles as well as its alignment with Western powers, its refusal to make common cause with other regime opponents from the 1950s through the 1970s has limited the extent to which it was regarded as a threat. However, a series of developments in recent years has increased the regime's concern. First, since leftist, Arab nationalist, and Palestinian opposition movements have virtually collapsed, only Islamic movements represent an internal challenge. Yet this in itself would not necessarily lead to confrontation, since the regime has shown strong signs that it prefers to keep the Islamic opposition public and legal rather than encourage underground movements operating outside of legal channels (such as the jihadist and Salafi movements).

Two major international developments have conspired to sharpen the contest between regime and Islamic opposition, transforming a source of domestic tension into a potential crisis:

- First, the rise of Hamas had already proved a source of contention because of the IAF's close support for—and identification with—the Palestinian resistance movement and the regime's attempt to distance itself from the Israeli–Palestinian dispute and maintain a working relationship with the Israeli government. More than a policy dispute divides the two sides, however. The Jordanian regime is clearly concerned that Hamas may draw on its sympathizers in the country for material and moral support, actively pulling the country back into conflict with its very powerful neighbor, much as Palestinian movements did in the aftermath of the 1967 war. For that reason, the regime has restricted Hamas operations inside Jordan, refusing to allow some of its prominent leaders to reside (or even visit) Jordan. The Palestinian elections in 2006 brought Hamas to power in the Palestinian Authority, sharpening the potential for a new round of Israeli–Palestinian violence that would place Jordan in a very awkward position. And with Hamas in power and Jordan a main route for Palestinian travel and finance, pressure from the IAF to support Hamas threatens to damage the regime's ties not only with Israel but also with the United States.

- Second, the U.S. invasion of Iraq similarly heightened the sense of confrontation between the regime and Islamist opposition. Throughout the 1990s, popular sentiment against Iraqi sanctions ran deep in Jordan, and the IAF made Iraq central to its appeal. When the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, the existence of U.S.–Jordanian security cooperation was widely known but not widely discussed, nor was the extent and precise nature of Jordan’s support revealed. While U.S.–Jordanian cooperation on Iraq thus became a taboo issue, the Islamist opposition’s rhetorical support for the Iraqi insurgency crossed no red line, and the IAF embraced the cause with enthusiasm. This continued even when a Jordanian citizen, Abu Al Musab Al Zarqawi, emerged out of a fairly faceless insurgency to become its most recognized figure. Al Zarqawi himself was deeply controversial because of the astonishing brutality of his methods as well as an enmity toward Shiites that verged at times on a genocidal fixation. The bombing of three Amman hotels in November 2005 transformed him from an embarrassment into a threat, and the IAF swiftly condemned the action. IAF leaders pointed out that Al Zarqawi had bitterly denounced mainstream Jordanian Islamists for their willingness to participate in the system. But it proved far more difficult for the IAF to disentangle itself from all that Al Zarqawi represented in Iraq, and significant portions of the party (even some party leaders) retained a degree of admiration for him.

Thus, in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the election of Hamas, the IAF’s foreign policy positions came to be seen by some more security-minded officials as moving from opposition to potential sedition. IAF leaders protested loudly that they had consistently refrained from violent political action in Jordan and remained committed to nonviolent change. Yet such assurances could only go so far toward assuaging the fears of a regime concerned that turmoil in Iraq and Palestine could spill into Jordan and perhaps return the country to the political atmosphere of earlier decades when domestic politics seemed not merely boisterous but also unstable and constantly threatened to disrupt the regime’s alignment with Great Britain and the United States.

In the spring and summer of 2006, the regime seized on two events to press the confrontation with the IAF and Muslim Brotherhood. First, it claimed to have uncovered preparations by Hamas to launch attacks within Jordan—a charge that was implausible because while Hamas has never shied away from violence, it has studiously avoided undertaking any attacks outside of Palestine, and its electoral triumph (when it was desperate for diplomatic and financial support) would have been a curious moment to begin a terrorism campaign in Jordan. Whether concocted or not, the effect was to place the IAF on the defensive at a time when its sister Palestinian movement had just realized its most significant triumph.

Shortly afterwards, on June 11, 2006, four members of the IAF were arrested after visiting the funeral tent erected by Al Zarqawi’s family. They were charged with incitement not simply for the visit but for offering comments that implied support for Al Zarqawi’s actions in Iraq. It was no surprise that the regime seized the opportunity to portray the deputies as offending the memory of the victims of the Amman bombing. But the step it took—arresting sitting parliamentarians for their statements, holding them in a remote location, and then trying them in a special state security court—was unusually aggressive by Jordanian standards.

In July 2006, the cabinet took an additional step, acting on a report by the public prosecutor alleging irregularities in the management of the Islamic Center, the largest NGO associated with the Islamist movement, to replace the organization’s board. It was this series of steps that led some

observers to speculate that the regime was considering an Egyptian solution of naked repression of the Islamist movement.

The leadership of the Islamist movement was uncertain about how to respond to the onslaught, particularly because the regime sent signals that it was seeking to move against certain tendencies within the Brotherhood, not working to destroy the entire Islamic movement. In a June 2006 interview with *Der Spiegel*, King Abdullah, in responding to whether he was going to redefine his relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood, claimed that the Brotherhood confronted a choice:

They have to redefine their relationship with us. They have been working in a gray area in recent decades. I think society throughout the world now has to decide what is good and what is evil. I believe that the majority of the Brotherhood wants a good future for this country, and a good future for their children. I think that we can all work as a team. But there are some principles. *Takfir* [declaring proclaimed Muslims to be apostates] is not one of them.

In an effort to ease tensions, mediators arranged meetings between the Islamist leadership and key regime figures, including the king himself (although as the confrontation escalated his personal participation ended). Significantly, the head of intelligence, Muhammad Dhahabi, was among the key participants, underscoring that the regime had come to see the Islamist movement as a security rather than political challenge.

Although Islamist leaders refused one of the central regime demands—an apology for the Al Zarqawi funeral tent visit—they did issue two statements clarifying their positions on a variety of controversial matters. The content of the statements provoked little controversy within the movement, but the act of issuing them under strong regime pressure provoked deep division. Many leaders resented the defensive tone the movement had struck; their resentment only deepened when the expected payoff for the statements failed to materialize and the regime proceeded with the trial of three of the four arrested parliamentarians. Thus, the attempt to placate the regime only succeeded in widening splits within the movement; 18 of the 40 local members of the Muslim Brotherhood’s consultative council—the organization’s key policy-making body—submitted their resignations to protest the movement’s statements.

Nevertheless, the IAF leadership insisted that it would not respond to what it regarded as unjustified provocation; after two of the parliamentarians were sentenced to jail, the Muslim Brotherhood proclaimed that the movement would “remain the one true to its principles and the nation ... despite all the pressures and the arbitrary and unjust manner in which it is treated.” The IAF angrily recalled “all the assurances that the Islamist movement gave to the government” including “that the movement is committed to a wise course based on gradual reform through peaceful means.” Deeply divided internally, the IAF finally resorted to a poll of its members before its leaders decided against withdrawing from parliament, although they admitted that the decision not to boycott was far from unanimous. The IAF’s leader explained the calculation of the winners of the internal debate in terms that mirrored precisely those used by more conciliatory regime figures. He spoke of divisions within the country’s leadership and explained that the IAF wanted to encourage moderate voices within the government who were seeking to avoid confrontation.

But it was clear that the regime had attempted to find methods to aggravate splits within the movement—not only with the arrests but also by playing favorites as various movement leaders appealed for their release. When the king finally issued a pardon of the deputies, it came after he paid a Ramadan visit to the home of a former leader reputed to be fairly moderate.

BUILDING ALLIANCES WITH OTHER OPPOSITION ACTORS

The IAF has historically had a tense relationship with other political actors in the country. In the 1950s it stood largely aloof from the Arab nationalists and leftists who promised fundamental political change. In the 1960s it regarded the Palestinian national movement warily—supporting its goals but not its nonreligious rhetoric or the leftist ideology of its most confrontational leaders. In the conflict between the regime and its opponents, the Islamic movement refused to make a clear choice, which left it without clear allies. In the past two decades it has made serious efforts to break free of this isolation, the success of which is due in large part to the decline in non-Islamist political actors. The result has been to leave the IAF as the only effective political opposition movement in the country.

Despite its uneasy relations with government and opposition actors, the Muslim Brotherhood and its political arm, the IAF, have long been accepted, however grudgingly, as legitimate movements. In fact, the IAF is probably more thoroughly integrated into the legal political environment than any other Islamist party in the Arab world. Nonetheless, the movement still provokes suspicions—and not only in regime circles.

Critics of the Islamist movement feel that they have not yet been fully assured in three key areas of concern:

- *Jordanian integrity*: Especially given the heavy IAF focus on Palestinian issues, some Jordanians suspect that the party does not fully accept that its first loyalty is to Jordan. Sometimes this charge may be an indirect way of pointing to the heavy participation of Palestinians in the IAF. In 2002, the palace launched a “Jordan first” campaign, pressing the issue of the integrity of Jordan and playing down the Palestinian cause through use of a seemingly innocuous slogan. But precisely because the slogan was so innocuous and lacked clear content, the IAF easily responded that they had always put Jordanian interests first—an answer that its critics found as evasive as the slogan itself. In addition, the IAF claimed, not without justification, that parts of the campaign were subtly aimed against the IAF and its charitable and political activities.
- *Violence and terrorism*: Jordan has been fairly free of political violence, and the Muslim Brotherhood prides itself for having consistently rejected violence since its founding. Yet its critics are not assured even by this longstanding record, fearing that the movement houses trends that flirt with jihadist ideologies and come close to engaging in *takfir*. Furthermore, the IAF lends strong support to movements such as Hizbollah, Hamas, and the Iraqi insurgency that do use violence. In all these cases, the IAF insists that the critical difference is that such movements are living under some form of occupation and that violent resistance is a natural right under such conditions. Few Jordanians would find fault with this position, but some still worry that should elements of the Islamic movement ever decide that the Jordanian regime is complicit in supporting anti-Islamic regimes, it will turn to less peaceful methods of pursuing its objectives.
- *Religion*: Islamist movements in the Arab world routinely confront the charge that they seek to impose their particular understanding of Islam on the entire population. The IAF has become familiar with this criticism despite the heterogeneous nature of the movement. Its intense internal debates do not serve to reassure skeptics that the IAF disavows any monopoly on truth.

These criticisms are not surprising coming from Jordanians sympathetic to the regime or those with leftist and more secular leanings. What is less expected is a tendency in recent years for members of the Islamist movement to show some sympathy with these critical views. Some former Muslim Brotherhood and IAF members have left the movement precisely because they felt the movement had not gone far enough to resolve ambiguities in its positions on these very issues. A few have continued to serve as independents; and a small group also formed a new political party, the Hizb Al Wasat (Center Party), which deliberately presents itself as a more moderate and less oppositional Islamic alternative. The protracted debate over boycotting the 1997 election occasioned some of these departures from the movement, but not all of those who subscribe to these criticisms have left the movement. IAF members identified as doves are often those who wish to push the party further in definitive positions on these issues.

There is certainly a limit to what the IAF can do to reassure internal and external critics on these points. The movement does not exercise political power, and many of the suspicions stem not from its proclaimed positions but from expectations of what it might actually do if it became more powerful or more estranged from the regime. So there is a limit to how far reassuring statements can quell suspicions. The movement has nevertheless tried, but its efforts often provoke new questions.

Perhaps the most comprehensive effort to answer critics came in the midst of the movement's confrontation with the regime in July 2006. On July 6, the IAF and Muslim Brotherhood jointly issued a lengthy statement with thirteen points proclaiming the movement's

1. Rejection of extremism and terrorism;
2. Acceptance of Jordanian and Arab societies (thus affirming their loyalty to the state and downplaying their opposition to nationalism) and of Muslims (thus disavowing any attempts to engage in *takfir*);
3. Disavowal of any monopoly on truth;
4. Support for national security;
5. Support for national causes (such as combating poverty);
6. Acceptance of political and intellectual pluralism and dedication to participating in the political process;
7. Rejection of foreign interference;
8. Acceptance of national fixed principles (*thawabit*) and insistence that no individual or group has a monopoly on defining these;
9. Insistence that opposition to some government policies did not suggest rejection of the Jordanian state;
10. Desire to strengthen Jordan's ability to face foreign challenges;
11. Support for Hamas and insistence that success for Hamas did not threaten Jordan;
12. Concern with charitable work; and
13. Embrace of moderation.

The movement clearly hoped that this statement would express its strong conventions in a manner that was both unapologetic and reassuring to its critics. The statement did not pull all its punches, however. It accused its critics of jealousy of its success in charitable work. And the statement hardly resolved all ambiguities. While it rejected *takfir* of Jordanian society, the statement was more equivocal concerning *takfir* of individuals; it also could not deny that those with more radical views on the matter remained within the movement. Five days later, the movement's leaders issued an additional statement that affirmed their acceptance of the "Amman declaration," a conciliatory statement issued by Muslim religious leaders in 2004 after at the end of an international conference operating under royal patronage to combat religious extremism. (It was this second statement that appeared too obsequious to some movement members, leading to the resignations mentioned above).

Yet while the movement has not, and probably cannot, reassure all its critics, it has scored some significant success in recent years in forming opposition coalitions. Given the strong distrust between the Islamic and the leftist and nationalist opposition rooted in events in the 1950s, the formation of an opposition front is a significant accomplishment. As discussed above, the coalition is explained partly by the decline of the left (and its consequent interest in forming alliances), but it is also due to a strong coincidence of interest and ideology supporting political reform.

It is also critical to bear in mind that the mainstream Islamist movement cannot concentrate solely on assuaging regime and leftist critics; it must also fend off more radical Islamist activists who suspect that the Muslim Brotherhood and IAF have allowed themselves to be co-opted. Some of the more radical activists (particularly some Salafis) have eschewed politics altogether and regard the mainstream movement as overly engaged in a society that is not completely Islamic; others (particularly jihadists) regard it as too willing to compromise with a non-Islamic regime. What is remarkable about the mainstream movement is that it has managed to retain support from some more radical leaders and individuals within its ranks. The distance between Muhammad Abu Faris—one of the most extreme leaders in the IAF—and the jihadists sometimes seems short indeed. This has caused others within the movement embarrassment and rendered the Brotherhood and the IAF more suspect in regime eyes.

But movement leaders—and some regime figures in more charitable moments—argue that containing such radicals within the framework of the mainstream movement has benefits for social and political stability. Some within the movement do incline toward more radical ideas, but as long as they remain within the movement they do not act upon them. They may harbor feelings of admiration for Al Zarqawi, but they do not seek to emulate him within Jordan.

The radicals are probably more powerful within the movement than the current leadership would like to admit; the IAF leadership is not only embarrassed on occasion by the radicals but also resentful of their criticisms and concerned about their influence with the rank and file. They have made a strategic commitment to maintain movement unity, arguing that the alternative of a splintered Islamic opposition will not only rob the movement of political weight but also make it more difficult to avoid an unattractive choice between co-opted and revolutionary brands of political Islam.

STAVING OFF AN EGYPTIAN SOLUTION

By forming a political party to participate in elections and parliamentary life, the Islamic movement in Jordan has realized concrete gains. It has built an organization that is largely accepted as a legitimate political player; it has obtained regular and legally protected access to various public forums where it can present its views; it has developed a wide-ranging and comprehensive political vision; and it has deepened the organizational capacity of the Islamic movement, producing a political party that is reasonably democratic in its internal operations and far more than the sum of the activities of a few prominent leaders.

But while the IAF can present the Islamic movement with many accomplishments, in the current Jordanian political environment, it may have trouble moving beyond what it has already achieved. The electoral system is designed to allow the IAF to participate but only as a minority bloc in parliament. Many fundamental issues in Jordan, especially those involving foreign and security policy, are placed beyond democratic contestation, and the regime and even the IAF's fellow oppositional political actors continue to view the Islamist movement with deep ambivalence and suspicions.

Perhaps most significant, the IAF's freedom to maneuver vis-à-vis other parts of the Islamic movement continues to be circumscribed by its institutional links to the Muslim Brotherhood. The political party still retains such deep links to the broader Islamic movement that it cannot pursue its platform purely on an electoral calculus. Despite its technical independence, it remains very much the arm of a broader movement that has a long-term set of ideological, social, charitable, and educational goals and refuses to act primarily with the next election in mind. The potential for tension between the political party and the broader Islamist movement—evident in other settings such as Morocco and Palestine—has not been fully realized in Jordan. The gains offered by the IAF, while real, remain limited and sometimes shaky and fail to convince the broader movement to set the IAF completely free.

Given these constraints, the IAF is unlikely to become the counterpart to European Christian Democratic parties but instead will remain as an oppositional political actor, trying to pursue an Islamist agenda through public pressure, education, and debate. It is possible that the IAF may enter a governing coalition, but such a move is unlikely in the current international environment.

Participating in a fully functioning democratic political system may indeed have a moderating effect on Islamist movements over the long term, but that opportunity is hardly likely to be offered in most Arab states. The most that will be available will be constrained competition in a partially liberalized system. The long history of the Islamic movement in Jordan suggests that such an opportunity may be taken seriously by many activists and leaders who will still chafe at the restrictions placed on them. Continued tension between the regime and Islamic opposition will thus be inevitable, and if each remains strong they will continue to oscillate between confrontation and détente.

If the IAF is most likely to remain in its current form—a coalition of groups dominated by neither hawks nor doves—then the regime will probably hold back from an aggressive Egyptian solution. To be sure, the IAF is viewed as threatening because it effectively transforms issues involving Jordan's external security—most obviously regarding Palestine but also Iraq and the relationship with the United States—into domestic political challenges. And the regime will

probably have difficulty resisting the temptation to play on divisions within the movement. But the alternative to an umbrella legitimate Islamist opposition might be the emergence of a splintered but much less restrained set of movements. Movement leaders are aware that the threat of radicalism has not only worried the regime but also placed limits on its willingness to use purely repressive tools. A member of the IAF's executive committee publicly explained that a confrontation "will increase the level of extremism in Jordanian society and promote the fashion of excess and inclination to violence among the youth."⁵

Ultimately, then, until fundamental change occurs either in the Jordanian political system or its external environment, the uneasy tension between the IAF and the regime is unlikely to evolve into partnership, but there will still be powerful voices on both sides working to avoid degeneration into unbridled hostility.

NOTES

- ¹ Muhammad Abd Al Qadir Abu Faris, *Safahat min al-tarikh al-siyasi li-l-ikhwan al-muslimin fi al-urdun* [Pages from the Political History of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan] (Amman: Dar al-Qur'an, 2000).
- ² The complete text of the 2003 platform can be viewed at: <http://www.jabha.net/body9.asp?field=LIB&id=1>.
- ³ "Islamists of Jordan: Prepared to Assume Authority," *Islam On Line*, January 29, 2006.
- ⁴ Interview with author, July 5, 2006.
- ⁵ Ruhayl Al Ghurayba, quoted in *Al Ghad*, September 18, 2006.

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