Divergence and Discourse

Negotiations between the Hashemite Regime and the Islamic Opposition

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Introduction

In 1989, King Hussein of Jordan initiated a landmark government liberalization process in the Hashemite Kingdom. It is often heralded as a breakthrough development, not only for political reform in the state, but also in the Middle East, a region largely comprised of authoritarian states. Martial law in Jordan was lifted, voting regulations were enacted, and elections were held. In another groundbreaking turn of events, the Islamic movement in Jordan, headed by the Muslim Brotherhood, surprised the monarchy by capturing forty percent of the seats in Parliament. From that point, Hussein pursued a policy of inclusion vis-à-vis the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as other independent Islamists, opting to counteract the potential threat of the Islamic movement by building a relationship with its governmental leaders through negotiations. While having gone through various transformations throughout the past seventeen years, this model for interaction still persists between the regime and the Islamic movement in Jordan.

This research focuses on two main issues surrounding the negotiation processes between the Hashemite government and the Islamist opposition. The first is the significance of fostering and maintaining open dialogue between the regime and the opposition in Jordan. This study investigates the necessity of such discourse for political liberalization processes in Jordan, including an examination of alternative routes to reform. The extent to which domestic and regional political contexts dictate the nature of such discourse will also be considered.

Secondly, this study will focus on the various circumstances that might compel the regime and the opposition to increase their commitment to dialogue. This applies to domestic affairs as well as to the regime's involvement in regional affairs, such as developments in Iraq and events in the Palestinian West Bank. This study will demonstrate that continued negotiations between the regime and the Islamic Action Front, political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood and leader of the opposition in the Jordanian Parliament, are a necessary element of the political liberalization processes

in Jordan. Negotiations are likely to be the only viable means by which enduring measures for democratic reform can be instituted. I will further argue that significant dialogue and, therefore the progression of the political liberalization process, is unlikely to occur unless the regime is given some incentive to participate. Such motivation is liable to come from a situation in which domestic or regional developments threaten regime stability in such a way that it must resort to the institution of democratic reform in order to bolster its governmental authority.

History

Relations between the Jordanian monarchy and the Islamic movement can essentially be separated into four chronological eras. The first period, between the Muslim Brotherhood's establishment in Jordan in 1945 and 1952, was marked by a good rapport between the regime and the Islamic movement. Not only did King Abdullah I's religious views bring about an inclination on the part of the monarchy to work with the Islamic movement, but at the time the Brotherhood existed as a small religious council, or *ulema*, ensuring that the Islamic nature of the country did not wane, but without a direct political agenda. They were not, therefore, deemed a threat to monarchical power.

From 1952 to 1990, the second stage, the relationship continued to fare well, particularly due to the regime's decision to ally with the Brotherhood in order to combat the leftist and Arab nationalist movements in Jordan. However, a combination of domestic and regional factors began to weaken this relationship. In 1985, King Hussein adopted a containment strategy for the Islamists, citing the movement's success in Iran, which he feared would eventually spread to Jordan as well.[1]

By 1990 the relationship was entering a new phase. The regime was weakening in the face of a surge in Palestinian nationalism surrounding the first *intifada* in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip in the late 1980s. In addition to this pressing reality, the 1989 economic crisis in Jordan also presented an acute threat to regime stability. This atmosphere caused King Hussein to take defensive liberalization measures, namely by holding parliamentary elections in an effort to pre-empt an expected popular thrust for democratic reform.[2] This created an opportunity for the Islamic movement in Jordan to gain a footing in the political system. The Muslim Brotherhood alone, which garnered 27.5 percent of parliamentary seats in the 1989 elections, presented itself as a formidable threat to the regime's power.[3] The regime, however, could not repeal the political liberalization measures

it had taken, such as decisions to hold elections, as these actions would have increased the ability of regime opponents to undermine royal authority. Thus, the regime chose to pursue a strategy of political inclusion. As a part of the opening negotiations with the Islamic movement, the opposition leadership was assigned cabinet posts in return for their commitment to political pluralism under the supreme monarchical power.[4]

The year 1991 marked the golden era for the Brotherhood, which enjoyed a great deal of control in parliament as well as a large amount of popularity on the Jordanian street. The same year also saw the end of the alliance between the regime and the Islamic movement, precisely because the Brotherhood's unprecedented success was perceived as a threat to the crown's rule. Indeed, King Hussein's 1993 amendment to the electoral law, which instituted the single-vote rule, served to politically marginalize the Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF).[5] Many individuals also recognize the regularization of the Brotherhood's participation in parliament as another factor that contributed to the Islamic movement's decline in popularity in the 1993 elections.[6] Tension between the two sides would persist until 2000, entering the fourth stage, which is characterized by a relationship devoid of regular negotiations with no uniform regime strategy for contending with the Islamic movement.

Much of the recent debate regarding the relationship between the regime and the Islamic movement has centered around one particular issue – the assumption that negotiations between the two sides can successfully aid in the cultivation of political liberalization processes in Jordan. Malik Mufti, in "Elite Bargains and the Onset of Political Liberalization in Jordan," argues that the agreements struck between regime and opposition elites, surrounding the 1989 wave of liberalization measures, allowed for, and in fact advanced, efforts to open the political system.[7] As Mufti explains, extensive negotiations within the regime focused on the decision to hold elections, as well as the specific calculations regarding assignment of electoral representation. However, once the Brotherhood presented itself as a strong parliamentary force, the regime sought to gain support from them. Essentially, the regime could not rely solely upon its loyalist support base in Parliament, as it simply was not large enough to conduct regime-friendly legislation. Thus, the regime pursued a policy of inclusion vis-a-vis the opposition. Mufti argues that negotiations between the regime and the opposition led to a more normative political discourse in which moderate voices on either side were empowered in decision-making processes.[8] Consequently, Jordan's emerging political leadership in 1989 and 1990, comprised of both regime loyalists and Islamic oppositionists, displayed a commitment to creating a more open

political system.

As mentioned previously, the 1989 economic crisis in Jordan essentially framed the historical context in which such liberalization measures took place. The crisis created an environment in which the regime's authority was in question, and therefore it sought to institute some level of democratic reform in anticipation of such a threat. Glenn Robinson refers to this phenomenon as "defensive democratization," a situation in which the regime, "uncertain about its ability to survive a deepening crisis…undertook sufficient reform to assure its political longevity, but without altering the core structures of power in Jordan."[9] Thus, according to Robinson, liberalization was not fostered by the interface that occurred between the monarchy and the Islamic movement, as Mufti might argue, but was an active measure taken by the monarchy such that regime elites could further entrench their power. Therefore, Robinson might contend that negotiations are irrelevant here, as liberalization methods were enacted by the government for the precise purpose of carving a secondary role for civil society. Liberalization was enacted such that civil society revolves around the central leadership of the regime, which does not allocate any greater power for the Jordanian public.[10]

It is also important to examine the present state of the regime-opposition relationship since the liberalization period of 1989 and the early 1990s. There is a question as to whether this period of negotiations actually generated a definite change in the relationship and initiated a liberalization process from which neither side could withdraw.[11] Some argue that negotiations brought about a temporary period of cooperation and compromise, creating a relationship which the regime was able to abandon once the domestic context no longer demanded it. Take for example the effects of the 1989 economic crisis paired with the regime's subsequent austerity measures handed down by the International Monetary Fund. Jillian Schwedler and Curtis Ryan contend that such handling of liberalization processes instills more power in the regime and thereby precludes future attempts to institute democratic reform in Jordan.[12] In this sense, the regime does not reverse its steps, but rather forges a new disposition for itself in terms of how it retains power in Jordanian society. The authors argue that the regime's shift away from true democratization measures serves to marginalize, and perhaps eventually eliminate, moderate elements of the opposition. This is deemed unfortunate by many who see the moderates as a sound link between authoritarian rule and the Islamists. In the case of Jordan, the state "looks less like a stalled democratic transition than an entirely new kind of hybrid regime, neither typically authoritarian nor meaningfully democratic."[13]

The Current Relationship

Currently, the political environment in Jordan can be characterized as being in a stalled state of liberalization. The regime has reneged on some of the democratic reforms that were instated with the first wave of liberalization, and the connection between the regime and the Islamic opposition is at one of its worst points in history.[14] In this context, some even argue that the liberalization process is in a state of regression.

A variety of factors contributed to the nature of this relationship, most notably King Abdullah II's specific approach to the Muslim Brotherhood, a style manifestly different from that of his father. Whereas King Hussein enjoyed a great deal of political support during his reign, allowing him to pursue a fairly open relationship with the Islamic movement, Abdullah's backing has been more military in nature. This dependence on military support for ruling legitimacy has afforded him very little patience for a viable political opposition in Jordan. Consequently, the regime views the Brotherhood opposition through a security, as opposed to political, perspective.[15] Abdullah also remains more focused than Hussein on Jordan's economy and strengthening its ties with the West, particularly the United States. Such commitments are increasing points of contention between the Brotherhood and the monarchy. Chief among these are the Brotherhood's opposition to the 1994 peace treaty with Israel and moves towards economic privatization.[16]

Moreover, international speculation regarding the stability of the regime vis-à-vis the Islamic movement have been unsettling for King Abdullah and the Jordanian *mukhabarat*, the country's General Intelligence Directorate (GID). Israeli Major General Yair Navah's February 2006 assertion that King Abdullah would be the last Hashemite king, due to an imminent Brotherhood takeover in Jordan, deeply concerned the regime.[17] Due in part to this statement and others like it, Abdullah once again took steps to consolidate his power by decreasing the Brotherhood's influence in the political system. This took the form of a continual refusal to speak with Islamic Action Front leaders, exclusion from the decision-making processes, and even arrests of Brotherhood Ministers of Parliament.[18]

One must also take into account the significant influences that regional actors and events have on the nature of the relationship between the regime and the Islamic movement in Jordan. For example, the United States' 2004 call for democratic reform in the Middle East put pressure on the regime to allow greater inclusion of the Brotherhood in the political system. However,

Hamas' growing popularity and subsequent electoral victory in the 2006 Palestinian elections alarmed the regime and the *mukhabarat* due to the Brotherhood's close ties with Hamas.[19] The choice of Zaki Bin Arsheed, a former member of Hamas and a strong, incredibly vocal, political supporter of the Palestinian movement, to head the Islamic Action Front as secretary general, presented an obstacle to improving relations between the regime and the Brotherhood. This move represents the culmination of regime frustrations with the Brotherhood, and in particular with its inclination towards maintaining political connections outside of the domestic sphere, specifically with Hamas.[20] It is important to note, however, that the Muslim Brotherhood's 2006 elections brought forth leadership more concerned with domestic issues and with weaker relations to Hamas.[21] Bin Arsheed, who began his tenure in 2006, was nominated by the previous Shura Council (consultative body). Therefore, his term represents the strong influence of the Hamas-dominated faction prior to the 2006 Muslim Brotherhood and IAF elections.

While many claim that the crisis between the regime and the Islamic movement has been the product of the monarchical succession, others, such as Bin Arsheed, maintain that the relationship has been deteriorating since the 1994 Wadi Araba Peace Treaty with Israel. Certainly, the accord is a subject of disagreement between the regime and the Brotherhood, one that has managed to endure for over a decade. "We are clear," claimed Zaki Saad, former leader of the IAF, in an April 2006 interview, "We reject this treaty because it is against Jordan's national interest. But we will move cautiously. We will ask for a referendum on it."[22]

Despite the much cooler relations that have prevailed between the regime and the Brotherhood since the beginning of Abdullah's rule, there have been some valuable negotiations. The 2003 parliamentary elections, the most recent to date in Jordan, were in a large part shaped by secret negotiations that were conducted between the movement and the monarchy. In exchange for holding elections, the regime insisted upon the Brotherhood's selection of young members to head the movement, in effect, a new generation of leadership.[23] The regime also reached an informal deal with the political opposition, led by the Islamists as well as some leftist dissenters. The opposition agreed to lessen their mobilization against the regime, particularly concerning the monarchy's close relationship with the US, in exchange for a greater degree, albeit small, of freedom in public expression as well as economic progress in the country.[24]

Though the nature of the interaction between the regime and the Brotherhood has certainly reached a trying period, neither side has displayed

a true inclination for confrontation with the other. In fact, while various representatives voice frustration with the fact that negotiations are at a standstill, they also claim that neither side has seriously entertained thoughts of taking any significant action against the other.[25] King Abdullah and his circle of government elites cannot afford to completely break ties with the Islamic movement. Their relationship is one of the prime factors holding together a society divided along a combination of geographical, historical, and cultural lines. Muhammed Abu Ruman, a writer with Amman's *Al-Ghad* Newspaper and a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, stated, "The relationship is a guarantee for stability in Jordan. If you cut the relationship, the regime will lose Palestinian support and Jordan will lose a very important model for dialogue in the region.[26]

The Brotherhood also has an interest in continuing a dialogue with the regime. The Islamic Action Front sees negotiations as being in the best interest of the Jordanian people. It is a means to initiate a sound program for reform in Jordan, particularly in the area of development, women's rights and human rights.[27] According to Orieb Rantawi, director of the al-Quds Center for Political Studies in Amman, negotiations will help the political reform agenda in Jordan as they are a means to build trust between the two parties, which is essential for bringing about electoral reform.[28] Indeed, Ryan and Schwedler argue that regime insecurity is one of the primary causes of the de-liberalization process in Jordan in the past few years.[29] According to this argument, the digression of the political liberalization process in Jordan is not directly the result of a lack of government commitment to democratic reform, but rather is due to uncertainty about the nature of the shift of power that might occur as electoral reform is instituted. Negotiations can build trust between the two sides and are likely to ease such inhibitions.

The fact that representatives of the regime as well as of the IAF profess a desire to achieve gradual change through steady dialogue stems worries that the relationship is in jeopardy of breaking down entirely. A main concern, however, is whether or not the IAF will be able to continue in its present role as leader of the Jordanian opposition and negotiation partner for the regime. There is a great deal of debate surrounding the magnitude of support for the IAF in Jordan. However, besides regime loyalists, who are not considered a political party, the IAF is consistently the most popular party in parliamentary elections and is one of the very few parties that has name recognition on the Jordanian street.[30] According to Bin Arsheed, not only does the IAF have the growing support of the Jordanian populace, but it is also a strong movement that is ready to take a leadership role in the Parliament, in partnership with the crown.[31]

Many people suggest that the increasing "Islamization" of Jordanian society, and the Middle East as a whole, is the reason for the growing popularity of the Brotherhood and the IAF. Rantawi argues that people in Jordan are increasingly choosing their candidates based on religion.[32] He continues that religiosity, along with tribal affiliations, will be the two main considerations, as they have traditionally been, among voters in the coming elections, slated for late 2007. The question lingers, whether these issues will assume even greater importance in the upcoming elections.

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Despite these assertions, however, various factors indicate a current decline in the IAF's popularity, as well as that of the Brotherhood in general. The Jordanian government estimates Islamist support among the country's eligible voters to be at about fifteen percent.[33] In a poll on democracy in Jordan, conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies at Jordan University in July 2006, two and a half percent of respondents said they believed that the Islamic Action Front was the most qualified movement to form a government.[34] While the IAF received the most support for the ability to form a government out of any other political party in Jordan, such a low percentage of backing is hardly a significant quantity of Jordan's electorate.

The Brotherhood's ability to stay afloat in Jordan's authoritarian political environment is largely the result of the moderate stance that the movement has adopted. The IAF has followed diplomatic means in reaction to domestic and regional issues.[35] The group's condemnation of violence as a mode of response has earned the IAF and the Brotherhood a negative reputation for "practicality" among some Jordanians. Many supporters of the Islamic movement have become disenchanted with the IAF due to the accountability that it has adopted to the Jordanian political system to refrain from issuing more militant statements. Accordingly, Jordanian followers of political Islamic ideology reject the Brotherhood and the IAF in favor of more proactive groups, whether regional movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah, or localized Islamic groups in competition with the IAF, such as Hizb Al-Tahrir (Party of Liberation) and Ahbash (Association of Islamic Charitable Projects).

Recent years have seen a general shrinking of the IAF constituency. The movement is being suppressed by the regime on one side and boxed out

by more radical Islamic movements on the other. It is in the interest of the regime to conduct more productive negotiations with the fairly moderate IAF, lest the monarchy's increasing marginalization of the Islamic movement give way to a less compliant Islamic representation in Jordan, as foreseen by Ryan and Schwedler. Rantawi indicates that the "Islamization of society benefits the Islamic movement… [however] extremists will be facilitated if the regime keeps closing doors."[36]

In addition to potentially benefiting the regime, the Brotherhood, especially the IAF, also has a lot to gain from opening serious negotiations. Unlike the more vibrant political environments that exist among Jordan's other regional neighbors, such as Lebanon, Yemen, or the PLO territory, the level of political mobilization in civil society is quite low. Indeed, the country's election history since the 1989 lifting of martial law displays a general apathy towards the democratic political process, a trend that does not seem likely to change in the near future. For instance, the 2003 parliamentary elections saw a 58.8 percent voter turnout, which, though higher than past participation, is still relatively low for the region.[37] As shown during King Hussein's liberalization measures in 1989 and the early 1990s, negotiations can be an effective means for initiating political liberalization processes from a top-down approach, thereby allowing for more IAF involvement in Jordanian politics, not to mention the possibility for greater political pluralism across the board.[38]

Another factor worth noting is the lack of charismatic leadership in Jordan. Indeed, no single personality in Jordanian politics, neither in the government nor in the opposition, has emerged that can spearhead a mass movement for democratic reform. Popular demonstrations, whether in favor of specific political parties or agendas, are extremely rare in Jordan. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the IAF would be able to cultivate popular support for any type of direct democratic reform, be it from its own support base or among the country's political opposition parties in general. There are other means to achieving the goals of change in Jordan such as a military coup and other forced move towards liberalization. However, due to a controlling regime and political environment the prospects for change in Jordan and the growth of democracy continue to rest within a top down regime and opposition driven approach.

Present Negotiations

While it appears that both the Brotherhood and the regime maintain some degree of commitment to dialogue, many factors have presented obstacles to achieving such discourse. There is much debate surrounding

the state of negotiations, including whether or not a productive discourse is actually taking place. Representatives of both the regime and the Islamic movement, as well as those not aligned with either faction, generally agree that dialogue is crucial to governmental reform in Jordan and maintaining political stability.[39]

Staunch disagreement on a few key issues has more or less brought any exchange of ideas to an impasse. The two chief concerns of the IAF have centered on regime-enacted legislation that marginalize the movement, and the stance that the regime has taken toward the Islamic movement in general. Principal to the IAF's criticism of the regime is its continued endorsement of the single-vote law which, when partnered with finely-tuned gerrymandering throughout the country, serves to ensure regime dominance of Parliament.[40] Leaders of the IAF recommend changing the voting regulations such that every voter be able to cast two ballots, one for a political party and one for an individual. Such a system would cater to the long-established tribal culture in Jordanian society while accommodating the country's developing democratic inclinations.[41] Many individuals associated with the regime agree that there is a need to abolish the single vote law in favor of more democratic elections. However, regime members also insist that such change must be conditional on IAF internal reform.[42]

Some regime members have insinuated that the Brotherhood's work in Jordan is somewhat reminiscient of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic uprising in Iran.

In addition to parliamentary elections, IAF leaders advocate allowing the participation of Islamic movements in public university elections, particularly at Jordan University in Amman. Presently, the government not only appoints half of the student government representation at Jordan University, a public institution, but also restricts the involvement of students specifically representing the Muslim Brotherhood.[43] The regime purposely inhibits municipal elections and puts serious restrictions on the media, specifically on Brotherhood material.[44] According to Freedom House, a US non-governmental organization that measures political rights throughout the world, "Vaguely-worded articles of the penal code and other legislation criminalize certain areas of peaceful expression, such as criticism of the royal family, slander of government officials, and speech that harms Jordanian foreign relations, enflames religious sensitivities, or undermines the state's reputation."[45] The government still maintains official control over

all broadcast news media, as well as strong, though unofficial, control over other forms of public channels, particularly print media.[46]

The second of the key matters for the IAF is the stance that the regime has adopted toward the Islamic movement, particularly in the past few years. As noted earlier, there has been a definite shift in the regime's approach to the IAF, as well as the Brotherhood and other Islamist groups on a broader scale, due to the military backing that supports King Abdullah II's rule. The regime attributes the changed attitude towards the IAF as being the result of a character transformation within the Islamic movement itself. An anonymous member of the *mukhabarat*, an individual in charge of handling the regime's portfolio for the Muslim Brotherhood, claimed that the movement changed from its loyalty to royal authority and has fallen under the influence of Hamas. He claims that the organization now carries an agenda against the regime.[47] The regime maintains that the Brotherhood must decide as to whether it wants to be a domestic party, loyal to the Jordanian people, or a group loyal to external powers. The regime's ultimatum to the IAF is, "The Brotherhood has to choose if they are with their state, or if they are with Hamas, Iran, and Syria."[48]

The regime further maintains that the Brotherhood acts like a state within a state, pointing to the network of institutions that the Brotherhood manages throughout the country including universities, secondary schools, hospitals, and various other social services. Some regime members have insinuated that the Brotherhood's work in Jordan is somewhat reminiscent of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic uprising in Iran, causing uncertainty about the Brotherhood's faithfulness to the crown, in addition to the wellbeing of the Jordanian state.[49]

The regime's main criticisms of the Brotherhood and the IAF revolve around the movement's membership composition. Bin Arsheed says, "The government is looking for internal Brotherhood changes, such as removing certain people."[50] Indeed, the regime would like to see the Brotherhood, specifically the IAF, put forth a more moderate face, particularly in terms of reducing the party's ties to Hamas.[51] Leaders of the IAF, however, claim that not only is the movement moderate, especially compared to most other domestic and regional Islamist groups, but its relationship with Hamas operates well within the confines of Jordanian law.[52]

The regime also believes that the Brotherhood has failed to take a firm stance against terrorist activity.[53] Conversely, the IAF and the Brotherhood insist, both in movement literature as well as through verbal communication, that the group strongly condemns the use of violence and professes advancement of interests through peaceful means only.[54] Therefore, it is

likely that this contradiction of views is the result of differing impressions about the Brotherhood's connection with Hamas, a movement that has yet to denounce the use of violent and aggressive behavior.

Conditions for Political Liberalization

Taking into account the various issues that stand between the two sides, dialogue between the regime and the Islamic movement may seem to be an impossible endeavour, particularly as a means to bring about democratic reform in Jordan. However, representatives of the regime, the Islamic movement, and third parties hail dialogue as being the best method for achieving such an end, especially when one considers the alternatives.

Aside from negotiation, there are essentially two other methods by which political liberalization might be initiated in Jordan. The first is international pressure, with the United States and the European Union taking the lead on opening Jordan's political system. The beginning stages of such an attempt took place in 2004, when the US-issued call for democratic reform in the region forced Abdullah to allow greater political inclusion of the IAF. However, as noted earlier, Hamas' January 2006 electoral victory put an end to such an immediate push for democratization in Jordan.[55]

There are several problems with this foreign influenced political liberalization. An externally prescribed recipe for reform necessarily undermines, and therefore weakens, the strength and the control of the Jordanian political establishment. The current situation in Iraq is only the most recent example of how such an endeavor is likely doomed to failure. According to Bin Arsheed, while some parties in Jordan support such a method of change, the IAF will never agree with this process of reform. The movement believes that having international powers bring about democracy in Jordan negates the rights and the responsibilities of the Jordanian people.[56]

The second scenario that would help to bring about democratic reform in Jordan is the encouragement and popular demand for political liberalization on the Jordanian street. The IAF is pursuing this method by teaching Jordanians their democratic rights and organizing rallies and protests for democracy. The growth of this strategy is largely due to the fact that negotiation has achieved too little for the Islamic movement and democratic reform.[57] The IAF even argues that publicly attacking the unchecked corruption within the government can be the best way to marshal public support for democratic reform.[58] Yet, the absence of real mobilization in civil society and a lack of charismatic, visionary, political personalities, makes

Jordan an uncongenial environment for such a mode of change. Despite the movement's best efforts, the kingdom's legacy of rentierism continues to inhibit efforts to foster popular support for political reform.

Without international pressure and effective domestic drive for reform, there is little incentive for the regime to introduce political liberalization measures. Likewise, the regime does not feel an immediate need to open dialogue with the Brotherhood or the IAF. It is argued that serious discourse is not likely to transpire unless the domestic or regional political contexts change in some way that necessitates more cooperation between the regime and the Islamic-led opposition.

Motivation on the part of the regime to open the political system might be plausible in the face of a domestic crisis requiring the support of Jordan's political parties. The 1989 economic crisis in Jordan is a prime example of this phenomenon. Solely based on its own authority, the regime was unable to take action to face such a predicament and as such it sought the support of the country's political representation.

One could speculate on the variety of factors that might induce such a threat to regime stability. Noting Jordan's continued legacy as a rentier state, another economic crisis opening the door to reform seems a likely scenario. However, the nature of Jordan's economy has changed, particularly as a result of the 1994 peace treaty with Israel, such that Jordan benefits from stronger economic ties to the US. Therefore, an economic crisis would likely be the result of regional and global factors, including Jordan's relationship with Israel.

The regime's stance and involvement in regional issues may also force top-down liberalization measures. The most probable area in the region for Jordanian involvement is the West Bank. The state has not been able to completely disassociate itself from the territory since the two were separated in the 1967 war with Israel. Palestinians are perhaps the majority population in Jordan and the future of Gaza and the West Bank is perhaps the single largest issue for many Jordanians today.[59] There is a distinct possibility that the regime would be compelled to involve itself in Palestinian affairs, particularly in the West Bank, in the event of a power transfer in the area.[60] Yossi Alpher, former director of the Jaffee Strategic Studies Center at Tel Aviv University, argues that if negotiations for a final settlement between Israelis and Palestinians are renewed, then Abdullah, despite his penchant for pursuing a more Jordanian nationalist discourse, would have an interest in ensuring that any transfer of power goes smoothly and allows for minimal chaos in the process. Should such a process devolve into turmoil, agitation of civil unrest and widespread violence could lead to a migration of Palestinians

across the river into Jordan, further exacerbating the demographic tensions in the Hashemite Kingdom.

There is also a possibility that the regime will be drawn further into Iraqi affairs, working with the US in an effort to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure as well as possibly offering assistance in suppressing Iraqi insurgency groups. Thus far, the regime's partnership with the US in the rebuilding process has brought about significant gains for the Hashemite kingdom, such as large oil subsidies. In a 2005 opinion piece for the US Institute of Peace, Scott Lasensky outlined five areas in which the partnership with the US is advantageous to Jordan, including the continuation of a strategic relationship with the US and an "inducement package that has provided political cover, reassured Jordanian leaders, and offset real costs associated with the war."[61] The alliance with the US in rebuilding Iraq is keeping the regime in power despite opposing public opinion. However, as the US's prospects in Iraq continue to worsen and Jordanian public opinion grows in opposition, the regime may need to marshal domestic support for its continued work with the US reconstruction effort, and its ability to reap the economic and political benefits of such a partnership.

Some individuals argue that the motivation of a systemic shock is unnecessary for democratic reform to take place in Jordan. Salah Al-Bashir, former Minister of Industry and Trade, claims that increased discourse between the regime and the opposition is inevitable, regardless of the political context. According to Al-Bashir, the 1989 economic crisis forced the regime to take liberalization measures, putting the country on an inescapable track towards political liberalization. He notes, "It's not a question of 'will negotiations happen,' it's a question of 'how fast.'"[62] Orieb Rantawi agrees, saying that the regime, "can prevent [democratic reform] for one year, two years, three years, but they cannot avoid it forever."[63] Despite this positive outlook, there seems to be no real indication that political liberalization is likely to take place. Abdullah and the *mukhabarat* check any motion taken on the part of Parliament members to open the process of democratic reform. This includes the media, laws regulating freedom of assembly, and detention of those suspected of undermining the regime.

Roles and Responsibilities

While the onset of the liberalization process is largely dependent on the political environment and the regime's motivation to engage in negotiations, there is debate over the steps needed to initiate such discourse and the process of democratic reform. The most important action required of both the regime and the IAF is to unify their respective stances towards the other.

The regime has no consistent method for dealing with the IAF, managing relations with the movement on a day-to-day basis and largely on political and security information obtained from the *mukhabarat*.[64]

The IAF suffers from its own internal debate over the approach it should take in addressing the regime's key grievances and terms of negotiations. Some members of the IAF profess a need to curb the radical speech coming from others in the movement, specifically pertaining to the level of connection and solidarity that the movement professes to have with Hamas.[65] Yet IAF Secretary General Bin Arsheed claims that such a concession is unnecessary and would do nothing to ease the negotiations process, as the problem is with the regime's unwillingness to engage in dialogue, regardless of how accommodating the IAF becomes.[66]

Once the political environment is ripe, both sides need to engage more sincerely in a mutual process of trust-building by sending stronger signals of change to the other. Rantawi claims that the IAF must commit to a stronger, more vocal stance against terrorism, in addition to clarifying its stance on human rights, political pluralism, the position of minorities in Jordan, and the implementation of s*haria* law.[67] Conversely, the regime must take steps to allow for a more democratic political process and must loosen its grip on Jordanian society. Ultimately, however, the success of negotiations might rely on the political savvy of the leaders. Without a desire to commit to an arduous process of deliberation and bargaining, any negotiation process is likely to fail. According to Al-Bashir, "The question should be, to what extent can the members of Parliament, particularly the Islamic Action Front, cut deals within Parliament? That's the question that should be asked."

Conclusion

Negotiations between the government and the Islamist opposition have ebbed and flowed since Jordan's political opening in 1989. They have provided the context for critical points of conjuncture between the Hashemite rulers and the Islamic opposition. The process itself has aided in the development of democratic reform in Jordan. However, the stalled state of negotiations and political liberalization raises two important questions regarding the future success of constructive discourse between the government and the Islamic movement. First, can dialogue promote real and lasting political liberalization in Jordan? Second, what conditions are necessary for creating a political context in which negotiations, and therefore political liberalization, can occur?

The December 2006 conference focused on drafting a program for

government-enacted democratic reform might provide some level of inducement for such change. This is particularly warranted considering the firm control of the government after the June 2007 parliamentary elections, and the regrettable incidents that took place during the municipal elections a month and a half later.[68] The conference, the delegates of which will include all of Parliament's political parties, Jordanian labor unions, NGOs, research institutions, the state's municipalities and local councils, and a host of other organizations from both the public and private sector, is meant to provide the government with a sound design for instituting political liberalization measures, placing specific emphasis on the fact that such a plan is the product of collaboration from a broad representation of civil society. Indeed, such contribution might be necessary for successful negotiations:

> "Some people argue that we need to do two things before actual, full political liberalization happens– achieve better economic indicators and development…and the other argument would be that we need to ensure that we really mobilize the people more politically…The other people say 'no, let it be and let's do it (just through negotiations).' I say that we need to work with all of the above, but we don't need to have radical solutions, we need to carry the public with us."[68]

Regardless of the exact formula for instituting democratic reform in Jordan, it appears as though most sections of the Jordanian government and opposition believe the process to be inevitable. However, the persistence of confrontation between the government and the Islamic opposition leads one to conclude that such progression is unlikely to be seen any time soon.

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1 Nachman Tal, *Radical Islam in Egypt and Jordan*. (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), p. 206. It is important to note that the Iranian model was and continues to be based on the Shi'a concept of *Wilayat Al-Faqih,* a guardianship of Islamic jurists, while the Sunni tradition does not sanction such practice.

2 Glenn Robinson, "Defensive Democratization in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 30 (1998): 387-410, p. 391.

3 An additional four independent Islamists, as well as ten other leftist and Pan-Arab-associated individuals, also joined the Muslim Brotherhood officials as part of the opposition. The Muslim Brotherhood was still considered an apolitical organization. It was not until 1992 that the group's political wing, the Islamic Action Front, was established. See Tal, *Radical Islam in Egypt and Jordan*.

4 Malik Mufti, "Elite Bargains and the Onset of Political Liberalization in Jordan," *Comparative Political Studies* 32 (1999): 100-129, p. 110.

5 The single-vote system allows for individuals to have one vote within their respective constituencies, which comprise anywhere from one to seven elected seats. Due to the importance of tribal affiliations in Jordanian society, individuals often vote according to their tribal allegiances, thereby making it impossible for political parties to appeal to the majority of voters with their party platforms. Skewed representation throughout the country further exacerbates this problem. See "Country Report: Jordan," *Freedom House*, Freedom House, 20 Nov. 2006 <www.freedomhouse.org>. Also see "Elections Final Results." *Embassy of Jordan (Washington, D.C.),* 15 Oct. 2006, <www.jordanembassyus.org>.

6 Laurie Bland, "In the Beginning Was the State...", *Civil Society in the Middle East*, Ed. Augustus Richard Norton, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995) 148-185, p. 165.

7 Mufti, "Elite Bargains and the Onset of Political Liberalization in Jordan".

8 Ibid p. 114.

9 Glenn Robinson, "Defensive Democratization in Jordan. " *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 30 (1998): 387-410, p. 387.

10 Ibid., p. 391.

11 Mufti, "Elite Bargains and the Onset of Political Liberalization in Jordan," p. 100.

12 Curtis R. Ryan and Jillian Schwedler, "Return to Democratization or New Hybrid Regime?: the 2003 Elections in Jordan," *Middle East Policy* 11 (2004): 138-151, p. 139.

13 Ibid.
14 Muhammed Abu Ruman, Personal Interview. 20 Nov. 2006; Ruhail Gharaibeh, Personal Interview 15 Nov. 2006; Orieb Rantawi, Personal Interview, 21 Nov. 2006.
15 Ibid.
16 Ruhail Gharaibeh, Personal Interview. 15 Nov. 2006.
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18 Abu Ruman, Personal Interview. 20 Nov. 2006.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Four general political positions comprise the Islamic Action Front.
22 Daniel Williams, "Political Islam's Opportunity in Jordan," *The Washington Post*, 13 Apr. 2006, Accessed on 19 Oct. 2006, <www.washingtonpost.com>.
23 Abu Ruman, Personal Interview, 20 Nov. 2006.
24 "Country Report: Jordan," *Freedom House*, Freedom House, 20 Nov. 2006 <www.freedomhouse.org>.
25 Khalil Attiyyeh, Personal Interview, 15 Nov. 2006; Ruhail Gharaibeh, Personal Interview, 15 Nov. 2006.
26 Abu Ruman, Personal Interview, 20 Nov. 2006.
27 Zaki Bin Arsheed, Personal Interview, 27 Nov. 2006, See also "The Vision of the Islamic Movement for Reform in Jordan," *Islamic Action Front Party*, Islamic Action Front Party, <www.jabha.net>.
28 Orieb Rantawi, Personal Interview, 21 Nov. 2006.
29 Ryan and Schwedler, "Return to Democratization or New Hybrid Regime?: the 2003 Elections in Jordan," p. 139.
30 *Democracy Poll- 2006*.
31 Ibid.
32 Rantawi, Personal Interview, 21 Nov. 2006.
33 Thanassis Cabanis, "Jordan's Islamists See a Path to Political Power," *The Boston Globe,* 21 Mar. 2006, Accessed on 20 Nov. 2006 <www.boston.com>.
34 *Democracy Poll- 2006*
35 "Statements and Remarks," The Islamic Action Front, The Islamic Action Front, 12 Oct. 2006 <www.jabha.net>.
36 Rantawi, Personal Interview, 21 Nov. 2006.
37 "Domestic Politics and Reform."
38 For more on the subject of political liberalization in the absence of civil society and an established political culture, see Mufti, "Elite Bargains and the Onset of Political Liberalization in Jordan," p. 102.
39 This claim is based upon personal interviews conducted by the author in Amman in November 2006.
40 Ruhail Gharaibeh, Personal Interview. 15 Nov. 2006
41 Ibid.
42 Salah Al-Bashir, Personal Interview. 20 Nov. 2006.; Attiyyeh, Khalil. Personal Interview. 15 Nov. 2006.
43 Gharaibeh, Personal Interview, 15 Nov. 2006.
44 Ibid.
45 "Country Report: Jordan."
46 Ibid.
47 Abu Ruman, Personal Interview, 20 Nov. 2006.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Bin Arsheed, Personal Interview, 27 Nov. 2006.
51 Attiyyeh, Personal Interview, 15 Nov. 2006.
52 Gharaibeh, Personal Interview, 15 Nov. 2006. Law No. 32, or the Political Parties Law, passed in 1992, states that no Jordanian political party may have financial or organizational ties to any non-Jordanian body. For more on the Political Parties Law, see "The Political Parties Law," Accessed on 28 Nov. 2006 <http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/pol-parties.html>.
53 Abu Ruman, Personal Interview, 20 Nov. 2006.
54 Bin Arsheed, Personal Interview. 27 Nov. 2006.; Gharaibeh, Ruhail. Personal Interview. 15 Nov. 2006.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Gharaibeh, Personal Interview. 15 Nov. 2006.
58 Bin Arsheed, Personal Interview. 27 Nov. 2006.
59 Al-Bashir, Personal Interview. 20 Nov. 2006.
60 Yossi Alpher, "An Understandably Reluctant Partner," *Media Monitors Network*, 7 July 2004, <world.mediamonitors.net>.
61 Scott Lasensky, "Jordan's Role in Iraq is Modest But Positive," *US Institute of Peace,* 19 Dec. 2005, U.S. Institute of Peace, Accessed on 15 Nov. 2006 <www.usip.org>.
62 Al-Bashir, Personal Interview, 20 Nov. 2006.
63 Rantawi, Personal Interview, 21 Nov. 2006.
64 Abu Ruman, Personal Interview, 20 Nov. 2006.
65 Gharaibeh, Personal Interview, 15 Nov. 2006.
66 Bin Arsheed, Personal Interview, 27 Nov. 2006.
67 Rantawi, Personal Interview, 21 Nov. 2006.
68 There is a great deal of dispute regarding the July-August 2007 municipal elections in Jordan, specifically as to whether or not the regime violated election laws in any way, and the manner in which it may have done so. Nonetheless, suspicions were great enough that the IAF illegally pulled out of the elections in response to the lack of transparency. MENA Election Guide, www.mena-electionguide.org, 31 Aug. 2007.
69 Al-Bashir, Personal Interview, 20 Nov. 2006.