

The Jordanian Brotherhood in the Arab Spring

By Jacob Amis

THE “ARAB SPRING” HAS HAD A DRAMATIC IMPACT ON THE POLITICAL strategy and discourse of Muslim Brotherhood movements worldwide, including in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.¹ Since January 2011, changing regional dynamics have emboldened the Jordanian Brotherhood and exacerbated tensions with the monarchy. In a marked escalation, the Brotherhood has led calls for constitutional reform to erode crucial aspects of royal prerogative. At the same time, the Islamists have positioned themselves at the vanguard of a robust protest movement that organizes demonstrations across Jordan on an almost weekly basis.² Now, a determined Brotherhood boycott of forthcoming parliamentary elections threatens to derail the official Palace-led “reform process” and has set the scene for further confrontation.

Jordan is by no means immune to the diverse processes of change that the 2011 Arab Uprisings have unleashed, and which brought Islamists to power in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere. Yet the kingdom has frequently been overlooked in the broad sweep of academic, journalistic, and policy analysis of the Arab Spring and contemporary Islamism.³ Indeed, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has always attracted less scholarly attention than its counterpart in Egypt.⁴ This paper’s aim is to shed light on the neglected case of the Jordanian Brotherhood and its formal political party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF). In particular, it will draw on a range of primary sources, including official brotherhood “declarations” (*bayānīn*; sing.: *bayān*) and interviews with senior leaders, to assess the impact of the Arab Spring on the movement’s political posture and interactions with the monarchy. It is argued that the

Jordanian Brotherhood represents yet another example of the regional rise of Islamist actors since 2011, one that now poses a potent challenge to the country's rulers.⁵

Before the Spring

MOST SCHOLARSHIP ON THE JORDANIAN BROTHERHOOD HAS TENDED TO EMPHASISE its amicable and cooperative relationship with the Hashemite monarchy. In *The Management of Islamic Activism*, Quintan Wiktorowicz saw the Brotherhood and the monarchy as locked in a mutually beneficial “role complementarity” which gave the Islamist movement a vested interest in the status quo and the character of a “loyal opposition.”⁶ Even when allowing for occasional flux in relations, scholars have consistently stressed the inability or unwillingness of the Islamists to question royal authority, the structure of the political system, or regime-defined “red lines” regarding oppositional activity and protest mobilization.⁷

Yet even before the cataclysm of 2011, and particularly in the turbulent years of Abdullah II's reign (1999-), the Brotherhood-Hashemite concord had largely unravelled. Indeed, by the eve of the Arab Spring, the harmonious “winking relationship”⁸ described by most scholars had descended into mutual suspicion and open-ended crisis. Compared with the intense historical confrontations between the Brotherhood and autocratic regimes in neighboring Egypt and Syria, it is clear that the movement found in Jordan a relatively benign host. King Abdullah I (1921-51) and King Hussein (1953-99) both courted the Brothers as a conservative counterweight to secular Pan-Arab and Palestinian nationalisms. As such, the Brotherhood was the only political entity that enjoyed both legal recognition and direct royal patronage during Jordan's martial law period (1957-89).⁹ This *modus vivendi*, which allowed the Brotherhood to quietly expand its social welfare network and develop influence among the ranks of student and professional unions, prevailed as long as Islamists and the monarchy alike regarded secular nationalism as a common threat, and, for as long as national political contestation remained closed.

Both pillars of the relationship disintegrated, however, in the last decade of King Hussein's reign. A top-down experiment with political “liberalization” revealed that once-formidable Leftist and Nationalist ideologies had lost their popular appeal and an Islamist alternative was newly ascendant. In 1989, to defuse widespread social unrest that followed IMF-imposed economic austerity measures, King Hussein lifted martial law and announced parliamentary elections. Political parties remained illegal; however, the Leftists and Nationalists failed to coordinate, and the Brotherhood

formed a national list and campaigned in earnest under the banner “Islam is the solution.” The result was a landslide: the Brotherhood won 22 seats outright, and proceeded to form a bloc with independent Islamists which took their total to 34 out of an 80-seat parliament.¹⁰

Henceforth, the regime sought to contain its former client, and political liberalization “gave way to its opposite, de-liberalization.”¹¹ In the run-up to 1993 elections, after parliament had been dissolved, King Hussein changed the electoral law by decree to introduce a single non-transferable vote system or, “one man, one vote” (*sawt al-wāhid*) which encouraged voting along familial and tribal lines rather than ideology.¹² In addition, new electoral districts vastly under-represented large urban and predominantly Palestinian-origin populations favourable to the Brotherhood while privileging traditionally loyalist rural constituencies. Following the 1994 Wadi Araba Peace Accord with Israel, the gulf between the Brotherhood and the regime increased. Restrictive press laws were introduced, anti-normalization rallies led to a ban on political protests, and the Brotherhood boycotted the 1997 elections in response.¹³

The first ten years of Abdullah II’s reign saw a progressive deterioration in the relationship between his regime and the Brothers. Regional and domestic instability, particularly the 2005 al-Qaeda hotel bombings in Amman and the January 2006 Hamas victory in Palestinian legislative elections, led the new king to crack down on the Brotherhood in an unprecedented manner. In July 2006, the government sequestered the Brotherhood’s umbrella NGO, the Islamic Centre Society, and thus deprived the movement of its institutional hub and perhaps a third of its revenues.¹⁴ Never before had the regime taken serious action against the Brotherhood’s grassroots network. Having withdrawn from the 2007 municipal elections amid accusations of voting manipulation, the Brotherhood nevertheless decided to run for parliament later in the year. They secured only 6 out of 22 candidates for the 110-strong Lower House. Although the campaign suffered from internal disagreements, local civil society organizations reported serious irregularities at the polls.¹⁵ The IAF Secretary of the time stated that the election was “an unprecedented fraud, the worst election in the history of Jordan.”¹⁶

Thoroughly alienated, the Brotherhood adopted a policy of non-participation in electoral politics. Close to 70 percent of the Shura Councils of both the Brotherhood and the IAF voted to boycott parliamentary elections in November 2010, with reform of the “one man, one vote” system cited as “the principle condition for participation.”¹⁷ Many in the regime’s circles sought to ignore or even welcome the Brotherhood’s marginalisation; however, the subsequent low turnout in the 2010 elections, especially in the traditional Brotherhood strongholds of Amman, Zarqa and Irbid, did not go unnoticed.¹⁸ Notwithstanding the fact that they were on the defensive, the

Brotherhood retained certain political trump cards. After all, the legitimacy of Jordan's "façade democracy"¹⁹ required the participation of the country's sole mass-based political party. It was with this fragile backdrop that the Arab Spring erupted in January 2011.

“Things Have Changed”

LEADERS OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD MAKE NO SECRET OF THEIR VIEW THAT the uprisings which have taken place across the region since 2011 have radically altered Jordan's internal political balance. The sight of successive regimes teetering under popular pressure in neighboring countries raised the morale of the beleaguered Jordanian Brotherhood and shifted the power dynamics between the monarch and movement. Ghaith al-Qudah, head of the IAF Youth Sector, described this new mindset:

What's happening right now in the Arab world is giving us, the Muslim Brotherhood, a strong message that we can make changes ... Take Syria—I myself was shocked that the Syrians could go and hold demonstrations. This was not allowed at all in Syria—but now people are going out in thousands, and saying everything on their mind... All leaders in the Arab world should understand this message: things have changed. No more “iron fist.”²⁰

The electoral victories of Islamist parties in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco contributed further to the Jordanian Brotherhood's newfound confidence. Increasingly, the Arab Spring appeared to confirm the Brotherhood's conviction that Islamists are the rightful and “natural choice” for self-governing Arab societies:

We're Muslims by nature, we're religious by nature as Arab peoples, no matter the impact of Westernization and Globalization and so on. So when people are given their free choice ... it's a choice that heads towards Islam.²¹

In the view of the movement, the Arab Spring had revealed Islamists' latent influence after decades of suppression. As Dr. Eyda Mutlaq of the IAF Shura Council argued: “The Islamic movement in the Arab world was repressed, it was under dictatorship and

they suffered... So now the Arab Spring uncovered the real power among the people. Look at al-Nahda: after years of exile, they came [back to Tunisia] and the people elected them.”²² Even though secular trends largely initiated the Arab Spring, the head of the IAF Political Office, Dr. Ruhayil Gharaibeh, went so far as to credit Islamist movements for laying the seeds of the 2011 uprisings:

The Arab Spring is one of the “fruits” (*themār*) of the work of the Islamic movement in the Arab world. The “approach” “*minhāj*” of the Muslim Brotherhood is based on the peaceful transformation of the people, meaning that the *umma* comes to a level of understanding and consciousness to demand change to the rule of corruption and oppression by popular—but peaceful—means. What has happened is precisely the approach for which the Muslim Brotherhood has been working for more than eighty years.²³

Most significantly, Brotherhood leaders understood that the electoral triumph of Islamist movements abroad could be translated into political leverage at home: “We use the results in the other Arab countries to say to our government: “look, when the elections are fair, the Islamists win.”²⁴

New conditions called for new demands. In 2005, the Brotherhood and IAF had released an extensive manifesto that closely mirrored the contemporary platforms that their Egyptian and Syrian counterparts had issued.²⁵ The document emphasized pluralism and “democratic *shūra*,”²⁶ and listed nineteen requirements for national political reform, including judicial independence, alternation of powers, dissolution of the unelected Upper House, and accountability for the security apparatus.²⁷ To the movement’s misfortune, however, the November 2005 Amman bombings overshadowed the publication, and abruptly switched national priorities from political reform to security concerns. In practice, the lofty goals of the manifesto were rarely invoked.²⁸ Furthermore, the reforms it proposed were explicitly based on the implementation of, and, the adherence to the *existing* text of the constitution. As yet, “the Pandora’s Box of constitutional change”²⁹ lay unopened.

The Arab Spring shattered this taboo, as debate across and beyond the Jordanian political spectrum settled on the subject of constitutional reform. The Brotherhood was not slow to capitalize on this development: for the first time in its history, the movement embarked on a determined drive for constitutional amendments to substantially redefine royal prerogative. In particular, the Brotherhood focused on the unrestricted power of the king to dissolve parliament (Article 34), appoint the prime minister (Article 35), and appoint the entirety of the Upper House (Article 36).³⁰ Brotherhood

leaders argued that, in keeping with the existing constitutional description of Jordan's system of government as a "parliamentary hereditary monarchy" (*nizām al-hukm niyābi malakī wirāthī*) in which "the people are the source of powers" (*al-umma masdar al-sultāt*) (Articles 1, 24), the Jordanian Constitution should enshrine the right of a parliamentary majority to appoint the prime minister, should either abolish the Upper House or subject it to popular election, and provide safeguards for the Lower House against arbitrary dissolution.³¹

The Brotherhood effectively zeroed in on some of the key powers with which the Kings of Jordan have historically ruled as absolute monarchs, rather than merely reigned as constitutional ones. Leaders of the movement made clear that this marked a bold departure in the Brotherhood's strategy, one which derived from Islamism's sudden regional empowerment. For example, Hayat al-Missayami, an IAF Shura Council member, stated:

I think what happened in the Arab countries has given us great power in our demands. This is very important. If nothing happened in Egypt and Yemen and so on, I think we would be talking about the election law—a very low-level of demand. Now, we are talking about very high-level demands ... this is coming from what is happening around us, especially in Egypt.³²

Previously, the questioning of royal power had been unthinkable. As an analyst at the Brookings Institution Shadi Hamid observed before the Arab Spring, even in moments of political crisis "the monarchy's institutional prerogatives were, with very few exceptions, rarely brought up or discussed publicly. The "red lines" remained safely in place, immune to pressure of any kind."³³

No longer immune, and with popular pressure rising, the Palace launched the Royal Committee for Constitutional Review in April 2011. Four months later, the committee proposed 41 amendments to the Constitution. Well-received by the nation's press, they included the establishment of an independent commission to oversee elections, a constitutional court to monitor legislation, and restrictions on State Security Courts. The amendments stopped short, however, of limiting the king's power.³⁴ Within days, Brotherhood General Supervisor Hamam Sa'īd told the audience of a high-profile Ramadan event that the committee's findings "did not make the people the true source of power, and could only lead to more "political oppression" (*al-istibdād al-siyāsī*).³⁵

The Brotherhood and IAF went on to reject the amendments in a joint statement, declaring that the committee "had failed to address the demands and expectations

of the Jordanian people.” In a *bayān* remarkable both for its strong language and the content and specificity of its demands, the movement stated:

The government squandered an opportunity to present substantial amendments to the structure of the “political system” *binyat al-nizām al-siyāsī* to render to the people its right as the source of powers, to implement the meaning of the constitutional text “parliamentary hereditary monarchy”... and to accede to the demands of the Jordanian people for “real and comprehensive reform” (*al-islāh al-haqīqī wa-l-shāmil*), to meet the challenges that are shaking the region.³⁶

The *bayān* renewed the movement’s demands regarding the crucial articles and royal powers that the committee did not address, and thoroughly criticized the proposed amendments. The fact that protests intensified nationwide in spite of the government’s reform package indicated that the Brotherhood had successfully aligned itself with public opinion.³⁷

Alongside this detailed constitutional critique, many within the Brotherhood pointed to the Moroccan experience as a model for Jordan to emulate in the immediate term. Morocco’s King Mohamed VI had acted early to introduce constitutional reforms that proved more substantial than those Abdullah II ceded. They included increased judicial independence and the stipulation that the majority party appoint the prime minister, and were legitimized by popular referendum. By November 2011, elections held under the revamped constitution had delivered a victory to the Islamist Justice and Development Party and its Secretary General Abdellilah Benkirane; the King then duly appointed Benkirane Prime Minister.³⁸

Though aware of the limitations of the Moroccan reforms, the Jordanian Brotherhood looked to them as a realistic first step. As Eyda Mutlaq of the IAF Shura Council stated:

It’s not enough—but it is substantial. The [Moroccan] King still has a lot of power, but gradually through democratic government and a democratic parliament—and since he appointed the Prime Minister from the majority—this is a progressive step towards elected government and constitutional monarchy.³⁹

Moreover, Brotherhood Deputy General Supervisor Zaki Bani Irsheid specifically touted the “Moroccan model” as the least bad option for the regime: “the least costly solution for solving the current problem would be the Moroccan model, to reach a

compromise between the desires of officialdom and the desires of the people by way of a tangible reform program, to bring Jordan out of this state of crisis.”⁴⁰

At times, Jordanian Brotherhood leaders have been moved to state the case for reform of the monarchy still more forcefully. Since the Arab Spring, a controversial discussion about “constitutional monarchy,” *malakiyya dusturiyya*, has revived itself within certain sections of the movement.⁴¹ Previously stifled by the cautious leadership, in its current maximalist expression the discourse surrounding *malakiyya dusturiyya* appears to envision a role for the Hashemites that is little more than ceremonial. As Ruhayil Gharaibeh, the intellectual progenitor of the initiative, explained:

The King should become the head of state, the “symbol of state” (*ramz al-dawla*), and the people should be the source of power with political parties and elections, like any other democracy in the world: like Malaysia, Spain, Japan, Sweden, Denmark. There are many states with monarchy *and* democracy...We can’t go on living under a form of rule that goes back to the Middle Ages, whereby one person exercises all the power without accountability... absolute power is absolute corruption, this is a well-known rule of politics.⁴²

For Gharaibeh, the fact that constitutional monarchy had been established in Malaysia, a Muslim-majority country, and one that achieved independence after Jordan, was particularly significant. While acknowledging the long-term nature of the goal, Ghaith al-Qudah, the head of the IAF Youth Sector, mirrored the argument for constitutional monarchy with equal forthrightness:

We need the King to be like the Queen and royal family in Britain... We think our King should understand this message. We need him to stay, we respect him; but, we need actual changes on the street. It will take time, I think they will go step-by-step: it’s not easy for the Jordanian royal family to switch from absolute power to constitutional power... it’s not easy to take power from them and to eliminate the power they have. But we hope that things can be changed.⁴³

Though he eschewed the term “constitutional monarchy,” stating that “what you want to call it is up to you,” Nimr al-Assaf, the Deputy Secretary General of the IAF, described a similar vision for the future of the royal institution:

Of course the King will have his role in some subjects, but not the same way that it is now. I mean, we are in the 21st century, and nobody accepts absolute power to be in the hands of one single person. No way.⁴⁴

Calls for such drastic reduction of the king's power remain contentious within the Brotherhood. One insider rued the fact that "some of the Brothers are asking for constitutional monarchy, some are not." Nevertheless, such a broad spectrum of the movement's leadership has never so openly promulgated these ideas.

No senior Brother has called for the end of Hashemite monarchy. Indeed, they affirm the institution as indispensable to Jordanian national unity. However, the Brotherhood's expanded demands would certainly amount to the end of Hashemite rule as we know it. For Gharaibeh, the question is *when* and *how* this transformation will take place, not *if*:

I believe all the Arab regimes will change, and that the revolutions of the Arab peoples will continue step-by-step, with the only difference between countries being the timing and the form. The sun of freedom will rise over the whole world, and all the corrupt, oppressive and backward tribalistic regimes will be demolished, and there will be a democratic system based on the freedom and participation of peoples in future years. Jordan is definitely part of this process.⁴⁵

Questioning once-sacrosanct royal authority is a political Rubicon that the Jordanian Brotherhood has most definitely crossed. Meanwhile, the power of the movement to mobilize its supporters on the street has given urgency to the new demands.

Activating Islam

SINCE JANUARY 2011, THE JORDANIAN BROTHERHOOD HAS MOBILIZED POPULAR protests on a larger, more regular, and more oppositional basis than ever before. Of course, the movement is no stranger to "street politics." It has organized political demonstrations in Jordan as far back as the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the Baghdad Pact.⁴⁶ More recently, the Brotherhood led rallies against the U.S.-led intervention in the First Gulf War and braved an uncompromising security crackdown to protest Jordanian inaction during the second Palestinian Intifada.⁴⁷ Yet such campaigns have

always been sporadic, and have usually revolved around foreign affairs. When domestic policies sparked unrest in the southern governorates in 1989, and then again in 1996, the Brotherhood was at best a secondary contributor to the demonstrations.⁴⁸ Perhaps for this reason, Wiktorowicz identified the Brotherhood's apparent reluctance to "threaten to mobilize mass-based social protest" as a clear sign of the movement's subjugation.⁴⁹

The balance has drastically changed since the onset of the Arab Spring. As the parameters of public expression have expanded across the region, the Jordanian Brotherhood has been able to consistently organize and lead substantial popular demonstrations in Amman and other cities under the new banner of structural political reform. Protests in Jordan began on January 7, 2011 in provincial Dhiban, and then spread to the capital the following Friday.⁵⁰ Though it did not participate at first in the largely acephalous, non-partisan and youth-dominated protests, the Brotherhood turned up in force on January 28, the third consecutive Friday march in Amman.⁵¹ Thereafter, the Islamists eased into a leadership position in the nascent protest movement, which became known locally as "the mobilization" (*al-hirāk*).

Indeed, the Brotherhood is uniquely positioned within the *hirāk* as the only traditional political actor to have remained prominent during this new phase of post-Arab Spring activism. In a protest movement largely based on informal, non-traditional and localized networks, the Islamists alone possess a unified national infrastructure as well as a registered political party. Because of this, Islamic demands easily eclipse newly established "youth" groups and regional reform committees (which can be dynamic but tend to be highly fragmented.) "Nobody can compete with the Brotherhood at this moment" confirms Dr. Muhammad Abu Rumman, an expert on Islamic movements based at the University of Jordan. The "Brotherhood controls the street."⁵² The Islamists grasp that they have this advantage. As Hayat al-Missaymi of the IAF Shura Council has said:

We are the largest movement. Most of our partners don't have the population with them: the population is with us. So if you go to any demonstration, if there are ten thousand people, 90 percent are from the Islamic movement. And if the Islamic movement did not support the demonstration, you would find very few people there.⁵³

Thus, the Brotherhood's joint protests with other parties and youth movements serve not only to increase overall pressure on the regime, but also to underscore the Islamists' status as the single most significant political force in the Kingdom.

Regular Friday protests have provided a new platform for the Brotherhood to

disseminate its demands for reform and connect with its popular base. In Amman, the most senior figures of the Brotherhood and IAF frequent the protests, often leading the “march” (*masīra*) arm-in-arm from al-Hussayni Mosque to al-Nakhil Square in the bustling downtown market district. There they address the crowd from a truck-mounted microphone podium, to spread the gospel of constitutional reform. The tenor of these speeches is remarkably consistent with the movement’s written discourse; it is peppered with calls for “structural” (*banyawī*), “fundamental” (*jadhri*), “core” (*jawhari*), “comprehensive” (*shāmil*) and “real” change (*taghayyir haqīqī*), as opposed to the “superficial” (*shikkli*), “illusory” (*wahmī*), and “counterfeit” (*tazwīrī*) reforms advanced by the government.⁵⁴

Although most demonstrations have concluded peacefully, violent incidents that have marred the *hirāk* are widely attributed to the activities of the General Intelligence Department (GID). On March 24, 2011, a youth activist group seized the Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasir roundabout (known as “Duwwar Dakhiliyya” due to its proximity to the Interior Ministry) in Amman, and declared an “open sit-in,” *i’tisām maftūh*. Although the Brotherhood did not overtly lead the demonstration, a “very good percentage” of the “March 24 Youth” belonged to the movement.⁵⁵ The following evening, security forces and pro-regime activists violently cleared the square, leaving one protestor dead and many wounded.⁵⁶

When “thugs” disrupted a subsequent demonstration in Karak, the IAF accused the government of colluding in the violence, to “terrorize activists and stop them from pressing for reform.”⁵⁷ In December 2011, police dispersed a Brotherhood rally outside the Prime Ministry in Amman after demonstrators allegedly tried to storm the building.⁵⁸ At around the same time, a Brotherhood march in the northern town of Mafraq, which was held in conjunction with youth and tribally-based committees, came under a prolonged attack that left dozens of activists injured and the local Brotherhood and IAF headquarters burned to the ground.⁵⁹ Islamist leaders have occasionally become targets of intimidation: in January 2012 a group of pro-regime activists attempted to attack the vehicle of IAF Secretary General Hamza Mansur as he left an Amman rally.⁶⁰

Whether or not such incidents are indeed condoned by higher powers, Brothers often attribute them to elements of the security apparatus eager to confront the Islamist movement with force. According to the head of the IAF Youth Sector, attacks on demonstrations are “a message from the intelligence department. We have two governments here in Jordan: the government that the King forms, and the government of the intelligence department.”⁶¹

The risk of escalation is clear. Brotherhood leaders know that the convergence of regular mass mobilization and increased demands for political reform places the

authorities in a position of acute difficulty. According to Ruhayil Gharaibeh, the head of the IAF Political Office:

There is a crisis. The regime wants the Brotherhood under control, but the movement is standing firm, exposing the superficiality and inadequacy of the small reformist steps taken so far. After the King signed off on the latest reforms, the Brotherhood went to the streets again, with the biggest force mobilized so far, and the message was clear. But the message has not been heeded, so I expect the popular movement on the streets will grow stronger and mobilize further.⁶²

Nevertheless, ‘Abd al-Hamid al-Qudah, another senior leader, described orderly and “institutionalized” protest as a key pillar of the Brotherhood’s interaction with both political elites and Jordanian society as a whole:

We will do our best to remain in the street and mobilize everyone in the country, peacefully, without harming anything, even using polite language, but spreading the facts to the people, so they will choose between remaining asleep, or increasing pressure on the government to make reforms.⁶³

When combined with an outspoken boycott of elections, this represents a powerful opposition strategy.

Resisting Co-option

THE SHOCKWAVES OF THE ARAB SPRING SOON INDUCED A SHIFT IN THE REGIME’S thinking towards its largest opposition movement. In the view of some policymakers, the Brotherhood’s resurgence revealed the failure of the aggressive measures which the regime had pursued over the previous decade: “they failed to decrease the power of the Brotherhood, to damage them, and they began to realize that it was the wrong strategy.”⁶⁴ The obvious alternative was to co-opt the Islamists, and the authorities soon embarked on a series of attempts to draw the Brotherhood into the official reform process.

When Abdullah II bowed to popular pressure and dismissed the government of Prime Minister Samir Rifa’i on February 1, 2011, the king himself led efforts to entice

the Brotherhood into a reconstituted cabinet.⁶⁵ Personal contact between the monarch and the movement was restored after years of estrangement, and the king's offer was unprecedented. As one Brotherhood leader said, "this was the first time in the political life of Jordan in which the King opened the door for us to select any number of ministers."⁶⁶

Yet the Brotherhood remained unmoved. Certainly, the choice of prime minister had been uninspired: Ma'ruf al-Bakhit, a returnee to the job whose previous tenure oversaw the controversial elections of 2007. More importantly, however, the Brotherhood showed it would not be bought off with transient appointments in lieu of lasting changes to the political system.⁶⁷

The regime repeatedly sought to win over the Brotherhood and secure its involvement. At every turn, however, the Islamists refused to endorse a tentative reform agenda that didn't affect the king's power. The National Dialogue Committee, which met between March and June 2011, was the first official reform initiative in Jordan. Inauspiciously for the regime, the IAF refused to take part in the 52-member Committee and criticized its strictly advisory role and limited remit, which initially excluded constitutional reform.⁶⁸

Far more damaging was the announcement, in September 2011, that the Brotherhood would boycott forthcoming municipal elections. Slated for December 2011, and following on the heels of the Royal Committee for Constitutional Review, the polls were set to be the first test of public approval for the Kingdom's reform effort. In a joint IAF-Brotherhood *bayān*, the movement re-tabled its demands for a substantive overhaul of royal and institutional powers and called for the establishment of a "National Reform Government" to administer the required changes.⁶⁹

In this particular confrontation, the authorities were the first to blink. The problematic Ma'ruf al-Bakhit was sacked in October 2011, municipal elections were postponed, and 'Awn al-Khasawneh, the former vice president of the International Court of Justice in The Hague, was brought in with directions to accommodate the Brotherhood. Again, the regime offered the Brothers an unprecedented degree of representation at cabinet level, and again, they rejected the overture. "It doesn't matter who's at the top, whoever comes as Prime Minister," stated Dr. Dima Tahboub of the IAF Shura Council. "At the moment it's just like a chess game, putting someone here, someone there, and this is a problem."⁷⁰

With the Jordanian regime now openly courting a formerly marginalized movement, the Arab Spring has clearly tilted State-Islamist power relations in favor of the latter. While the Brotherhood found itself able to expand its demands and mobilize mass support as never before, "the regime," on the other hand, "is weak. There is a lack of legitimacy." The core dilemma for the monarchy, Dr. Rumman notes, is that

“for any movement towards democracy, they need to talk to the Brotherhood.” Indeed, it is widely predicted that a Brotherhood boycott of the elections could single-handedly derail the official reform process:

(The Brotherhood) knows, above all else, that if they boycott the elections, the regime will be in a crisis, because it needs the Brotherhood to participate, to give legitimacy to the elections... all of us know that, because the Brotherhood represent the opposition, and the seat of the opposition in Parliament, and because they represent the Palestinian social class in Jordan.⁷¹

Moreover, as the IAF Deputy Secretary General asserts, “a large chunk of the Jordanian people won’t be participating if we don’t.”⁷²

Yet for all the rotations of personnel, and the consistent offers of high-ranking cabinet positions, successive governments have proven unable or unwilling to countenance the Brotherhood’s far-reaching demands for structural change. In May 2012, Khasawneh shocked Jordan when he submitted his resignation from abroad amid rumours of a debilitating power struggle between the Prime Ministry, the Royal Court, and General Intelligence. An overnight icon of the opposition, Khasawneh claimed that royal interference had handcuffed reform, and thus precluded any entente with the Brotherhood. “I was supposed to run the country,” he protested. “I won’t accept instructions from the Palace.”⁷³

Any real prospect of a reform settlement inclusive of the opposition ended when Khasawneh’s successor, Jordan’s fourth Prime Minister in eighteen months, verified his conservative reputation and signed into law a new elections measure that retained the “one man, one vote” formula, and ruled out further constitutional amendments at this stage. “The King’s powers are not negotiable,” a government spokesman declared, “and we will not bargain with any political party in return for its participation.”⁷⁴ With parliamentary elections set for January 23, 2013, and the door to compromise apparently closed, pressure on the political system will continue to build.

Countdown to Crisis

JORDAN’S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD NOW STANDS AT THE HEAD OF A BROAD BOYCOTT coalition poised to discredit perhaps the most important elections in the country’s history. While increasingly carousel-like governments have dithered over reform, the

Brotherhood has forged and maintained alliances with an impressive array of societal forces. These range from established political parties of secular Leftist or Nationalist orientation with whom the Brotherhood has long enjoyed a measure of cooperation, to formerly loyalist factions (including influential East Bank tribes), to the novel grassroots “popular movements” (*harakāt shaʿbiyya*) that have emerged across the country in the wake of the Arab Spring.⁷⁵

This union of urban-based and predominantly Palestinian-origin Brotherhood constituencies with the East Bank towns and tribes of the “provinces” (*muhāfizāt*) is of particular significance. Not since the peak of the 1950s Arab Nationalist mobilization has a regime adept at “divide and rule” experienced such sustained and vocal discontent across the kingdom’s core communal divide. Even as the opposition is metasizing into a pan-Jordanian phenomenon, a top-down retreat from the “Moroccan model” of pre-emptive compromise reform threatens to put the country’s rulers permanently on their heels. In the words of the Brotherhood’s second-in-command, “the smooth stability that Jordan has long witnessed is starting to shake.”⁷⁶

In Jordan, as elsewhere, the Brotherhood is entering uncharted territory. The Arab Spring has allowed the Jordanian Brotherhood to shape and direct popular pressure as never before, and to challenge the once sacrosanct authority of the king. By embracing a new discourse focused on constitutional change, mobilizing grassroots protest in conjunction with other political actors, and resisting co-option, the Brotherhood has dealt a significant blow to the legitimacy of the prevailing order. “Now, our movement, the Jordanian people’s movement, is irreversible, not as it was before,” states one Brotherhood leader. “It is irreversible, and it is increasing day by day. I ask Allah to help our king make a brave breakthrough decision, to avoid for Jordan the fate of Syria and Yemen.”⁷⁷ By the time Jordan’s rulers are forced to take heed, it may already be too late.

NOTES

1. There is no consensus on what to call the various encounters between and among Middle Eastern autocracies and peoples that have taken place since unrest began in Tunisia in December 2010. The choice of “Arab Spring” here reflects its broad usage, in Jordan (*al-rabiʿ al-arabi*) as elsewhere.
2. *The Jordan Times* estimates that some 1,000 demonstrations took place in 2011 alone. See: Taylor Luck, “Pro Reformers to Continue Protest Drive” *The Jordan Times*, 20 January 2012

- <http://jordantimes.com/pro-reformers-to-continue-protest-drive>. In an August 2012 interview, King Abdullah II himself stated that Jordan had experienced over 5,000 demonstrations since the beginning of the Arab Spring. King Abdullah of Jordan, Interview by Charlie Rose, August 7, 2012 <http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/12495>.
3. Three useful exceptions are: Shadi Hamid and Courtney Freer, "How Stable is Jordan?," *Brookings Doha Center Policy Briefing* (November, 2011); The International Crisis Group, "Dallying with Reform in a Divided Jordan," Middle East/ North Africa Report No. 118 (March, 2012); Asher Susser, "Jordan 2011: Uneasy Lies the Head." *Crown Center for Middle Eastern Studies* 52 (June, 2011).
 4. The most recent holistic study of the Muslim Brotherhood included chapters on the Egyptian, Syrian and European branches, but no detailed treatment of the Jordanian case. See: Alison Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Burden of Tradition* (London: Saqi Books, 2010). Marion Boulby's *The Muslim Brotherhood and the Kings of Jordan, 1945-1993* (Tampa FL: University of South Florida Press, 1999) is still the only book-length case study in the English language, although several comparative works have since been published.
 5. The term "regime" is used throughout to denote the institution of Hashemite monarchy which, via the Royal Court and senior echelons of the intelligence services, over and above the elected parliament and appointed government, constitutes the executive authority in Jordan: "the head of the nation, above the law, and entirely unaccountable to the electorate." Shadi Hamid, "Jordan: the myth of the democratizing monarchy" in Nathan Brown and Emad El-Din Shahin, *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 124.
 6. Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 95.
 7. Ibid, 4-5, 83, 95; Boulby, 158-9; Well into the reign of Abdullah II, Jillian Schwedler found that "Jordan's mainstream Islamists... have never challenged the authority of the monarchy, and have sought to promote their social reform program within the boundaries of regime-defined constraints." Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 66-7.
 8. Curtis C. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah* (Boulder CO: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 2002), 21.
 9. The King himself was guest of honor at the Brotherhood's inauguration ceremony in Amman on 19 November 1945. See: Ibrahim Gharaibeh, [Arabic] *Jama'a al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin fi al-Urdun, 1946-1996* [The Society of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan], (1997), p. 47.
 10. With political parties still illegal, Brotherhood candidates ran as independents. The figure is sometimes broken down as 20 Brotherhood seats, with 14 independent Islamists. The ambiguity concerns whether two particular candidates were Brotherhood members or independent Islamists closely affiliated with the movement, and is open to interpretation. Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation*, 97 fn. 34.
 11. Russell Lucas, "Deliberalization in Jordan." *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 14, No.1 (January, 2003), p.138.
 12. Under the previous formula, constituents could vote for as many candidates as there were available seats in any given electoral district. Thus, in multi-member constituencies, each voter possessed several votes, enabling support for both ideological and tribal candidates. A single-vote

- system, on the other hand, favored the latter at the expense of political parties and made for fragmented and loyalist parliaments.
13. Philip Robins, *A History of Jordan* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 188-193.
 14. Muhammad Abu Rumman, *The Muslim Brotherhood in the 2007 Jordanian Parliamentary Elections* (Amman Jordan: Freidrich Ebert Stiftung, 2007), 26.
 15. "Press Statement," Al-Hayat Center for Civil Society Development, 20 November 2007, http://www.ndi.org/files/2224_jo_elect_press-stamt_11202007.pdf.
 16. Zaki Bani Irsheid, Muslim Brotherhood Deputy General Supervisor, Interview [in Arabic] by Author, Amman, December 20, 2011.
 17. Muhammad Abu Rumman, [Arabic] *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn ma ba'd Muqat'a Intikhabat* [The Muslim Brotherhood after Elections Boycott] (Amman: Center for Strategic Studies, 2011), p. 4.
 18. Ibid, 10-11.
 19. Beverley Milton-Edwards, "Facade Democracy in Jordan," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (January, 1993).
 20. Ghaith al-Qudah, Head of IAF Youth Sector, Interview by the author, Amman, August 25, 2011.
 21. Dima Tahboub, IAF Shura Council, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 11, 2011.
 22. Eyda Mutlaq, IAF Shura Council and Head of Women's Sector, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 15, 11.
 23. Ruhayil Gharaibeh, Muslim Brotherhood Shura Council and Head of IAF Political Office, Interview [in Arabic] by the Author, Amman, October 3, 2011.
 24. Hayat al-Missaymi, IAF Shura Council and former IAF MP, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 18, 2011.
 25. The Egyptian Brotherhood released a reform initiative in 2004 and an electoral platform in 2005, despite having no legal party. See: Nathan Brown and Amr Hamzawy, "The Draft Party Platform of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Paper, (January, 2008), 12. From exile, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood published *al-Mashru'a al-Siyasi li-Suriya al-Mustaqbal* [The political project for the Syria of the future] in 2004. Available at: <http://www.ikhwansyria.com/ar/default.aspx>.
 26. The concept of *shūra* (consultation) has often been employed by Islamists to legitimize democratic processes. The extent to which this elastic term qualifies their acceptance of democracy is open to interpretation. See: Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation*, 154-157.
 27. [Arabic] *Ru'ya al-Haraka al-Islamiyya li-l-Islah fi al-'Urdun* [The Vision of the Islamic Movement for Reform in Jordan] (Amman: Islamic Action Front, 2005), 25-31.
 28. Muhammad Abu Rumman, [Arabic] *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn ma ba'd Muqat'a Intikhabat*, (Amman: Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, 2011). 4.
 29. Avi Shlaim *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 597.
 30. Constitutional text available at: http://www.mpil.de/shared/data/pdf/the_constitution_of_the_hashemite_kingdom_arabic.pdf.
 31. See: "[Arabic] *al-haraka al-islamiyya tu'lin ru'yatuha min al-ta'dilat al-dusturiyya al-muqtaraha* [The Islamic Movement announces its view on the proposed constitutional amendments]." IAF website, 27 August 2011, www.jabha.net.

32. Hayat al-Missaymi, IAF Shura Council and former IAF MP, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 18, 2011.
33. Shadi Hamid, "Jordan: the myth of the democratizing monarchy." ed. Nathan Brown and Emad El-Din Shahin, *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East* (New York NY: Routledge, 2010), 128.
34. Marwan Muasher, "Jordan's Proposed Constitutional Amendments—A First Step in the Right Direction," Carnegie, 17 August 2011, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/08/17/jordan-s-proposed-constitutional-amendments-first-step-in-right-direction/5tz7>;
Taylor Luck, "Parliament "biggest winner" in constitutional reform." *The Jordan Times*, 24 August 2011.
35. "[Arabic] *sa'id: al-ta'dilat al-dusturiyya lan tu'adi 'ila 'ila mazid min al-istibdad* [Said: the constitutional amendments can only lead to an increase in oppression]." Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood Website, 21 August 2011, www.ikhwan-jor.com.
36. "[Arabic] *al-haraka al-islamiyya tu'lin ru'yatuha min al ta'dilat al-dusturiyya al-muqtaraha* [The Islamic Movement announces its view on the proposed constitutional amendments]." IAF Website, 27 August 2011, www.jabha.net.
37. Mohammad Ben Hussein, "Islamists protest against proposed constitutional amendments." *The Jordan Times*, 19 August 2011, <http://archive.jordantimes.com/?news=40565>.
38. Marina Ottoway and Marwan Muasher, "Arab Monarchies: Chance for Reform, Yet Unmet." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Papers, (December,2011). 5-7.
39. Eyda Mutlaq, IAF Shura Council, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 15, 2011.
40. Zaki Bani Irsheid, Brotherhood Deputy General Supervisor, Interview [in Arabic] by the Author, Amman, December 20, 2011.
41. The evolution of this idea is discussed in: Muhammad Abu Rumman, *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun ma ba'd Muqat'a Intikhabat* [The Muslim Brotherhood after Elections Boycott] (Amman: Center for Strategic Studies, 2011), 6-9. Rumman notes that "a great proportion of the Brotherhood feared this initiative" as a provocation to the regime, and that, before the Arab Spring, "constitutional monarchy" remained at best an unofficial narrative, promulgated in conjunction with opposition figures outside the Islamist fold.
42. Ruhayil Gharaibeh, Muslim Brotherhood Shura Council and Head of IAF Political Office, Interview [in Arabic] by the Author, Amman, October 3,2011.
43. Ghaith al-Qudah, Head of IAF Youth Sector, Interview by the Author, Amman, August 25, 2011.
44. Nimr al-Assaf, IAF Deputy Secretary General, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 12, 2011.
45. Ruhayil Gharaibeh, Muslim Brotherhood Shura Council and Head of IAF Political Office, Interview [in Arabic] by the Author, Amman, October 3, 2011.
46. Beverley Milton-Edwards and Peter Hinchcliffe, *Jordan: A Hashemite Legacy* (New York NY: Routledge,2009), 35.
47. At one demonstration, the IAF Secretary General was injured by riot police. See: Jillian Schwedler, "More than a Mob: The Dynamics of Political Demonstrations in Jordan," *Middle East Report*, No. 226 (Spring, 2003), 23.
48. Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe, *Jordan*, p. 48; Curtis C. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition*, 57.
49. Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism*, 5, 95.

50. Khaled Kalaldeh, Secretary General Social Left Movement, Interview by the Author Amman, August 19, 2011. The Social Left (*al-yasar al-ijtim a 'i*) were one of few politically organized elements involved in the Dhiban protest.
51. Kamal Khoury, Social Left Movement activist and participant in the demonstration, Interview by the Author, Amman, August 19, 2011.
52. Muhammad Abu Rumman, Centre for Strategic Studies, Interview by the Author, Amman, October 3, 2011.
53. Hayat al-Missaymi, IAF Shura Council, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 18, 2011. Although the figure of 90% should be taken as gestural, the view is widely supported by non-Islamist analysts in Jordan, and is confirmed by the author's personal observation of demonstrations in Amman on 9th and 30th September 2011.
54. Speeches delivered by Brotherhood General Supervisor Hamam Sa'id on 9th September 2011, and then IAF Deputy Secretary General Ahmad Majali on 9th and 30th September 2011. Recordings in possession of the author.
55. Ghaith al-Qudah, Head of IAF Youth Sector, Interview by the Author, Amman, August 25, 2011.
56. This was the most significant episode of violence in Jordan's Arab Spring, and one of few events to be covered by international media. See: "Jordan: Man Dies in Hospital After Amman Clashes." BBC News, March 25, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12866531>.
57. Mohammad Ben Hussein, "Political parties condemn attack on Karak protesters." *The Jordan Times*, August 14, 2011, <http://archive.jordantimes.com/?news=40392>.
58. Raed Omari, "Police disperses Islamist protesters 'attempting to storm the Prime Ministry.'" *The Jordan Times*, December 25, 2011, <http://jordantimes.com/police-disperses-islamist-protesters-attempting-to-storm-prime-ministry>.
59. The violence followed threats by pro-regime activists intent on stopping the march. Despite prior knowledge of the danger, security forces were slow to respond. See: Nur al-'Amad, "[Arabic] *al-tawattur yukhayam 'ala al-mafraq qabla jum'a al-islah wa-l-wala'* [Tension engulfs Mafraq ahead of Friday of reform and loyalty]." *Amman Net*, December 22, 2011, <http://ar.ammannet.net/?p=138148>; Taylor Luck, "Mafraq clashes place Islamists, gov't at crossroads," *Jordan Times*, December 27, 2011, <http://jordantimes.com/mafra-q-clashes-place-islamists-govt-at-crossroads>.
60. Taylor Luck, "Islamists return to the streets in 'Friday of Affirmation,'" *The Jordan Times*, January 27, 2012, <http://jordantimes.com/islamists-return-to-the-streets-in-friday-of-affirmation>.
61. Ghaith al-Qudah, Head of IAF Youth Sector, Interview by the Author, Amman, August 25, 2011.
62. Ruhayil Gharaibeh, Muslim Brotherhood Shura Council and Head of IAF Political Office, Interview [in Arabic] by the Author, Amman, October 3, 2011.
63. 'Abd al-Hamid al-Qudah, Brotherhood Shura Council and former Deputy General Supervisor, Amman, December 14, 2011.
64. Interview, Muhammad Abu Rumman, Centre for Strategic Studies, Amman, October 3, 2011. Dr Rumman was consulted by the Royal Court on strategies to achieve Brotherhood participation.
65. Asher Susser, "Jordan 2011: Uneasy Lies the Head," *Crown Center for Middle East Studies*, 52, (June, 2011), 4.
66. Ghaith al-Qudah, Head of IAF Youth Sector, Interview by the Author, Amman, August 25, 2011.

67. By contrast, in January 1991, King Hussein succeeded in drafting the Brotherhood into a limited number of Cabinet positions to calm popular discontent during the Gulf Crisis. Having done so, the government was peremptorily dissolved within six months. Robins, *A History of Jordan*, 173-174.
68. Cory Eldridge and Nicholas Seely, "Taher Masri: The Struggle for Reform." *Jo Magazine*, April 17, 2011, http://www.jo.jo/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1984%3Ataher-masri-struggling-for-reform&catid=81%3Apolitics&Itemid=197&limitstart=2.
69. "[Arabic] *al-haraka al-islamiyya tarhan musharakatuha al-siyasiyya bi-khamsa mutalib* [The Islamic Movement stakes its political participation on five demands]," IAF website, September 27, 2011, www.jabha.net.
70. Dima Tahboub, IAF Shura Council, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 11, 2011.
71. Muhammad Abu Rumman, Centre of Strategic Studies, Interview by the Author, Amman, 03/10/11.
72. Nimr al-Assaf, IAF Deputy Secretary General, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 12, 2011.
73. "The King's Sad Men," *The Economist*, May 5, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21554229>.
74. Hani Hazaimah and Khaled Neimat, "Gov't says King's powers are not negotiable." *Jordan Times*, August 12, 2012, <http://jordantimes.com/govt-says-kings-powers-are-not-negotiable>.
75. In July, thirty-five popular and tribal movements from across Jordan convened at the Muslim Brotherhood's Amman headquarters to formally announce a united election boycott. Amman Net, "Meeting of Islamists and movements: general agreement on election boycott." *Amman Net*, July 11, 2012, <http://ar.ammannet.net/news/163664#.UCvYrqmPWa8>.
76. Zaki Bani Irsheid, Muslim Brotherhood Deputy General Supervisor, Interview [in Arabic] by the Author, Amman, December 20, 2011.
77. 'Abd al-Hamid al-Qudah, Brotherhood Shura Council and former Deputy General Supervisor, Interview by the Author, Amman, December 14, 2011.