



October 2008, Volume 6, Issue 8

*Michele Dunne, Editor*

*Intissar Fakir, Assistant Editor*

Read the Arab Reform Bulletin and other Middle East Program publications in **Arabic** at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/arabic/>

Read the Arab Reform Bulletin and other Middle East Program publications in **English** at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/MiddleEast>

### **Insights and Analysis**

Palestine: Interview with Ghassan al-Khatib on Leadership and Elections

Israel: Interview with Yossi Alpher on Leadership and Elections

Middle East: Has the United States Poisoned Democracy?

*Amaney Jamal and Mark Tessler*

Jordan: Fair Winds for the Brotherhood

*Shadi Hamid*

Middle East: Troubling Governance and Corruption Indicators

*Khalil Gebara*

### **News and Views**

Palestine: Hamas Agrees to Meet with Fatah in Cairo

Egypt: Editor Pardoned; YBG Selected for IMF; Militants Reach Out

Syria: Al-Hayat Banned

Iraq: Transfer in Control of Sons of Iraq; Provincial Election Law Passed

Lebanon: New Election Law Approved

Tunisia: Human Rights Activist Released; Journalist Threatened

Morocco: Parliamentary Coalition Created; Blogger Freed

Yemen: Journalist Released; Socialist Activists Pardoned

Kuwait: MPs Replaced

Algeria: Presidential Candidacy Announced

Sudan: Cabinet Reshuffle

Upcoming Political Events  
Views from the Arab Media

## **Read On**

Access the best new publications in English and Arabic on Iraq, U.S. policies, Lebanon, the Arab-Israeli conflict, Gulf countries, and reform issues.

## **Insights and Analysis**

### **Palestine: Interview with Ghassan al-Khatib on Leadership and Elections**

#### **How would postponing the presidential election for one year, until January 2010, affect the current Palestinian political situation?**

First, it hasn't been confirmed yet that the election will be postponed. There is still a discussion about the legality of doing this. The election law clearly states that presidential and legislative elections should be held together, while the Basic Law limits the president's term to four years.

After the initial announcement that elections would be postponed until January 2010 met with opposition, President Mahmoud Abbas revised his decision, saying that legal procedures would be examined and that all options were under consideration. In other words, the president left the door open for elections either in January 2009 or 2010.

As Hamas has made it clear that after January 2009 the president will lose his legitimacy, any postponement would play into Hamas's interest in claiming to be the only legitimate party. That's why there is a desire at the moment to hold elections as planned, so as not to give Hamas the opportunity to act as if everyone is equally without legitimacy.

#### **If elections were held as scheduled in 2009, would there be more than one candidate?**

Most likely only one candidate would run on behalf of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), but that is not guaranteed unless President Abbas achieves better organization and coordination within the PLO. In the last election there were a large number of candidates.

#### **What will happen if presidential and legislative elections both are held in 2010, in view of the standoff between Hamas and Fatah?**

Hamas is not enthusiastic about holding elections, whether in the West Bank or Gaza, but it is still unclear at the moment whether Hamas would take part. Political bureau leader

Khalid Mishal said recently that there should be coordination among Hamas members leading up to elections, which suggests that he wants to clarify certain matters such as who would be on the election commission, which government would run day-to-day affairs until then, which security apparatus would maintain order during polling, etc.

Without Hamas's involvement in preparations, it would be impossible to hold elections in Gaza, which means that only Palestinians in the West Bank would be able to vote for their president. That would deepen an already serious divide between the West Bank and Gaza.

This leaves us with difficult choices. On the one hand if elections are not held on time, we risk the legitimacy of the president, the government, and the Palestinian National Authority. On the other hand, if we have elections in January 2009, they might be held without cooperation among all parties. That is why the best solution is to reconcile Fatah and Hamas before the elections.

**Are the amendments that President Abbas made to the electoral law—changing to a party list system and requiring all parties to accept the PLO as sole legitimate representative—in September 2007 seen as legitimate?**

Yes, they are legitimate. Hamas has not endorsed them because they were made by a presidential decree, which is within the executive rights of the president as long as the Palestinian Legislative Council is not in session.

I expect that the Council will meet most likely before elections are held (unless Council members who are detained by Israel are not released) and when it does, it will revoke Abbas's amendments to the electoral law. But more importantly, Hamas would not be involved in election preparations under the electoral law with Abbas's amendments, which it finds unacceptable. This will represent the biggest challenge leading up to the elections.

**As an expert on the subject, how much do you think public opinion has changed in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since the Hamas coup in July 2007?**

There have not been major changes in public opinion in the last two years. Hamas succeeded in the 2006 elections not because it won the most votes but because Fatah lacked unity and leadership. Not much has changed since. Hamas's popularity has receded slightly while Fatah's has improved, but this is not sufficient to guarantee a different outcome in the next elections. As long as Fatah remains divided, Hamas is likely to win again.

**What did Fatah learn from the 2006 elections?**

Unfortunately, it doesn't appear that Fatah has learned from that experience. It has kept the same unpopular leaders, who lack any leadership qualities or influence and moreover are still divided among themselves. Fatah's failure so far to hold the leadership

conference it has been preparing shows that the group still has not found a way out of its current crisis.

**On the Israeli side as well, there is a leadership crisis. How will this affect the progress of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations?**

There has been a dramatic change in the Israeli leadership since former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon withdrew from politics. Since then there hasn't been a politician with a strong character to lead Israel and its government. Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is weak, and now he is leaving office without a clear successor.

Competition among Tzipi Livni from the Kadima party, Ehud Barak from Labor, and Benjamin Netanyahu from Likud will dominate the political scene until the next elections. They are each focused on winning elections and thus will not allow each other to achieve any progress in the peace process. This means more expansion of Israeli settlements, wavering in negotiations, making peace talks a bargaining chip, and using them to score political points without achieving tangible results.

*Ghassan al-Khatib is vice-president of Bir Zeit University, former minister of labor in the Palestinian National Authority, and co-editor of the e-magazine [Bitterlemons](#). Michele Dunne conducted this interview; Barkuzar Dubbati translated it from Arabic.*

**Israel: Interview with Yossi Alpher on Leadership and Elections**

**Following the victory of Tzipi Livni in the Kadima party primary, what do you expect from her efforts to form a new governing coalition?**

Presumably Livni will try to reestablish more or less the same as the outgoing coalition—the Kadima, Labor, and Shas parties. I do not think she will have much difficulty with Labor, other than Ehud Barak's discomfort with being her defense minister; he said some uncomplimentary things about her during the primary.

Livni's big problem will be with the conservative Shas Party, which will take this opportunity to squeeze her for more money for religious schools and benefits for large families. This is a national scandal, which continues to this day. Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, while he was Minister of Finance a few years ago, finally managed to cut back these payments per child but now Shas is pressing to restore them. The price Shas exacted from former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was his declaration that we would not negotiate with the Palestinians about Jerusalem. Giving in to such demands goes very much against Livni's instincts, but it is the classic way of putting together a coalition. Livni only entered politics about ten years ago and this will be her first test; she comes to this situation with less experience than Olmert in this kind of political wheeling and dealing. It is also very important to watch what Olmert himself does in the background. If Livni fails to form a coalition, Olmert will remain as caretaker prime minister until elections are held, which could be another 6 months.

Don't forget Livni can bring in the pro-peace party Meretz instead of Shas and reach some arrangement with the ten members of Knesset who represent Arab parties. That would be a tenuous coalition, but one that would be much more peace-oriented.

**If Livni succeeds in forming a new coalition, will she serve out what would have been the rest of Olmert's term as prime minister?**

In theory, yes, she could serve another two years. But judging by the fate of previous coalitions, if she reaches some kind of achievement in negotiations this would precipitate new elections. Let us remember that the Palestinian issue, which she is as dedicated to as Olmert was, has brought down every single Israeli governing coalition for the last twenty years. Olmert's resignation actually was an exception, a coalition brought down by the prime minister's corruption rather than by the Palestinian issue. One could hardly say that's a refreshing change but at least it is different from the pattern we have seen.

**What are prospects for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at this point?**

If Livni forms a coalition, it is not clear what she wants to do with a government. Does she want to pick up where we left off with the peace process with the Palestinians, for example? She is the chief negotiator. Or does she really want just to stabilize her prime ministerial image in the eyes of the Israeli public in the hopes that this will help her win an election? Maybe she wants to do both of these things and she is going to be playing it by ear. She has a lot of integrity on her side and a very good image in the public eye but not a lot of experience at this kind of political backroom dealing with the likes of Shas.

Another question is Syria. Livni has been rather cool to those talks and much more dedicated to the talks with Palestinians. Olmert also was cool to talks with Syria until he listened to his security community, who told him that peace with Syria is much more doable and could help to push Iran out of the region and reduce support for militant Islamist organizations. It's very possible that Livni as foreign minister didn't hear all the briefings that Olmert did. In Israeli political culture, the foreign ministry is a weak partner at best in national security decision-making, which is done by the prime minister and the defense minister, who are sometimes the same person. So, now Livni is going to step into those shoes.

**Has it typically been progress or failure in negotiations with Palestinians that has necessitated Israeli elections?**

I hesitate to generalize about the last twenty years because we are going all the way back to the time of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, but generally it has been progress—or at least a controversial decision made by the prime minister that was not supported by his entire government or even all of his own party. Livni might have the same problem. Kadima is made up of people who moved from Likud and others who moved from Labor, who have divergent views on the Palestinian and Syrian issues. In this sense, Livni's first challenge really is to shore up support within her own party and to make sure that most or

all of those twenty-eight other Knesset members are behind her. This is not so simple. There were four camps going into the Kadima primary, and rivals such as Shaul Mofaz can command the allegiance of several members of Knesset.

**What will be the fate of the initiative former Prime Minister Olmert introduced recently to offer compensation to Israeli settlers who agree to leave the West Bank?**

Livni opposed this initiative in cabinet discussions, seeing it as another unilateral Israeli step. She argued that the initiative would say to the Palestinians that we are unilaterally declaring that the fence is the border, but that hasn't been agreed yet. Maybe the fence can be moved. So do you offer compensation to the twenty thousand residents of Ariel, for example, which might or might not end up in Palestinian territory? I think Olmert's initiative was good because in my opinion an agreement that really draws a map and finalizes it and begins to move people out is not around the corner. While imperfect and unilateral, the initiative is a move in the right direction. There are indications that as many as 20 percent of the 60,000-70,000 settlers who live beyond the planned path of the fence would be prepared to take the money and move, which could create a very interesting dynamic.

**While Israelis undergo this process, there is also turmoil in the Palestinian leadership. Do you have any observations on that situation?**

Well, the most important dilemma they face is the Fatah-Hamas West Bank—Gaza split. Everything else is a function of that. If there is a controversy over whether President Abbas's term is over this coming January or a year later, it is because Hamas objects to the Fatah positions. Former President Arafat and the Palestinian Legislative Council elected in 1996 served far beyond their mandated terms. It is to the credit of the Palestinians that they want to be constitutional about this, but it's hard to do that when Hamas has taken over Gaza by force and pushed Fatah out and clearly wants to end Abbas's term sooner rather than later. If Abbas ends up holding the election in January 2009, it will also affect negotiations with Israel. He will have to decide whether it would be in his interest to have some sort of declaration of principles in writing, or whether such an agreement might be unpopular with Palestinians and it would be better to say "I am still negotiating."

*Yossi Alpher was an adviser to former prime minister Ehud Barak and is co-editor of the e-magazine [Bitterlemons](#). Michele Dunne conducted this interview.*

**Middle East: Has the United States Poisoned Democracy?**

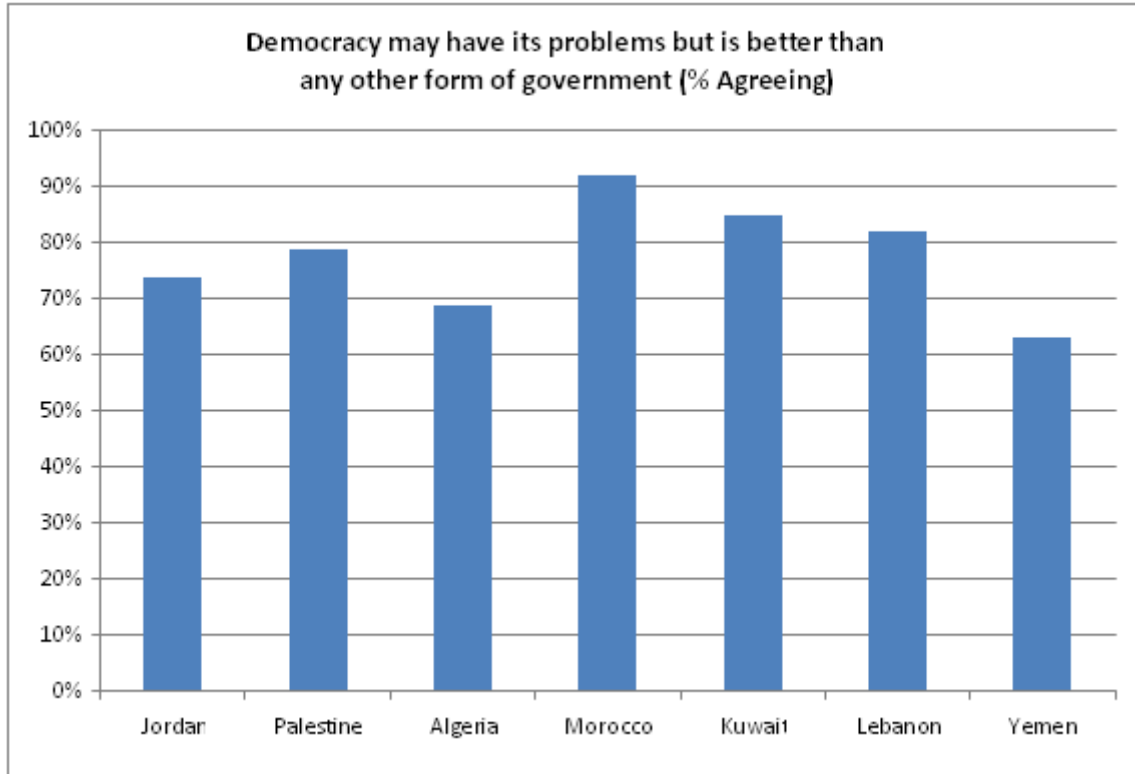
**Amaney Jamal and Mark Tessler**

Has the association of democracy promotion with U.S. foreign policy, and especially with the occupation of Iraq, spawned a backlash and led ordinary Arab citizens to question whether democracy is appropriate for their countries? Certainly the United

States' lack of even-handedness in dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been a major Arab complaint, and more recently the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq have given rise to widespread anti-American sentiment in the Arab world. Associated with this is U.S. government insistence that its actions in Iraq are part of an effort to promote democracy in the Arab world.

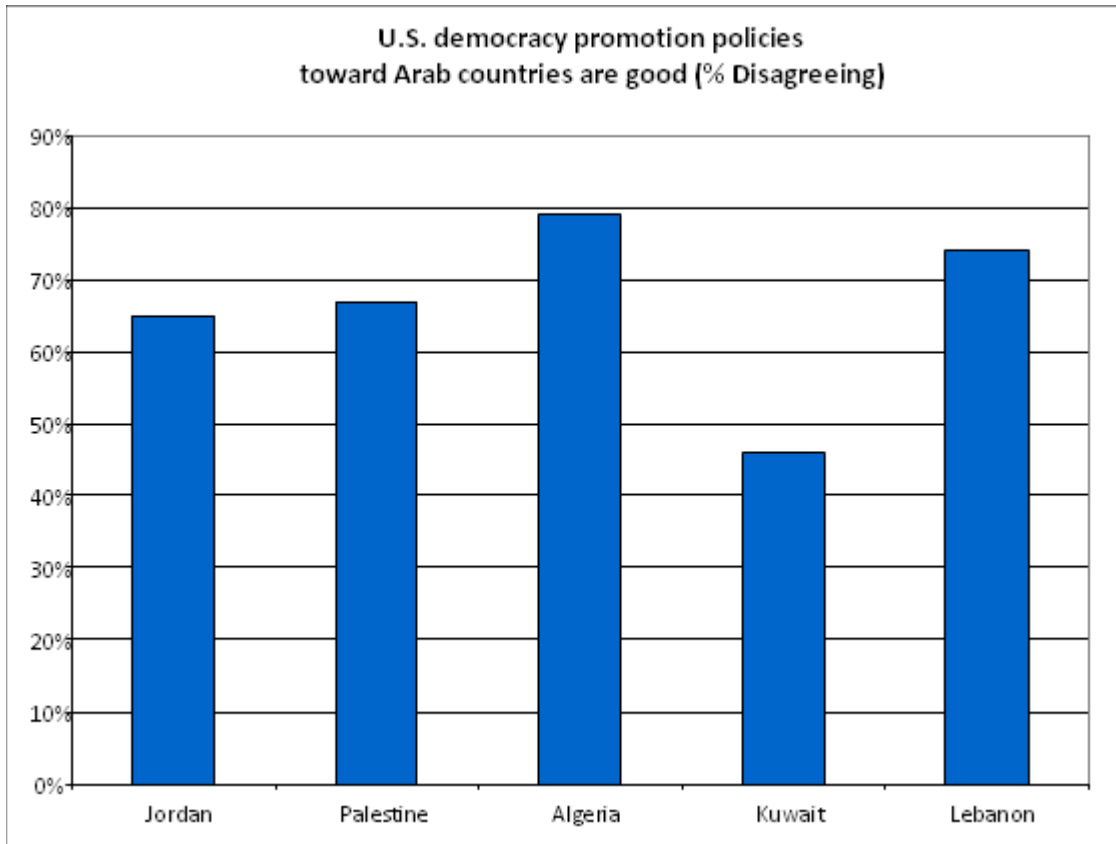
To examine the relationship between anti-Americanism based on antipathy toward U.S. foreign policy, on the one hand, and views about desirability of democracy on the other, we analyze data from the Arab Barometer project. With scientific and administrative leadership provided by a team that includes prominent scholars from five Arab countries, as well as the present authors, the Arab Barometer carried out in 2006-2007 face-to-face interviews with large and representative national samples of ordinary citizens in seven Arab societies: Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Yemen. A total of 8,555 men and women were interviewed. Information about the organization, methodology and findings of the Arab Barometer may be found at <http://www.arabbarometer.org/>.

Three charts based on data from the Arab Barometer surveys are presented in order to assess whether and how anti-Americanism and judgments about U.S. foreign policy influence attitudes about democracy. The first chart examines the level of support for democracy in the seven Arab Barometer countries and shows that support is consistently strong. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement, "Democracy may have its problems, but is better than any other form of government." As shown in Chart 1, overwhelming majorities agreed: 74 percent in Jordan, 79 percent in Palestine, 92 percent in Morocco, 82 percent in Lebanon, 63 percent in Yemen, 69 percent in Algeria, and 85 percent in Kuwait. Other questions about democracy produced similar response patterns.

**Chart 1: Support for Democracy in the Arab World**

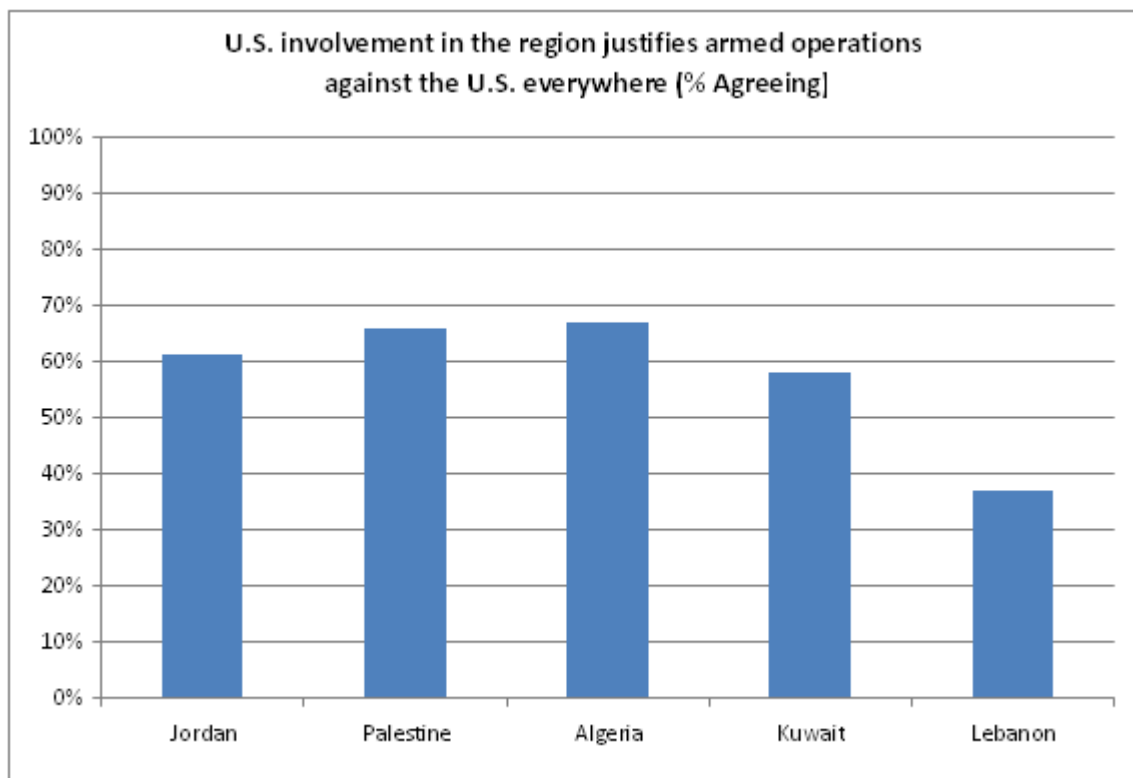
A second chart presents responses to a question about U.S. democracy promotion efforts. It asks whether respondents agree or disagree that “U.S. democracy promotion policies toward Arab countries are good.” This question was asked in five of the Arab Barometer countries, and in all cases but one those who disagree are much more numerous than those who agree. The percentage of respondents who disagree that U.S. democracy promotion policies are good ranges from 64 percent in Jordan to 73 percent in Algeria. The one exception is Kuwait, where only 38 percent take this position. This may be, in part, because people remember and appreciate the United States’ role in pushing out the Iraqi forces that invaded in 1990.

**Chart 2: Views of U.S. Democracy Promotion Policies**



The view that U.S. actions in the Arab world are not contributing to democratization hints at broader discontent with U.S. involvement in the region. Indeed, as shown in Chart 3, dissatisfaction with U.S. policy is strong enough to lead many Arab citizens to agree with a statement that asks whether “U.S. involvement in the region justifies armed operations against the U.S. everywhere.” Although this question was not asked or did not yield reliable data in two countries, Morocco and Yemen, responses from the other five Arab Barometers countries show substantial support for this proposition. Specifically, 61 percent in Jordan, 66 percent in Palestine, 67 percent in Algeria, 58 percent in Kuwait, and 37 percent in Lebanon believe it is legitimate, given U.S. involvement in the region, to use violence against the United States.

**Chart 3: Are Armed Operations against the U.S. Justified?**



We may now return to the question raised at the outset. Does the anti-Americanism evident in Arab judgments about U.S. foreign policy (which incidentally is not reflected in responses to questions that ask about American culture or the American people) incline ordinary Arab citizens to be less supportive of democracy? Although most Arabs favor democracy, Chart 1 shows that in some countries as many as one-third do not. Are these individuals disproportionately likely to be those who are most critical of the U.S.?

We test this proposition by comparing the extent of support for democracy among those who agree and those who disagree that U.S. involvement in the Arab world justifies armed operations. Such a comparison makes clear that the proportion of those supporting democracy is almost identical in the two categories. In other words, those who are angry enough at the United States to justify attacks on U.S. targets are just as likely to support democracy in their own countries as are those who do not justify such attacks. This is the case in all five of the countries for which Arab Barometer data are available. Thus, our data do not support the argument that Arab popular support for democracy has been undermined, and the concept itself has been discredited, by the anti-Americanism that results from Arab complaints about U.S. foreign policy.

*Amaney Jamal is assistant professor of Politics at Princeton University. Mark Tessler is Samuel J. Eldersveld Collegiate Professor and vice provost for International Affairs at the University of Michigan.*

## **Jordan: Fair Winds for the Brotherhood**

### **Shadi Hamid**

The fortunes of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood may be shifting after three difficult years that saw the group's worst electoral result in history, reports of diminished influence, and sustained government repression. After hitting an unprecedented low, the relationship between the Jordanian regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, the country's largest opposition grouping, has improved recently. This is the opposite of what many observers, including this author, expected. Hammam Sa'id, known as a hardliner, was elected General Guide of the organization in May 2008, leading many to predict heightened confrontation between regime and opposition. Analysts Matthew Levitt and David Schenker wrote, for instance, that the leadership change suggested the Brotherhood "can no longer be considered 'loyal' to the kingdom." During Sa'id's tenure, however, events have moved in an unexpected direction. Since being elected, he has toned down his abrasive rhetoric, emphasized domestic priorities, and made an effort to reach understandings with the government of Prime Minister Nader al-Dahabi on key issues of contention.

The question of the Palestinian Resistance Movement ( Hamas ) is one area where Islamists and the regime have moved closer to each other. After nine years of severed ties, Jordan has opened a dialogue with Hamas, recognizing the group's growing influence and its strong position in Gaza. With its close ties to Hamas leaders, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood and its political arm, the Islamic Action Front ( IAF ), played a critical role in facilitating the resumption of contacts.

Moreover, Jordan's King Abdullah—known as one of the region's most pro-Western rulers—has attempted to strengthen ties to other U.S. adversaries, including Iran and Russia. He has met with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev three times in the last eight months, and their discussions have increasingly revolved around military assistance and cooperation, including joint production of multi-caliber grenade launchers. Such moves have given Islamists hope that Jordan is beginning to shake off Washington's tight embrace.

For their part, Islamists are drawing a degree of optimism from their improved relations with the regime. Even IAF Secretary-General Zaki Bani Irsheid, one of the government's fiercest detractors, said in a private conversation in August that Jordan may be entering a "new political phase." Coinciding with the improved ties between Islamists and the regime, relations between internal Brotherhood/IAF factions have also improved after nine months of crippling internal divisions that had threatened to tear the movement apart. In early August, so-called hawks and doves reached an agreement that left both sides content, at least temporarily. The agreement reflects what had been a difficult and sustained round of internal negotiations over a variety of contentious issues, including Bani Irsheid's pending trial by an internal IAF court for allegedly sabotaging his own

party's prospects in the 2007 parliamentary elections. This agreement might have postponed further infighting, however, rather than ended it; there are still factions within the Brotherhood that hold substantially different visions on how to proceed in what remains a challenging economic and political environment.

It is unclear what the Jordanian regime's efforts at strategic repositioning—taking into account a perceived decline in U.S. influence in the region—bode for further political opening and reform. Over the last three years, the Jordanian government interpreted U.S. silence on reform as a green light to clamp down aggressively on Islamists. However, if it continues to see a need to reach out to Hamas, the regime will need to expand political space for the Islamist opposition and maintain a mutually beneficial working relationship with it.

Of course, there have been bouts of optimism before, and they have been misplaced. Each time the regime has reached out to the Brotherhood, as it did in advance of the November 2007 elections, it has quickly reversed course and resumed anti-Islamist policies. Islamists are unlikely to be fooled again. Despite the optimism expressed by Bani Irsheid and others, most Islamists see this as yet another round of tactical maneuvering. The Jordanian regime is not necessarily acting in good faith; it is acting in its own self-interest. So too is the Islamist opposition.

*Shadi Hamid is director of research at the Project on Middle East Democracy and a Hewlett Fellow at Stanford University's Center for Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law.*

## **Middle East: Troubling Governance and Corruption Indicators**

### **Khalil Gebara**

Taking a closer look at recently released indices of development can help to explain why the Arab world is undergoing serious political, economic, and social crises. The results of the 2007 Good Governance Indicators for the Middle East and North Africa (published by the World Bank) and the 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index for the Arab world (prepared by Transparency International) provide evidence of structural malfunction and corruption in Arab regimes. For its part, the 2008 Failed State Index reflects dysfunction in the social environment.

The World Bank's Good Governance Indicators provide a more in-depth view of these realities. Good governance indicators include the degree of voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. Arab countries received 23.7 percent for voice and accountability and 44.9 percent for "government effectiveness." By contrast, OECD countries scored an average of 91.4 percent for the first indicator and 88.7 percent for the second. When compared to Latin American countries, for example, developing Arab countries score similarly on government effectiveness and better on rule of law, but do considerably worse in terms of

voice and accountability (a difference of 28 percentage points).

These indicators reflect the degree to which most Arab regimes lack the necessary mechanisms to combat corruption and enhance accountability. Many Arab states have yet to pass legislation dealing with illegitimate enrichment and conflict of interest. Most oversight bodies lack institutional independence, as they fall under the jurisdiction of the executive branch. In addition, several Arab countries have yet to pass legislation dealing with the right to access information, which makes it difficult for citizens to find out about the inner workings of government. The absence of serious attention to such legislation can only be explained by the fact that secrecy is the basis of rule in the Arab world.

The 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index, which covered 180 countries this year (including twenty Arab countries), makes it possible to rank Arab countries from the least to the most corrupt (based on 0-10 score). The results indicate that Qatar ranks 28 out of 180 internationally, with a score of 6.5, making it the least corrupt Arab state. Gulf States showed improvement; the United Arab Emirates ranked as the second least corrupt Arab state, with Oman ranking third. With the exception of Jordan, which showed some progress with a score of 5.1, eastern Arab and North African countries have not made any notable progress. Iraq and Somalia rank 179 and 180 respectively, the lowest two rankings internationally.

Socio-economic indicators provide a metric for individual and societal progress. Arab countries continue to struggle through their development agenda. The 2008 Failed State Index (covering 117 states) demonstrates the relationship between socio-economic factors and political stability. Social factors include mounting demographic pressures, population density, movement of refugees, and chronic and sustained human flight. Economic indicators include economic development (balanced or not), and economic growth (slow or fast). The first group of failed states included twenty states, four of which are Arab (Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, and Lebanon). The second group of failed states included Egypt, Yemen, and Syria.

Unstable economic conditions lead to a decline in the quality of services, increase in poverty, and unemployment. Social and political instability produce an environment conducive to the spread of corruption. Such instability can also lead to social crises that undermine state authority and threaten social security. Under these circumstances, good governance becomes even more difficult, if not impossible. Instead, resources are dispersed and competition among civil society organization over these resources intensifies. This has taken place in Sudan, Somalia, and to a lesser extent in Lebanon and Palestine.

The foregoing analysis shows that Arab countries lack peaceful mechanisms to regulate the functioning of institutions. They have yet to embrace the principles of good governance and respect the red lines that confine politics to an institutional framework. Despite the efforts of Arab politicians and civil society organizations, the goal of combating corruption has not become a priority on the agenda of Arab regimes. This will only be accomplished when the relationship between citizens and the state is strengthened

through popular participation in decision-making, the establishment of alliances between governments and legislative bodies on the one hand and the private sector and civil society organizations on the other, ensuring the independence of public institutions and inter-agency cooperation, and embarking on a balanced development plan. An important step toward achieving the first goal would be pressing governments to pass fairer and more democratic electoral laws that would allow citizens to elect representatives who are willing to hold governments accountable.

*Khalil Gebara is president of the Lebanese Organization for the Enhancement of Transparency and secretary general of Arab Parliamentarians Against Corruption. Dina Bishara translated this article from Arabic.*

## **News and Views**

### **Palestine: Hamas Agrees to Meet with Fatah in Cairo**

Hamas officials announced October 9 that they have agreed to a proposal by Egyptian Intelligence Director Umar Sulayman to meet with Fatah in Cairo in late October. According to Hamas deputy political bureau director Musa Abu Marzuq, the two factions will create committees to discuss various topics, including reconstituting the Palestine Liberation Organization to include Hamas. Abu Marzuq suggested that Fatah and Hamas could reach an agreement on elections in the context of an understanding on broader issues. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) voted against extending President Mahmud Abbas's presidential term during a meeting in Gaza October 7; Fatah members and West Bank members did not participate. Azzam Ahmad, head of the Fatah PLC bloc, said that the Hamas resolution regarding Abbas's term reflects "a Hamas consensus only, not a PLC decision." Azzam said that Fatah had accepted an Egyptian initiative to form an interim government with Hamas in order to restore Palestinian unity, but would not accept a permanent unity government "on the model of the Mecca agreement" before the next presidential and parliamentary elections were held.

President Mahmoud Abbas announced on September 14 his intention to postpone presidential elections, due January 2009, until 2010. The president said that both parliamentary and presidential elections should take place at the same time in January 2010. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

### **Egypt: Editor Pardoned; YBG Selected for IMF; Militants Reach Out**

President Hosni Mubarak pardoned Ibrahim Eissa, editor in chief of the independent daily *al-Dustur* on October 6, one of a number of pardons issued to mark the anniversary of Egypt's 1973 war with Israel. On September 28, a Cairo appeals court sentenced Eissa to two months in prison for causing a stock market decline by spreading rumors about the

health of President Mubarak in August 2007. The journalists syndicate issued a statement thanking Mubarak for the pardon.

The International Monetary Fund appointed Egyptian Finance Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali as head of its International Monetary and Finance Committee, replacing Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, on October 6. Boutros Ghali will be the first person from a developing country to hold this position. Click [here](#) for more.

Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya has given the government private assurances that it has no aspirations to power, according to a [report](#) in the pan Arab daily *al-Hayat* October 1. The group reportedly admitted its failure to attain leadership and vowed not to seek it again, either by force or through the ballot box, and urged the government to view it as an ally.

### **Syria: *Al-Hayat* Banned**

The Syrian government halted the distribution of the Saudi-owned pan-Arab daily newspaper *al-Hayat* on October 4 until further notice. No explanation was provided, but observers speculate that the decision was related to *al-Hayat's* coverage of the Damascus bombing incident on September 28. *Al-Hayat* is often subject to censorship in Syria, and previous issues have been confiscated because of their content. Click [here](#) for more.

### **Iraq: Transfer in Control of Sons of Iraq; Provincial Election Law Passed**

U.S forces transferred control of some one hundred thousand members of the Sunni militia *al-Sahwa*, also known as the Sons of Iraq, to the Iraqi government on October 1. Transfer of the remaining *Sahwa* groups in other Sunni areas will happen gradually. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

Parliament passed a new provincial election law on September 24. UN Envoy Staffan de Mistura worked with various political blocs to secure their approval. According to the new law, elections will take place by January 2009 in regions except for Kirkuk. Parliament will form a committee to draft separate legislation for Kirkuk by March 2009. The presidency approved the law on October 1. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

### **Lebanon: New Election Law Approved**

Parliament approved a new electoral law on September 30, which is a modified version of the 1960 election law but with different district divisions, as agreed upon during the Doha talks. According to the new law, parliamentary elections will be held in 2009. The new law seeks to regulate the maximum expenditure allowed for maintenances of political platforms for each candidate in addition to setting regulations for media publicity. Other provisions include banning opinion polls ten days prior to the election and excluding military personnel from voting. Click [here](#) for more in Arabic.

### **Tunisia: Human Rights Activist Released; Journalist Threatened**

An appeals court released human rights activist Tarek Soussi provisionally on September 26. Soussi, a founding member of the International Association for the Support of Political Prisoners, had been detained since his August 26 interview on *al-Jazeera* criticizing the arrest of human rights activists in North African countries. Soussi still faces charges of "spreading false news liable to disrupt public order". Click [here](#) for more.

Police detained and then released journalist Slim Boukhdir on September 20 in Sfax. Since his release from jail on July 21, Boukhdir returned to publishing articles criticizing the government's human rights records and calling for further reform. Reporters without Borders released a [statement](#) condemning harassment of Boukhdir.

### **Morocco: Parliamentary Coalition Created; Blogger Freed**

The recently formed Authenticity and Modernity party, the political wing of the Movement for All Democrats, joined forces with the National Rally for Independents on September 30 to form the largest coalition in the parliament. The Authenticity and Modernity party created by Ali al-Himma in August and lead by Hassan Benaddi was the result of a merger among five political groups. Since its creation, the party has faced strong skepticism, particularly after the withdrawal of Abdellah Kadiri's party the National Democratic Party on September 11. Kadiri accused Authenticity and Modernity leaders of monopolizing the decision-making process. To counter the growing influence of the Authenticity and Modernity party, the Socialist Union of Political Forces is looking to form an alliance with its traditional rival the Islamist Justice and Development Party, the strongest opposition party in the government. Click here for more in [Arabic](#).

An appeals court overturned the conviction of blogger Mohammed Erraji on September 8. Erraji had been sentenced to two years in prison and a \$630 fine in a summary trial after publishing an article criticizing King Muhammad V. Click [here](#) for a statement by the Committee to Protect Journalists.

The government announced an emergency education plan on September 12 to address the increase in school dropout rates. The plan includes increasing the age of compulsory education from nine to 15 years in addition to enhancing rural educational centers. Click [here](#) for more.

### **Yemen: Journalist Released; Socialist Activists Pardoned**

Abdulkarim al-Kaiwani, former editor of *al-Shoura*, was released on September 25 after a court approved an order by President Ali Abdullah al-Saleh. Kaiwan has been serving a six-year jail sentence since June 2008 on charges of supporting the Zaidi rebellion in the north. Reporters without Borders issued a [statement](#) welcoming his release.

President Ali Abdullah Saleh ordered on September 12 the release of twelve members of the Socialist Yemeni Party accused of inciting violence and unrest in the south. Click [here](#) for more.

### **Kuwait: MPs Replaced**

In a final ruling, the Constitutional Court replaced MPs Mubarak al-Waalan and Abdullah al-Ajmi, elected in May 17 parliamentary elections, with Askar Al-Enezi and Saadoun Hammad al-Oteibi. The court declared that calculation errors were made in both cases. Although the change in MPs does not affect the current political balance in the parliament, as both are independents, it nevertheless affirms the strength of tribal affiliations within the national assembly. Al-Enazi and al-Oteibi will be sworn in on October 21. Click [here](#) for more in English and [here](#) for Arabic. The cabinet ordered Justice, Awqaf, and Islamic Affairs Minister Hussein al-Huraiti to set up a plan to avoid such incidents in future elections.

### **Algeria: Presidential Candidacy Announced**

Algerian National Front leader Moussa Touati announced on September 13 his candidacy for the April 2009 presidential elections.

### **Sudan: Cabinet Reshuffle**

President Omar Bashir appointed on September 15 Costa Manipi to replace Pagan Amum, secretary general of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, as head of the cabinet, as part of a larger reshuffle. Click [here](#) for more in English and [here](#) for Arabic.

### **Upcoming Political Events**

- Algeria: Presidential Election, April 2009
- Yemen: Parliamentary Elections, April 2009
- Tunisia: Presidential Election, October 2009

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

Debate in the Arab media focused on **US-Arab relations:**

- Saati Nouredine speculates about the timing and motive of U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Hale's trip to Lebanon in an [article](#) published on October 6 in the Lebanese daily *as-Safir*. Hale's third visit, in the span of a few months, comes too late to provide substantial changes to the current administration's Lebanon policy. Perhaps the aim is to reassure Lebanon's allies that the United States stands with them over the next three months at least. It will be difficult, however, to change the reality that Lebanon has been one of the Bush administration's biggest victims and there are no guarantees that the disasters of the last eight years will not continue for the next three months.
- A debate on Arab countries' policies toward the United States was the subject of *Al-Jazeera's* weekly show "al-Itijah al-Mu'akis" (The Opposite Direction) on September 23. The show host stressed that while Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Honduras, and Bolivia are defying Washington, docile Arab leaders cave in to President Bush's demands, fearing exile, delegitimization, or execution.

The two guest Jordanian author and academic Ibrahim 'Alloush said that the United States continues its exploitation of the Arab world while supporting Israel's destructive policies. Kuwaiti author Sami al-Nisf argued that the few countries in Latin America rebelling against the United States do not reflect the policies of most countries on the continent. He stressed that the so-called revolutionary regimes such as Qaddafi's and Saddam Hussein's inflicted more harm on their own people than any outside force did. These regimes show the worst record in terms of human rights abuse, corruption, and lack of political or economic development.

#### Recent commentary focused on the **Arab-Israeli conflict**

- *Al-Jazeera's* "Ma Wara al-Khabar" (Behind the News) hosted a [debate](#) on September 15 on the political and constitutional legitimacy of extending Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas's mandate and its effect on the ongoing dialogue with Hamas. Former justice minister and head of the constitutional committee Ahmed al-Khalidi said that there were no constitutional grounds for the postponement of the elections. Dr. Ali al-Jarbawi, political science professor at Beir Zeit University, stressed that the issue at hand is a political one couched in constitutional terms. Both agreed that the constitutionality of the issue is irrelevant and the only solution is national dialogue and consensus between Hamas and Fatah.
- Tarek Hamid claims in [article](#) published in the pan-Arab daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, that Gaza, home to Hamas, is following in the footsteps of Afghanistan. Gaza is sinking deeper into infighting and poverty. This is taking place at the expense of the people and their cause, which continues to lose legitimacy because of Hamas. The author warns that the situation could worsen with President Mahmud Abbas's mandate running out. Neighboring Arab states have lost their tolerance for Hamas, as it continues to divide Palestinians and to strategize with Iran as it pleases.

#### Commentary in the Arab media focused on **Lebanon**

- Lebanese analyst Saati Nouredine said that the armed conflicts springing up around Lebanon have transcended the political realm and as such can no longer be resolved politically in an [article](#) in the daily independent *As-Safir* on September 17. Nouredine predicted that the first round of national dialogue that began on September 16 would not provide solutions as it is disconnected from the reality of the streets. Fighting has become a form of sport for the supporters of each faction. These incidents are increasingly out of the control of politicians and are likely to sabotage any elections.
- Columnist Ghasseb al-Mukhtar claims, in an [article](#) published in the Lebanese daily *al-Safir* on September 26, that Lebanese parties engaged in national dialogue are not truly interested in national reconciliation but rather seeking their own gains. Their discourse betrays deep-seated prejudices and a

defeatist attitude that will not lead to national reconciliation. No dialogue will succeed until all parties work towards the same goal: a strong democratic nation.

Other commentary focused on **Iraq**:

- Iraqi columnist Ammar al-Sawad addressed the fears of an increasingly militarized Iraq in an [article](#) published in the daily newspaper *al-Sabah* on September 25. The hope to establish a civil state following the fall of Saddam Hussein's military regime is slowly fading as the country deploys army and security forces to fight insurgents and as the military regains influence and power. The author calls for an overhaul of military institutions to assuage growing fear of the military in Iraqi society.

## Read On

New publications focusing on **Iraq** include:

- [“The Importance of Iraq’s Provincial Elections,”](#) by Nazar Janabi (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch no. 1405, September 26, 2008).
- [“Iraqi Elections and Displacement,”](#) by Elizabeth Ferris (Brookings Institution, October 2, 2008).
- [“How Soon is Safe? Iraqi Force Development and Conditions-Based U.S. Withdrawals,”](#) by Anthony Cordesman and Adam Mausner (Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 16, 2008).
- [“The Future of the U.S. Military Presence in Iraq,”](#) by Julie Montgomery (United State Institute of Peace, USIPeace Briefing, September 2008).
- [“Reconciliation Strategies in Iraq,”](#) by David Steele (United State Institute of Peace, Special Report no. 213, September 2008).
- [A New Muslim Order: Iraq and the Revival of Shia Islam,](#) by Nicholas Pelham (I.B. Tauris, September 2008).
- [The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq,](#) by Orit Bashkin (Stanford University Press, November 2008).
- [“Security and Displacement in Iraq: Responding to the Forced Migration Crisis,”](#) by Sarah Kenyon Lischer (*International Security*, vol. 33, no. 2, Fall 2008, 65-119).
- [“Reclaiming Jewish Communal Property in Iraq,”](#) by Michael R. Fischbach (Middle East Report, no. 248, Fall 2008).

Publications addressing **U.S. policies** in the Middle East include:

- “[A New U.S. Policy for Syria: Fostering Political Change in a Divided State](#),” by Seth Kaplan (*Middle East Policy*, vol. 15, no. 3, Fall 2008, 107-21).
- “[Making the World Safe for Partial Democracy? Questioning the Premises of Democracy Promotion](#),” by Arthur Goldsmith (*International Security*, vol. 33, no. 2, Fall 2008, 120-47).
- “[Assessing the Dangers of Illicit Networks: Why al-Qaida May Be Less Threatening Than Many Think](#),” by Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Calvert Jones (*International Security*, vol. 33, no. 2, Fall 2008, 7-44).
- “[American Foreign Policy after Iraq](#),” by Robert J. Pranger (*Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 3, Summer 2008, 55-67).
- “[Egyptians Expect a Shift in Style not Substance](#),” by Shohrat Aref (*Foreign Service Journal*, vol. 85, no. 9, September 2008, 25-28).
- “[Middleman in the Middle East: America’s Flawed Approach to the ‘Peace Process’](#),” by Marian Leighton (*Orbis*, vol. 52, no. 3, Summer 2008, 391-402).
- In “[Fix this Middle Eastern Mess](#),” Glen Kessler contends that the region needs sophisticated diplomacy from the United States to resolve current crises (*The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 4, Autumn 2008, 135-48).
- “[U.S. Embassy Bombing in Yemen: Counterterrorism Challenges in Weak States](#),” by Michael Knights (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch no. 1404, September 24, 2008).

Recent publications addressing **Lebanon** include:

- “[The Hariri Tribunal: Politics and International Law](#),” by Samar El-Masri (*Middle East Policy*, vol. 15, no. 3, Fall 2008, 80-92).
- “[Rethinking Hezbollah’s Disarmament](#),” by Bilal Y. Saab (*Middle East Policy*, vol. 15, no. 3, Fall 2008, 93-106).
- “[Stability in Lebanon Threatened Again](#),” by David Schenker (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch no. 1406, October 2, 2008).
- [The Invisible Cage: Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon](#), by John Chalcraft (Stanford University Press, November 2008).

Recent publications focusing on the **Arab-Israeli** conflict:

- [“Rethinking the Two-State Solution,”](#) by Giora Eiland (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus no. 88, September 2008).
- [“Abandoning the Iron Wall: Israel and ‘the Middle Eastern Muck’,”](#) by Ian S. Lustick (*Middle East Policy*, vol. 15, no. 3, Fall 2008, 30-58).
- [“Two Complementary Views of Peacemaking: The Palestinian Israeli Case,”](#) by Sapir Handelman (*Middle East Policy*, vol. 15, no. 3, Fall 2008, 57-66).
- [Surrounded: Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Military,](#) by Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh (Stanford University Press, October 2008).
- [“Reconsidering Hamas: A View from Amman,”](#) by Hassan Barari (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch no. 1401, September 2, 2008).

Recent publications focusing on **Gulf States** include:

- [“Turkey’s Relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council from 2003-2007: New Paradigms?”](#) by Robert Olson (*Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 3, Summer 2008, 68-87).
- [“Saudi Arabia’s “Soft” Counterterrorism Strategy,”](#) by Christopher Boucek (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Paper no. 97, September 2008).
- [“Addressing Yemen’s Twin Deficits: Human and Natural Resources,”](#) by Navtej Dhillon (Brookings Institution, September 22, 2008).
- [“The Ismailis of Najran: Second-class Saudi Citizens”](#) (Human Rights Watch, September 22, 2008).
- [Faysal: Saudi Arabia’s King for All Seasons,](#) by Joseph A. Kéchichian (Florida University Press, October 2008).

Other publications addressing **reform and related developments** in the Arab world include:

- [“The State of Reform in the Arab World 2008”](#) (Arab Reform Initiative, Annual Report, September 2008).
- [The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt,](#) by Michael Ezekiel Gasper (Stanford University Press, November 2008).

- “[Egypt’s Education System: Parents and Students Emerge as a New Force for Reform](#),” by Amina Fahmy and Djavad Salehi-Isfahani (Brookings Institution, October 2, 2008).
- “[The Russian-Libyan Rapprochement: What Has Moscow Gained?](#)” by Mark N. Katz (*Middle East Policy*, vol. 15, no. 3, Fall 2008, 122-28).

Recent Arabic periodicals on reform topics include:

- The October issue of [al-Dimuqratiyya](#) (Democracy), published by al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, includes articles on changes in U.S. foreign policy, Islamophobia in Germany, and consumerism in the Middle East.
- The September issue of [Buhuth iqtisadiyya ‘arabyyia](#) (Arab Economic Studies), published by the Center for Arab Unity Studies, includes articles on the effects of money laundering on the financial sector, challenges facing foreign investors in developing countries, and unemployment in Iraq.
- The October issue of [al-Mustaqabal al-‘arabi](#) (Arab Future), published by the Center for Arab Unity Studies in Beirut, includes articles on the perception of Islam in Germany, U.S. forces in Iraq, and the correlation between democracy and sustainable development in Arab countries.
- The October issue of [al-Siyasa al-dawliyya](#) (Foreign Policy), published by al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo, includes articles on the Palestinian leadership crisis, the Darfur Crisis and the International Criminal Court, and a special report on the role of civil society.