

Arab Reform Bulletin: November 2006

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Note from the Editor:

What precisely is the connection between prospects for political reform in the Arab world and the Arab-Israeli conflict? Does the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian dispute—as well as Israeli conflicts with Syria and Lebanon—keep regional politics at a boil incompatible with a focus on internal reform? Or is the conflict merely an excuse used by authoritarian regimes to divert attention from the need for change? For the United States and Europe, which policy goal should take precedence: promoting democracy among Palestinians or strengthening a Palestinian partner capable of negotiating? In other Arab countries, would reviving Arab-Israeli peace negotiations help or hinder the efforts of reformers?

Long important, such questions have become urgent in light of the recent war between Israel and Lebanon and ongoing conflict in Gaza. This special edition of the *Arab Reform Bulletin* explores the issue from a variety of angles: how regional tensions have affected reform in Syria and Jordan, how the recent conflict transformed political discourse in Arab countries, and how U.S. policy is affecting politics in Palestine. This is not an effort at a final answer, but rather at stirring further debate. This edition also includes selected recent publications on the Arab-Israeli conflict and, as always, our monthly roundup of reform-related developments and publications throughout the region. Please email me at arb@CarnegieEndowment.org with your reactions.

—*Michele Dunne*

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Insights and Analysis

Syria: Interview with Ayman Abd Al Nour, political analyst and former economic advisor to the Baath Party

Please review President Bashar Al Assad's record on political reform so far.

Bashar Al Assad's regime began with a great outpouring of enthusiasm to implement social, political, administrative, judicial, and economic reforms. Reforms in the economic and legal sectors took off quickly; 1,200 laws and ordinances were issued to organize the reform process, all in his first two years in power.

At the beginning of his term, President Al Assad initiated freedom of expression for all, the effects of which were clearly seen in the statements of intellectuals and writers. There were forces within the regime, however, that took advantage of the immaturity of oppositionists to suggest they raise their demands to include constitutional—or even regime—change and free and fair elections, as opposed to gradual change. This caused the regime to crack down and arrest a number of opposition figures led by two members of parliament, Riad Sayf and Ma'moun Homs, in September 2001. The regime maintained this tough stance for a year and a half until the opposition relaxed its demands, and then it began inviting people to the Baath Party 2005 conference, at which point it resumed preparations for another round of reforms and the opposition got moving again.

But just when the regime was ready to implement reforms that would have effected a qualitative change in Syrian political life, former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated, leading to a freezing of the reform process. With the German investigator [Detlev] Mehlis naming prominent figures in the regime as potentially involved—and threats of an international trial, sanctions, even regime change—the regime closed in on itself. The regime began depending only on its inner circle and giving security top priority, completely halting economic reform.

What is the impact of the exiled opposition, particularly the National Salvation Front?

The regime feels that it is strong and on firm ground. It believes that the international actors that could exert pressure on it, headed by the United States, are tied up with numerous problems because of the Iraq war. Moreover, the regime feels assured that military intervention in Syria to change the regime is impossible because of what has happened in Iraq. The political opposition, whether inside or outside Syria, does not want to ride in on an American tank, with the Iraqi example fresh in their minds. Collaboration between opposition forces inside and outside the country is very weak, and internal opposition forces cannot hold meetings or mass rallies because of the emergency law.

Internal opposition forces have no money for their activities and no access to media to spread their message. Additionally, the opposition has no one with charisma or leadership qualities who might capture the attention of Syrians, particularly young people. Their leaders are often over 65 years old, and still use traditional rhetoric unsuitable for the new generation, while 57 percent of Syrians are under 19! The opposition needs new blood; they need people who speak foreign languages and wear stylish clothes, who go to conferences and mix with the younger generation in the streets, restaurants, and parks.

If the Syrian regime feels confident, why has it arrested human rights and civil society activists in recent months?

The Syrian regime is currently in a defensive posture, feeling besieged from the international community as well as Arab countries. Arab regimes that used to be allies, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, no longer are, and now side with Jordan despite Bashar Al Assad's efforts to revive the Syrian–Egyptian–Saudi axis. The international community, headed by Europe and the United States, has isolated Syria, leaving the regime no recourse except to Iran. Due to the perception of external threats, the regime has closed in on itself—freezing political reforms and undermining opposition-affiliated media and organizations—so it can devote its attention to the outside. [Human rights activists] Michel Kilo and Anwar Al Bunni were arrested due to regime fear, but not fear of change from inside. The regime is not afraid of the opposition, as it understands that even if the opposition were to go to the streets, Syrians would not unite and call for revolution to change the regime. Rather, these arrests among the opposition give the regime the opportunity to catch its breath and concentrate on the radical Islamic forces currently present in Syria, as well as on external threats.

President Al Assad has said that his country is open to negotiating with Israel on the Golan Heights. How would resumed Syrian-Israeli negotiations affect prospects for internal political reform?

President Al Assad and other senior officials have said several times that Syria is ready for peace talks with Israel, and there are forces within Israel who want talks as well. Actually it is the United States that vetoes the idea, in order to prevent Syria from breaking out of its international isolation. Negotiations between Syria and Israel about the Golan, when they start, will greatly strengthen the regime, and also improve its international and local stature. Negotiations would vindicate the regime's defiant stance and build capital in the Syrian street. It would also take the Golan card out of the hands of opposition parties, whether inside or outside Syria.

If negotiations were to resume, we can expect that within a year political parties and platforms would begin to develop. The regime would not have to fear these parties because on every issue—whether the Golan, political reform, economic reform, or social issues—the regime has an agenda with which to preempt the opposition.

What are Syrian reformists' current priorities?

Reformists—university professors, Baath Party members, clerics, independents—are pushing for greater freedom, municipal and parliamentary elections, media freedom, and loosening of the grip of the executive on other powers. All of these demands were fully presented at the Baath party conference and led to resolutions, but they never materialized on the ground. Now demands are growing to implement the conference resolutions by putting into place an election law and political parties law, broadening political participation, amending Article 8 of the Constitution [which sets up a single party system], and easing licensing of television stations and the press. Once all of this is done, there will be a complete transformation in Syrian political life.

What about your own website [www.all4syria.org], which discussed reform issues?

My website has been blocked since 2004. After that we tried sending out the information and articles via e-mail. The problem is we can't get ads to pay for the continued existence of the site because businesses are afraid to get into trouble with the regime. We experimented with having electronic subscriptions, but people weren't used to paying money for something intangible. The regime has now resorted to putting out publications and launching websites in which government officials write under pseudonyms. They have discovered that the average Syrian is only online for a maximum of an hour a day, and so they decided to fill that hour with stories that will distract Syrians from their real problems.

This interview was conducted by Michele Dunne and translated from Arabic by Judd King.

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Arab World: Regional Conflicts as Moments of Truth

Amr Hamzawy

The Lebanon war of 2006 changed the political environment in the Arab Middle East at two levels. The first was temporary and receded after the thirty-three day war had ended. The second, however, was structural and rooted in the reality of Arab societies, where the practices of ruling elites and opposition movements reveal the fragility of opportunities for democratic change.

The temporary change was the return of regional issues, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict, to the forefront of public concern. This seriously undermined discussion of internal reform, which had dominated debate for the past three years. The fallout of the Lebanon war differed from that of the tragic circumstances in Iraq and Palestine in that it was more sudden and dramatic. In addition, Hizbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah's charismatic personality ignited interest in the conflict.

In this context, resistance (advocated by Hizbollah and its supporters in Iran and Syria as well as Islamist and pan-Arab opposition movements) versus restraint (advocated by Arab governments and other voices calling for peace with Israel) became the primary axis of political division, taking the place of democracy versus autocracy. The interplay of ideological and historical themes inherent in the Arab-Israeli conflict led to accusations of capitulation, treason, and betrayal by one side and irrationality and irresponsibility by the other. During the war and shortly thereafter, the political climate became extremely polarized, making it difficult to carry out the consensus-oriented politics required to discuss reform.

Beyond such temporary effects, the Lebanon war highlighted two structural deficiencies that underpin the existing Arab regimes and undermine opportunities for true democratic change. The first is the nation-state's lack of legitimacy as the single framework for political life. Declining popular acceptance of governing elites and their failure to protect human rights and guarantee the minimum requirements of a decent life have aided the rise of populist non-state opposition movements. Such movements—primarily Islamists—have attempted to supersede the state in their rhetoric and programs, drawing their legitimacy instead from the religious and historic idea of the umma (global Islamic community). Despite the important differences between the peaceful political work of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or the Islamic Action Front in Jordan and the militancy of Hizbollah or Hamas, all criticize the nation-state as artificial, illegitimate, and rejected by the people.

The Hizbollah operation that initiated the confrontation with Israel in July was no less than an appropriation of the sovereign right to make war or peace, leaping over the state institutions in which Hizbollah is a partner. Similarly, the Supreme Guide of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's call during the war for initiating jihad and sending Egyptians to fight the "Zionist enemy" expressed a desire to sidestep the sovereignty and commitments of the state, including the peace treaty with Israel. It is difficult to discuss political reform in societies beset by the dilemma of choosing between illegitimate authoritarian elites ruling in the name of the nation-state and populist opposition movements cloaked in religious garb, who threaten the sovereignty of the state as a way to open the door to pluralism and the peaceful alternation of power.

Another deficiency highlighted—and heightened—by the Lebanon war is the hegemony of the sacred over political culture. The religious rhetoric on the war was not confined to Islamist movements raising the banner of the "American-Zionist attack" on the Islamic umma but also extended to pan-Arab ruling elites and opposition movements, who replaced their usual Nasserist anti-Israel and anti-Western rhetoric with religious slogans, attempting to ride on the coattails of the Islamists. Even governments and others known for moderation, especially in Egypt and Jordan, formulated their objections to Hizbollah's actions in religious terms, stressing Hizbollah's Shiite character and alluding to the danger of allowing Shiite perspectives to hold sway over the interests of the Sunni majority. Although raising this scarecrow did little to detract from public support for Hizbollah, it showed the extent to which religion has become rooted in the public sphere. Non-Islamist forces—whether government or opposition—have surrendered to the language of religion and other intellectual and ideological currents have been marginalized.

The problem with this intersection of religion and politics—or in other words, the use of religion as the prime justification for political actions—is that it reduces a complicated reality to an unending series of conflicts between good and evil. It also limits to a great extent the energies available within governing and opposition forces for a constructive dialogue aimed at peaceful agreement on the principal issues of democratic transformation, the essence of which is pluralism and pragmatic acceptance of the other.

Amr Hamzawy is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. This article was translated from Arabic by Kevin Burnham and Michele Dunne.

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Lebanon: Hizbollah's Enduring Myth

Emile El-Hokayem

Serious thinking about reforming Lebanon's fragile and inefficient system of governance has been among the casualties of the recent war. Political reform has never topped the agenda of Lebanon's leaders, including the one actor most people believe would benefit most: Hizbollah. A closer look at the reasoning behind Hizbollah's political strategy can explain why it is unenthusiastic about amending Lebanon's confessional system, and how it uses its special status to justify resistance against Israel and avoid disarmament.

Hizbollah, the Shiite movement that has become Lebanon's dominant party, realizes that Lebanon's sectarian nature will not allow it to dominate the country's consensus-based politics. This sets Hizbollah apart from other Islamist organizations in the region, some of which can realistically hope to come to power if free elections were held. Hizbollah has recalibrated its ambitions accordingly. It lifted its initial opposition to the 1989 Taif Accord (which ended Lebanon's civil war and redistributed power among sects) and gradually integrated into Lebanese political and social life.

Hizbollah's pragmatism, however, should not be mistaken for genuine acceptance of Lebanon's confessional system and the constraints that come with it. Since Hizbollah cannot tear down the formal sectarian power-sharing structure and impose its preferred system of governance, the party has worked around this obstacle by formally accepting the Taif state while developing ways to remain, in effect, above the system.

Hizbollah has placed itself above the Lebanese political system, considering itself purer and more principled than other parties, which are dismissed as incompetent, corrupt, and perfidious. Furthermore, Hizbollah has always called for political and social reform in its electoral platforms, and it has been rightly praised for its good management practices, which stand in stark contrast to the corrupt and nepotistic ways of Lebanon's traditional elite. Because of this contrast, Hizbollah is able to avoid sharing the blame for Lebanon's ills, even though it is the country's pivotal party and holds considerable sway over domestic and foreign policies. It is also able to cultivate the notion that some of its policy choices, including perpetual resistance against Israel, cannot be questioned.

Hizbollah, according to conventional wisdom, exists in part to right the wrongs of political underrepresentation and economic disenfranchisement of Lebanon's large Shiite community. It would therefore make sense to expect Hizbollah to champion political reform; after all, more institutionalized Shiite power would translate into more Hizbollah power. But to believe that Hizbollah seeks to advocate Shiite rights within the state framework is to fundamentally misread its objectives. Reform would actually undermine the political strategy that has enabled Hizbollah to maintain its special status and impose its objectives on the rest of the country. Hizbollah has built parallel quasi-governmental structures that provide its followers with a sense of empowerment in lieu of advancing their interests within the framework of the Lebanese state—not because Hizbollah cannot, but because it prefers not to. In other words, Hizbollah by far prefers being a state within a state to any alternative, barring perhaps a complete (and unlikely) domination of Lebanon's political scene.

In Lebanon's consensus-based politics, monopolizing Shiite representation guarantees that no combination of political forces can compel Hizbollah to abide by rules or principles it deems contrary to its interests, unless its opponents are willing to risk civil war. By promoting the belief that its disarmament would be tantamount to turning back the clock on Shiite progress, Hizbollah has built a sectarian shield for its weapons.

Thus, Hizbollah has exploited Lebanon's openness and democratic inclinations. To be fair, the rest of Lebanon's political elite is also not serious about political reform. Yet the difference between Hizbollah and Lebanon's other politicians is fundamental; the former hijacks the system for ideological reasons and the latter abuse it to promote parochial political and economic interests.

Hizbollah cannot be a reformist force in Lebanese politics so long as it seeks to remain inside and above the system at the same time. Reform should rank high on the list of Lebanese politicians' priorities, because calling Hizbollah's bluff by pointing out that it does not seek institutional reform provides an opportunity to undermine one of Hizbollah's main levers of power and influence.

Such an emphasis on reform is unlikely, however, because after the recent conflict Lebanon has entered a new era of political paralysis and brinksmanship.

The failure of the dialogue initiative launched recently by Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri shows Lebanese politicians' lack of commitment to addressing the fundamental issues plaguing the country. Such initiatives actually feed the deadlock by turning the focus of Lebanese to details such as timing, topics, participants, and format. The reverberations of the tense regional environment will only exacerbate this sad state of affairs by providing more opportunities for grandstanding and finger-pointing at the expense of a much-needed dialogue over reform.

Emile El-Hokayem is a research fellow at the Henry L. Stimson Center in Washington DC.

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U.S. Policy and Palestine: Reform and Peace are Interdependent

Philip C. Wilcox, Jr.

Since 2002, U.S. diplomacy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been constrained by Israel's doctrine that there is no Palestinian partner for peace. According to this concept—accepted by the United States—until Palestinians halt violence toward Israel and reform their internal politics, there can be no peace talks.

The rationale of the no-partner policy during the era of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was that Israel should not be expected to negotiate in the face of terrorism. Even after a unilateral Palestinian ceasefire helped end the second intifada in February 2005, however, the “no partner” policy persisted and an important window of opportunity was missed. The policy was then reinforced by the election of the Hamas government in January 2006 and demands by Israel and the United States that Hamas recognize Israel, forswear violence, and accept all past agreements as conditions for renewed negotiations.

Whatever U.S. intentions have been, the actual effect of U.S. policy—together with unilateral Israeli actions that seem designed to foreclose negotiated compromises—has been renewed violence and a further breakdown of the Palestinian political order. Placing the burden of change solely on the Palestinians without offering them hope and incentives and without asking for reciprocal moves by Israel, is unrealistic. A viable U.S. policy should recognize that Palestinian violence and disorder are mainly symptoms of the deeper conflict over occupation and sovereignty. These symptoms will persist as long as real Palestinian statehood is denied, and U.S. efforts to influence and reform internal Palestinian politics will be marginal or counterproductive.

U.S. policies toward Palestinian reform to promote peacemaking have been erratic. In the 1990s Washington condoned Arafat's authoritarianism to support fighting terror. During the second intifada that began in autumn 2000, the United States sought to curb Arafat via creation of a prime minister, rationalization of Palestinian security forces, and fiscal reforms. When Arafat's more cooperative and reform-minded successor, President Mahmoud Abbas, took office and appealed for new peace talks in 2004, he received only friendly words from Washington and no support from Israel.

Before the Palestinian parliamentary elections, the United States also championed democratic processes for Palestinians. But after Hamas won in January 2006, the United States not only boycotted Hamas officials and mobilized a cutoff of economic aid until Hamas met the three conditions, but it also changed course on reform. Washington reversed its policy of empowering a prime minister and security reform (pursued while Arafat was alive) and instead sought to strengthen President Abbas vis-a-vis the elected Hamas government and Prime Minister Ismail Haniyya. To this end, in addition to the aid cutoff, the United States is now training and arming a Presidential Security Guard that will report to Abbas rather than the Hamas-led Ministry of Interior. Washington is also funding programs to strengthen Abbas's defeated Fatah party and other independent parties in order to create alternatives to Hamas.

U.S. convolutions on democracy and reform and a lack of clarity on the core issues of Israeli-Palestinian conflict have serious repercussions. U.S. efforts to manipulate internal Palestinian politics, which resemble failed Israeli efforts in the past, are unlikely to succeed. Indeed, the cutoff of aid and other efforts to change the internal balance against Hamas have so far weakened Abbas more than Hamas. Hamas has sustained its social and welfare programs, while PA institutions such as schools and hospitals are in danger of collapse. At a time of deepening and increasingly violent Hamas-Fatah rivalry, efforts to shore up Abbas and Fatah through a Presidential security force might encourage Palestinian civil war. The starvation of government—including security agencies—has also encouraged violence and gangsterism. And Israel's reliance on massive force in its renewed Gaza campaign, which has killed well over 350 Palestinians, has strengthened Hamas militants, further undermined Abbas's appeals for nonviolence, and provoked threats of renewed terrorism.

A new U.S. policy that integrates peace and reform is needed. First, the United States should call for an urgent mutual ceasefire and a prisoner exchange. Second, it should seek contacts with Hamas to encourage the movement's pragmatic elements. Third, Washington should urge Israel to release Palestinian Authority tax revenues and allow Europeans to resume aid to the Palestinians. Fourth, it should urge Israeli steps to halt unilateral acts and ease onerous conditions of occupation in parallel with Palestinian security reforms. Finally, the United States should present a new vision of peace to Israelis and Palestinians, offering hope for an escape from the current destructive impasse through a practical plan for a two-state peace that would meet the fundamental needs of both parties. Only such steps would allow U.S. efforts to promote Palestinian reform and create a more moderate partner for peace a chance at success.

Philip C. Wilcox, Jr. is President of the Foundation for Middle East Peace in Washington, DC and a former U.S. Consul General in Jerusalem.

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Jordan: A Balancing Act that Keeps Political Change at Bay

Rana Sabbagh-Gargour

For the sixth time this year, Human Rights Watch is questioning Jordan's commitment to abolish provisions in its penal code used solely to silence opposition figures. In November, Adnan Abu Odeh, former head of the Royal Court was investigated for allegedly insulting the king and inciting sectarian strife during televised remarks. By voicing the widely held sentiment among Jordanians of Palestinian origin—half the country's population of 5.6 million—that they are excluded from full political life, the 73-year-old politician born in the West Bank city of Nablus touched a nerve. Charges against him were dropped quickly to minimize domestic polarization and preempt growing Western criticism over Jordan's teetering experiment with rule of law.

The Abu Odeh episode illustrates Jordan's halting trek towards democracy, based on an insecurity rooted largely in the continuing Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Debates continue to rage within Jordan about whether democratic reform would threaten stability as long as the regional crisis remains unresolved or, conversely, whether opening up the political system gradually is the only way to ensure long-term security. Since taking over in 1999, King Abdullah has shown more consistency on economic than political change, handpicking liberals and technocrats to implement market-oriented reforms while sticking to mostly center-right prime ministers to ensure that political opening is on a slower track.

As with most Arab states, Jordan replicates the pattern of episodically opening up and closing down political reform, often linking shifts to the Arab-Israeli conflict and its consequences for internal security. In the most recent installment of a long-running saga, Jordan rolled back political reform after Al Qaeda's suicide attacks against Amman hotels in November 2005. A new government led by a conservative army strategist turned diplomat replaced one led by self-styled liberal academic premier Adnan Badran, who had promised to promote political freedom during his six-month tenure. A "security package" of laws was passed by parliament this summer at the prodding of the palace and the powerful intelligence apparatus, including anti-terror legislation that raised concerns about violations of free speech and civil liberties. Other laws nationalized the issuance of fatwas (religious edicts) and banned preachers from delivering sermons without prior approval. Such laws are seen as essential to curb religious fanaticism—fed by endemic corruption, poverty, unemployment, and discontent over the government's pro-U.S. policies—among Jordan's young and disillusioned population, but they also could backfire.

In July 2006 the National Agenda, a ten-year blueprint for reform crafted by a royal commission headed by liberal politician Marwan Muasher, was dealt a heavy blow after the agenda's plan to change the electoral law and introduce proportional representation was shelved. Over 700 hand-picked Jordanians representing all walks of life were invited by the palace to a closed-door meeting to forge a consensus on priorities for the next two years, including local and regional challenges. The carefully-worded "All for Jordan" document that emerged was laced with constructive ambiguity to appease the diverse needs of an entrenched bureaucracy, a conservative tribal parliament, powerful current and former officials struggling to maintain influence, a Westernized elite unhappy over the slow pace of reform, an influential Islamist-led opposition and Palestinian refugees still smarting over the 1994 peace treaty with Israel.

And so for now Jordan will keep the current one-person, one-vote electoral law, which favors the majority East Bank rural areas over densely populated cities with a majority Palestinian Jordanian population. Why address such a divisive issue, the government's thinking goes, when polls show that the majority of Jordanians favor the current election law until there is a full settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the fate of Palestinian refugees in Jordan is determined?

There is also increasing official talk in favor of postponing general parliamentary elections set for summer 2007, for up to two years, due to regional turbulence. Such a move would be motivated by fear that the influential Islamic Action Front might win a majority in parliament. Jordan's Islamists have long opposed the decision to sever links with the West Bank on the grounds that the territory is part of an Islamic waqf (endowment) and no-one has the right to give it up. They might use an election victory to forge closer links with Hamas and to push for setting up an Islamic state combining Jordan and whatever is left of the Palestinian territories.

Jordan and other Arab regimes are toeing an increasingly difficult line, apprehensive about their own restive publics, occasional Western pressure for reform, and most of all the prospect of losing power. This is pushing them toward caution. Jordan cannot postpone forever the issue of the political rights of second- and third-generation citizens of Palestinian origin. But for the present, political survival is the name of the game, especially when Jordanian leaders see election results in Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon as having produced more turmoil than consensus.

Rana Sabbagh-Gargour is an independent Jordanian journalist and former chief editor of the Jordan Times.

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Readers React

The Egyptian National Democratic Party conference has become an annual occasion for burnishing the image of presidential scion Gamal Mubarak, as well as an opportunity for the opposition to raise debate about hereditary succession. The question posed by Joshua Stacher in his October 2006 article ("Egypt: A Leap Toward Reform—or Succession?") is one that I can answer: Egypt is leaping toward hereditary succession and also toward the abyss. Religiosity is rising, and the Mubarak regime's insistence on hereditary succession could lead to Islamic revolution. Egyptians in general do not want to see the Mubarak regime continue, whether via inheritance or succession by a member of the old guard. This year's conference, as Stacher said, showed what a referendum over candidates within the party would produce. Members of the old guard were replaced by members of the new guard, who do not differ much from their predecessors except in terms of their closeness to Gamal Mubarak. And prominent figures rumored as possible alternatives to Gamal, such as General Intelligence Director Omar Soliman or Prime Minister Ahmad Nazif, are being sidelined.

Magdy Samaan
Egyptian journalist

In his October 2006 article ("U.S. Policy and Yemen: Balancing Realism and Reform on the Arab Periphery"), Jeremy M. Sharp calls the Al Qaeda threat in Yemen "very real." He mentions the two failed attacks on oil facilities (which actually took place on September 15 rather than 19) as an example of the threat. Yemen has always been a key piece of geography for Al Qaeda, but if the United States continues to focus solely on counterterrorism issues in the bilateral relationship at the expense of the other numerous problems Sharp mentioned—particularly the looming economic crisis, as Yemen is running out of both petroleum and water—the results could very well be disastrous.

Gregory D. Johnsen
Doctoral candidate, New York University

Send your views on what you have read in the *Arab Reform Bulletin* to the editor at arb@carnegieendowment.org.

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News and Views

Palestine: Progress in Hamas-Fatah Talks

Fatah and Hamas agreed on November 13 to appoint Muhammad Shubeir, former President of the Islamic University of Gaza, as the new prime minister in a unity government that will be formed by the end of November. Ismail Haniyya, the Palestinian Prime Minister and leader of Hamas, declared on November 10 that he was prepared to resign his post if it would bring an end to the international aid embargo imposed on the current Hamas government for refusing to recognize Israel, renounce violence, and abide by previous interim peace agreements.

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Lebanon: Government Talks Collapse

Talks aimed at easing political tensions in Lebanon collapsed on November 11 after the anti-Syrian governing majority rejected demands from Hezbollah and its allies to be granted one-third of cabinet positions. Six ministers (five from Shiite political parties Hezbollah and Amal) withdrew from the 24-member cabinet in protest. The week-long talks were prompted by a threat from Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah that unless this demand was met by mid-November, the group would resort to street protests to bring down the government. Hezbollah accused the governing majority led by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora of failing to back it during the July war with Israel and of supporting U.S. and Israeli demands for its

disarmament.

The majority coalition stated it was willing to include Maronite leader (and Hezbollah ally) Michel Aoun in the cabinet but refused to surrender a third of cabinet posts, which would give Hezbollah veto power. The majority accused Hezbollah of seeking to veto a statute approving an international tribunal to prosecute suspects in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005. The remaining cabinet members approved on November 13 a United Nations proposal outlining the structure and legal framework of the international tribunal.

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Jordan: Pending Cabinet Reshuffle

Jordan's Prime Minister Marouf Al Bakhit announced he will introduce cabinet changes before parliament's ordinary session opens on November 28.

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Egypt: Muslim Brotherhood-NDP Tensions; Liberal MP Sentenced

The Muslim Brotherhood accused the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) of committing fraud in elections for speaker of the People's Assembly. Ahmed Fathi Sorour, who has served as speaker since 1990, was reelected with 319 votes of 445. The Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohammad Saad Al Katatni received 79 votes. This is the first time the Brotherhood has nominated a candidate for the post.

The Muslim Brotherhood also charged the government with denying its candidates access to union offices ahead of labor union elections, as well as disqualifying students affiliated with the group from student elections. State security forces detained about 30 students on November 5 and eight members of the Muslim Brotherhood on October 17. According to Human Rights Watch, 792 members of the organization were detained between March and October. According to the Muslim Brotherhood, 62 remain in custody: 29 of them charged with belonging to an illegal organization and the remaining 33 without charge. On October 18, Secretary General Mahmoud Izzat, arrested on August 25, was released. Click [here](#) for more details.

On October 31 a military court in Cairo sentenced Talaat Al Sadat, a member of parliament for the opposition Al Ahrar party and nephew of late President Anwar Al Sadat, to one year in prison for "spreading false rumors" and "insulting the armed forces and the republican guard." On October 5 Speaker of Parliament Fathi Sorour, acting at the request of Egypt's military prosecutor general, stripped Al Sadat of his parliamentary immunity, the day after he gave media interviews accusing military officers of participating in a conspiracy that led to the assassination of President Sadat. Click [here](#) for more details.

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Bahrain: Run-Up to Elections

Bahrain's electoral commission rejected demands by opposition groups to allow foreign observers to monitor the parliamentary and municipal elections slated for November 25. The commission also rejected on November 2 the demand by Bahrain's largest Shiite political society Al Wefaq (which is planning to contest 17 seats in the 40-member lower house) that military personnel should not be allowed to participate in the poll.

Bahrain's Information Ministry blocked several websites on October 30 for violating a ban on reporting about a scandal over election irregularities. The report by former government advisor Salah Al Bandar described a conspiracy by senior government officials to rig the upcoming elections to reduce the powers of Shiites. Among the blocked websites are those of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, the Arab Network for Human Rights Information, and the website of the opposition National Democratic Action Society. Click [here](#) for more details.

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Saudi Arabia: New Succession Rules

In a move to formalize the royal succession process, Saudi Arabia's royal court announced on October 20 the formation of

a committee of princes to vote on the eligibility of future kings and crown princes. According to a statement by the royal court (**Arabic Text**), the committee, to be known as the Allegiance Institution, will include the sons and grandsons of King Abdul Aziz. Under the new rules the committee can vote for one of three princes nominated by the king. In the event that neither the king nor the crown prince are deemed fit to rule, a five-member transitory council would run state affairs for a maximum of one week.

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Kuwait: Debate on Electoral Violations Continues

Kuwait's parliament turned down on November 6 a request by a parliamentary committee to suspend the head of the Citizen Services Apparatus Sheikh Muhammad Al Abdullah Al Mubarak Al Sabah. The committee, established in July to investigate electoral violations, declared on October 1 that it had evidence of government interference in the June parliamentary elections and asked for Al Abdullah's suspension while the investigation unfolds. Out of the 60 present MPs, 32 voted against the recommendation, 21 voted in favor, and seven abstained. MPs in favor of the proposal called for shutting down the citizen service apparatus on the grounds that it is a source of corruption. Click **here** for more details in Arabic.

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United Arab Emirates: Improvement in Labor Rights

The United Arab Emirates' Prime Minister Sheikh Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum announced a series of reforms on November 8 designed to improve worker rights. The reforms include: establishing a labor court to handle workers' complaints; regulating contracts of foreign laborers; setting fixed working hours for domestic help; requiring the labor ministry to create a mechanism to prevent delays in wage payments; and adopting a system of health insurance for all categories of workers. The UAE is currently negotiating a free trade pact with the United States.

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Morocco: Justice and Charity Leader Imprisoned; Yassine Trial Postponed

A Moroccan court sentenced Muhammad Al Abadi, the Al Adl wal Ihsan (Justice and Charity) group's second-in-command, to a one-year prison term for violating construction regulations in his house. Observers, however, believe the case is political and in line with the authorities' recent crackdown on the group, believed to be the largest opposition organization in Morocco. Al Abadi was arrested along with approximately 100 members and leaders of the group on June 14. Between May and June, Moroccan authorities briefly detained some 500 members after the group launched an "open doors" campaign to recruit outside traditional areas such as mosques and universities.

The trial of Nadia Yassine, the unofficial Al Adl wal Ihsan spokeswoman, was postponed on October 31 until April 19, 2007. Yassine faces charges of defaming the monarchy after she stated that she preferred a republic to an "autocratic regime" in an interview with the Al Usbuiyya Al Jadida daily in June 2005. If convicted, she will face jail sentences of three to five years and a fines of 10,000-100,000 dirham (\$1,100- \$11,000).

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Algeria: Referendum Delayed

The Algerian government will delay a planned referendum on constitutional amendments until next year. Proposed amendments are expected to extend the presidential term from five years to seven years, abrogate the two-term limit, and introduce the position of vice president.

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Libya: National Security Council Established

Libya's government announced the establishment of a national security council on October 21. The council—headed by the prime minister and composed by the ministers of defense, general security, communication, economy, and finance—will be in charge of designing a strategy for internal and external security as well as declaring a state of emergency in the case of national security threats. Click **here** for more details in Arabic.

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New Transparency International Corruption Index

Iraq is ranked as the most corrupt country in the world in the 2006 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) released by the Berlin-based corruption watchdog Transparency International. In the Arab world, the United Arab Emirates is ranked the least corrupt (31 out of 163 countries worldwide), followed by Qatar (33) and Bahrain (36). The most corrupt Arab states beside Iraq are Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Sudan. Jordan and Tunisia witnessed a significant worsening of their ratings while Algeria and Lebanon saw a major improvement. Click [here](#) for the complete ranking.

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Upcoming Political Events

- Bahrain: Legislative and municipal elections, November 25, 2006.
- United Arab Emirates: Elections to the Federal National Council, December 16, 2006.

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Views from the Arab Media

The U.S. mid-term elections and their effects on the Arab world were the subject of many commentaries in the Arab media:

- President George Bush paid the price for his failed policies according to Ayman Al Safadi's [article](#) in Jordan's *Al Ghad* on November 10. The elections were above all a referendum on U.S. foreign policy, particularly Iraq, and therefore changes on this front should be expected. But how quick and positive these changes are depends on whether the Democrats can translate their campaign slogans into viable strategies.
- The success of the new phase of U.S. foreign policy depends on policy makers recognizing that while the neo-conservatives' war on Iraq was a failure, a return to traditional "pragmatic" considerations for the region is not a solution either, argued Raghida Dargham in a November 10 [commentary](#) in *Al Hayat*. First, the retreat from Iraq should not come at the expense of appeasing Iran. Second, engagement with Syria should not come at the expense of Lebanon's sovereignty and democracy. Finally, a more active and balanced approach by the U.S. to the Arab-Israeli conflict is needed.
- On a November 6 episode of Al Jazeera's "[Min Washington](#)" (From Washington), Khalil Jahshan, lecturer at Pepperdine University, argued that above all, the elections were a test of American public opinion on U.S. foreign policy. Khaled Sfouri, an activist in the Republican Party, pointed out that the U.S. Congress does not determine foreign policy but that it could influence the situation in Iraq by cutting the defense budget. According to Osama Siblani, head of the Arab American Political Action Committee, the Democratic Party lacks a coherent vision for an alternative policy in Iraq.
- Jamal Khashoggi argued that Arab coverage of the U.S. elections should go beyond an analysis of their implications on U.S. policy toward the Middle East in a November 9 opinion [article](#) in the UAE's *Al Ittihad*. Coverage should instead focus on studying the U.S. democratic process itself and determining the lessons to be learned by Arab countries about the practice of democracy.
- The timing of the verdict for former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was motivated by the U.S. mid-term elections, asserted head of Al Arabiya satellite television Abdul Rahman Al Rashed in an opinion [article](#) in *Ash Sharq Al Awsat* on November 8. He also argued that the victory of the Democratic Party would not alter the course of the U.S. war on terror; although the American public opposes the handling of the Iraq war, it still believes in fighting terrorism.

A November 6 episode of Al Arabiyya's "[Panorama](#)" debated the significance of the return of Lebanese politicians to the national dialogue meetings. Although the participants—MP Ammar Houry and journalists Qasem Qasir, George Alam, and Aqab Saqr—disagreed over the events that led to a relaunch of the dialogue, they agreed that the meetings are a positive move for Lebanon's political stability.

Palestinian writer Marzouq Al Halabi argued that the principal reason for the political stagnation in Arab countries is the absence of a middle class in an [article](#) in *Al Hayat* on November 9. The middle class's dynamics and values are a key force of change and could provide the missing link between a tyrannical ruling regime on the one hand and populist opposition movements on the other.

Reforms undertaken by the Gulf states were the subject of a November 3 discussion on Al Jazeera's "[Akthar Min Rai](#)" (More than One Opinion). Hani Al Qushbandi, a Doha-based Saudi analyst, argued that there are no popular demands for parliamentary politics in Saudi Arabia because of the strength of tribalism and religious ideology. Before Saudi Arabia can have political reform, it needs religious reform. Ali Fakhro, former minister in Bahrain, asserted that the key to reform in Bahrain is fully empowering the elected lower house of parliament. Kuwaiti MP Nasser Al Sane argued that although Kuwait's political system is imperfect, it provides the best model for other Gulf states because the legislative branch consists solely of an elected parliament.

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Read On

Selected recent books on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict include:

- In [Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid](#) (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), former U.S. President Jimmy Carter argues that there can be no lasting peace between the Israelis and Palestinians as long as Israel continues to violate international agreements. Carter calls for a proactive U.S. government role in achieving a just agreement that both sides can honor.
- In [The Iron Cage: The Story of Palestinian Struggle For Statehood](#), Rashid Khalidi argues that Palestinians' failure to achieve statehood prior to the 1948 creation of Israel set the stage for their subsequent inability to reach that goal (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).
- Former Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami highlights the misunderstandings and blunders of Israelis and Palestinians in [Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- Peace negotiators must address the unresolved issue of compensation for the property abandoned by Palestinian refugees in 1948, argues Michael R. Fischbach in [The Peace Process and Palestinian Refugee Claims: Addressing Claims for Property Compensation and Restitution](#) (United States Institute of Peace, 2006).
- A report published by the Rand Corporation offers a comprehensive examination of what it will take to build an independent Palestinian state ([Building a Successful Palestinian State](#), 2006).
- [Bridging the Divide: Peacebuilding in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict](#) examines the potential of civil society and non-governmental organizations for peacebuilding (Edy Kaufman, Walid Salem, and Juliette Verhoeven eds., Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006).
- Once the servant of civilian politicians, Israel's military has acquired an unprecedented influence in shaping defense and foreign policy, contends Yoram Peri in [Generals in the Cabinet Room: How the Military Shapes Israeli Policy](#) (United States Institute of Peace, 2006).
- Nigel Parsons explores the development of the Palestinian Liberation Organization from a liberation movement to a national authority in [The Politics of Palestinian Authority: From Oslo to Al-Aqsa](#) (New York and London: Routledge, 2006).
- In [Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombings](#), Mohammed Hafez explores the factors that fueled the campaign of suicide attacks during the al-Aqsa intifada that began in 2000 (United States

Institute of Peace, 2006).

Several recent publications discuss the aftermath of the 2006 Lebanon war:

- In (“**Israel, Hizbollah, Lebanon: Avoiding Renewed Conflict**,” Middle East Report no. 59, November 1, 2006), the International Crisis Group argues that UNSC Resolution 1701 is not the proper framework for resolving underlying issues in the Israeli-Lebanese relationship. And in (“**The Arab-Israeli Conflict: To Reach a Lasting Peace**,” Middle East Report no. 58, October 5, 2006), the ICG argues that now is the time for an international push to launch a comprehensive peace initiative addressing the root causes of the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- Amr Hamzawy and Dina Bishara examine the reactions of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Jordanian Islamic Action Front to the Lebanon war in “**Islamist Movements in the Arab World and the 2006 Lebanon War**” (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Paper no. 75, November 2006).
- Notwithstanding the high cost of the war in Lebanon, if Beirut and the international community handle the crisis well the end result might still be positive: a more stable Lebanon that could help secure a true regional peace, argues Paul Salem in “**The Future of Lebanon**” (*Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2006, 13-22).
- A recent paper published by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars examines the far-reaching implications of the Lebanon war from the perspectives of Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Turkey, and the United States (“**A View from the Region: Different Perspectives on Israel's War with Lebanon's Hizbollah**,” Occasional Paper Series, Fall 2006).
- An edited anthology published by the Beirut-based Center for Arab Unity Studies analyzes the costs of the Lebanon war for both Israel and Lebanon, as well as its larger regional and international implications (***Al Harb a l Isra' i liya ala Lubnan: a l t ada' iyat a l L u ibaniya w al Isra' il i ya w a t a' thirataha a l Arabiya w al i qlimiya wal dawliya***, The Israeli War on Lebanon: Implications for Lebanon and Israel; Arab, Regional and International Effects, October 2006).
- Israel's inconclusive war with Hizbollah resulted in no clear winner; rather it ushered a painful period of self-examination for Israel and undermined Hezbollah's monopoly over southern Lebanon, argue David Makovsky and Jeffrey White in “**Lessons and Implications of the Israel-Hizbollah War: A Preliminary Assessment**” (Washington Institute for Near East Policy,” Policy Focus no. 60, October 2006).
- Hamas and Hizbollah actions have eliminated Israel's unilateral option and brought back the old dilemma of war versus economic liberalization (Yoav Peled, “**Illusions of Unilateralism Dispelled in Israel**,” *Middle East Report Online*, October 11, 2006).
- Israel's national security decision-making process suffers from extreme politicization due to the proportional representation electoral system, and the consequent need to govern through coalition cabinet, argues Charles D. Freilich in “National Security Decision-Making in Israel: Processes, Pathologies, and Strengths” (*Middle East Journal*, vol. 60, no. 4, Autumn 2006, 635-63).

Several recent publications focus on developments in **Iraq**:

- ***The Iraq War: Causes and Consequences*** offers a comprehensive analysis of the policies of the major international and regional states leading up the war (Rick Fawn and Raymond Hinnebusch, eds., Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006).
- Radical armed sectarian groups are succeeding in producing a lasting change in Iraq's social and demographic make-up, warns a Brookings Institution report on sectarian-induced displacement in Iraq (Ashraf al-Khalidi and

Victor Tanner, "**Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq**," Brookings-Bern Project Occasional Paper, October 2006).

- ***The International Struggle over Iraq: Politics in the UN Security Council 1980-2005*** discusses the challenges the body faces in a unipolar international system and its gradual abandonment of its traditional political and military tools in Iraq for the legal-regulatory approach (David M. Malone, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Several recent publications address reform-related developments in Arab countries:

- **Morocco's** National Initiative for Human Development is unlikely to produce a real transfer of power to the local level due to its centralized institutional structure and project-based implementation, according to Ivan Martin ("Morocco Wakes up to Human Development," *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 11, no. 3, November 2006, 433-39).
- **Morocco** presents a test case for the successes and failures of U.S. and European democracy promotion programs as well the possibility of balancing the critical—but often conflicting—goals of stability and reform, argue Haim Malka and Jon Alterman in ***Arab Reform and Foreign Aid: Lessons from Morocco*** (Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2006).
- It is difficult to gauge whether new **Saudi** succession rules will change the current system, but for the foreseeable future King Abdullah's successor will most likely be from his generation, argues Simon Henderson in "**New Saudi Rules on Succession: Will They Fix the Problem?**" (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch no. 1156, October 25, 2006).
- The United States Institute of Peace has published briefs on the prospects of political reform in **Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, and Kuwait** as part of a new project on "**The Challenges to Democratization in the Arab World**" (November 2006).
- Analyzing Freedom House studies, Iliya Harik argues that the denial of democratizing trends in the Arab countries is a function of questionable measurement ("Democracy, 'Arab Exceptionalism,' and Social Science," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 60, no. 4, Autumn 2006, 664-84).

Several recent publications address **Islamist movements** in the Arab world:

- Rather than induce parties to moderate, cross-ideological cooperation in **Jordan** is limited to issues on which Islamists and other parties already fully agree, argues Janine Clark in "The Conditions of Islamist Moderation: Unpacking Cross-Ideological Cooperation in Jordan," (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4, November 2006, 539-60).
- In "**Jordan and Its Islamic Movement: The Limits of Inclusion?**," Nathan Brown examines how the Islamist movement has managed to work within legal boundaries and repackage its strong beliefs in legal organizations that have had a broad and deep reach into Jordanian society (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Paper no. 74, November 2006).
- The concept of Islamic constitutionalism articulated by **Egyptian** Islamist thinkers envisions a much more invasive role for the state in citizens' lives than does liberal constitutionalism, writes Bruce K. Rutherford in "What do Egypt's Islamists Want? Moderate Islam and the Rise of Islamic Constitutionalism" (*Middle East Journal*, vol. 60, no. 4, Autumn 2006, 705-23).

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