

## Arab Reform Bulletin: October 2007

# Arab Reform Bulletin

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*Michele Dunne*, Editor

*Salma Waheedi*, Assistant Editor

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## Insights and Analysis

### Egypt: Regression in the Muslim Brotherhood's Party Platform?

#### *Amr Hamzawy*

The Muslim Brotherhood's draft party platform sends mixed signals about the movement's political views and positions. Although it has already been widely circulated, the document does not yet have final approval from the movement's guidance bureau.

The platform's detailed treatment of political, social, and economic issues marks a significant departure from previously less developed positions, articulated *inter alia* in a 2004 reform initiative and the 2005 electoral platform for Brotherhood parliamentary candidates. This shift addresses one of the most important criticisms of the Brotherhood, namely its championing of vague ideological and religious slogans and inability to come up with specific policy prescriptions.

The document raises troubling questions, however, regarding the identity of a future Brotherhood political party as well as the group's position on several political and social issues. Released in the context of an ongoing stand-off between the Egyptian regime and the Brotherhood, it reveals significant ambiguities and perhaps regression in the movement's thinking.

First, the drafters chose not to address the future relationship between the party and the movement. In doing so, they have deliberately ignored important ideas recently discussed within the movement, especially among members of the parliamentary bloc. Inspired by the experiences of Islamist parties in Morocco, Jordan, and Yemen, these members advocate a functional separation between a party and the movement, with the former focused mainly on political participation and the latter on religious activism. In addition to its superficial treatment of the nature of the party and its internal organization, the platform includes no clear statement on opening party membership to all Egyptians regardless of their religion, one of the requirements for establishing a political party according to the Egyptian constitution.

Second, the draft Brotherhood platform identifies implementation of *sharia* as one of the party's main goals. Although this is consistent with the group's interpretation of Article 2 of the Egyptian Constitution ("Islam is the religion of the state, and Islamic law is the main source of legislation"), it departs from the pragmatic spirit of various Brotherhood statements and initiatives since 2004 in which less emphasis was given to the *sharia* issue. The return to a focus on *sharia* in the platform has led to positions fundamentally at odds with the civil nature of the state and full citizenship rights regardless of religious affiliation.

The platform undermines the principle of a civil state by stipulating that senior religious scholars would have the right to veto legislation that does not conform to the principles of Islamic law. It calls for the establishment of a board of elected senior religious scholars, with whom the president and the legislature would have to consult before passing laws. In effect, this would put the legislature and the executive under the scrutiny of an extra-constitutional body. Setting aside impressionistic inferences regarding the Brotherhood's adoption of a theocratic state model, these provisions constitute a significant departure in the movement's thinking away from the more moderate positions articulated by its leadership in recent years. Over the past few years, the Brotherhood had consistently asserted that the Supreme Constitutional Court was the only body that can adjudicate the constitutionality of laws, and denied that a religious body could perform this task. The draft

platform also discriminates against Egypt's Copts by arguing—on religious grounds—that only Muslims are allowed to compete for the highest executive offices, the presidency and prime ministership. This constitutes a violation of basic principles of universal citizenship, which the Brotherhood's discourse had once seemed to accept.

Finally, the party platform's treatment of social and economic issues reveals a preference for a strongly interventionist state that would mitigate the effects of free trade. By contrast, the platform's provisions regarding political reform and democratic change focus on a more limited role for the state and a greater role for civil society and nongovernmental organizations. Calling for a state that systematically intervenes in social and economic spheres while at the same time advocating limiting its political role is contradictory.

Ambiguity and regression in the Brotherhood's party platform cannot be seen outside the current political context in Egypt. Since their strong showing in the parliamentary elections 2005, the Muslim Brothers have been once again facing a repressive state apparatus that places strict constraints on their political participation. In such an uncertain environment, it is highly unlikely that nonviolent religious opposition movements open up to fully embrace democratic norms and principles.

*Amr Hamzawy is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Dina Bishara translated this article from Arabic.*

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## **Jordan: Elections without Surprises**

### ***Oraib al-Rantawi***

On November 20, Jordanians will head to the polls to elect representatives to the Chamber of Deputies. Comprised of 110 seats spread over forty-five electoral districts, the parliament includes six seats reserved for women, nine for Christians, and three for the Circassian and Chechen minorities. Although opposition parties will participate, they are not expected to win more than 20 percent of the seats. This is largely due to Jordan's electoral law, which adopts the one person, one vote principle--voters cast one vote for one candidate, rather than for a party list, even when the electoral district is allocated more than one seat. Political parties, trade unions, professional syndicates, and civil society institutions in Jordan have long criticized the law, arguing that it stifles political development, fosters tribalism at the expense of modern civil society, and has led to a conservative, traditionalist-dominated Chamber of Deputies since 1993.

For over ten years, politically active Jordanians have been demanding a new electoral law. They have proposed a broad range of changes, including:

- A mixed electoral system, i.e., one person, two votes--the first for a candidate within the electoral district, and the second for a party list;
- Fairer distribution of seats among the electoral districts; the number of constituents per seat varies wildly, with some representing up to seven times as many constituents as others;
- An independent commission to supervise the electoral process in lieu of the Ministry of Interior, which is currently entrusted with this role;
- Electoral monitoring by international and local observers;
- Hearing of appeals to election result by the judicial branch, rather than parliament itself, which has not yet upheld a single appeal;
- Improved electoral procedures to ensure that multiple votes are prevented, dead voters are not counted, etc.;
- Stopping the movement of voter records from district to district and curbing vote buying.

Successive governments have vowed to issue a new electoral law, but then disappointed the Jordanian public by holding the next elections without passing any amendments. Even articles of the electoral law related to the quota of seats for women remain unchanged, despite the fact that they proved highly controversial in the last election, given how few seats were set aside for women and the fact that the quota denied female candidates in the major cities a shot at winning seats.

The thirty-four registered Jordanian political parties (in addition to three currently being established) have chosen to take part in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The political arena these days is seeing active coalition building, platform drafting, and campaign planning, as a result of the Islamic Action Front (IAF) opting to participate. This decision came after heated internal debates within the IAF and the Muslim Brotherhood (which founded the party), due to what the party's leaders describe as an organized government campaign targeting them with arrests, media campaigns, pressure on leaders and members, as well as curbing their social, economic, and educational institutions. The leaders also complained

of government intervention and election rigging in municipal elections in July 2007, which the IAF boycotted.

According to several sources, the Islamist movement's decision to take part resulted from the assurances exchanged between Prime Minister Marouf al-Bakhit and the leaders of the IAF's centrist faction, in a September 19 meeting at al-Bakhit's house. The prime minister reportedly promised to hold clean, transparent elections, while the movement's leaders reassured the government of their intent to take part in but not win the elections, and to keep extremists off their electoral lists. The results of the reported bargain are already observable; the IAF's list for the upcoming elections only has twenty-two candidates, fewer than in the previous elections, and includes no known hawks or members of what is known as the " Hamas line."

The Islamist trend is expected to win a number of seats similar to the 16 percent it holds in the current parliament, but certainly not to cross the 20 percent threshold. Meanwhile, most other opposition parties are not predicted to gain parliamentary representation, except for some of the centrist parties, which are in effect blocs--for example the National Constitutional Party and the Islamic Center Party in the last parliament--of deputies who won seats on their personal reputation or tribal connections, not as members of political parties. Thus it can be said that Jordan is likely to experience elections without surprises in November, leading one observer to predict that the elections will produce a carbon copy of the current parliament--even if some of the names and faces are new.

*Oraib al-Rantawi is head of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies in Amman. Paul Wulfsberg translated this article from Arabic.*

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## **Bahrain: Assessing al-Wefaq's Parliamentary Experiment**

**Jane Kinninmont**

It is almost one year since al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, Bahrain's largest legal opposition group, ended its boycott of parliament and won seventeen of forty seats in November 2006 elections. Compared to the repressive era of the 1990s, it is a remarkable achievement--for the group and for King Hamad's program of gradual political liberalization--that al-Wefaq's leader Sheikh Ali Salman, a former political prisoner and longtime exile, is now the head of a recognized parliamentary opposition. As yet, however, al-Wefaq has few clear gains to show from political participation. Differences are reported to be arising within the group, which also faces criticism from al-Haqq, an opposition group that broke with al-Wefaq.

Al-Wefaq's MPs have little real legislative power within Bahrain's current parliamentary system, in which the limited powers of the forty elected MPs are largely counterbalanced by those of forty royally appointed MPs. Al-Wefaq, whose constituents mainly belong to the country's Shi'a majority, has no ministers in the cabinet, where Sunni ruling family members hold most of the key posts. Nevertheless, al-Wefaq can claim to have influenced government policy in several areas. The government is increasing investment in public-sector housing, a priority for al-Wefaq's constituents in a country where land and mortgage financing are scarce. The government is also trying to reduce unemployment, disproportionately high among the Shi'a. It will soon introduce the country's first ever unemployment benefits, which will be funded with an unpopular 1 percent levy on salaries--essentially Bahrain's first income tax. Pressure from al-Wefaq MPs also seems to have contributed to the recent dismissal of Health Minister Nada Haffad.

Although it is likely that al-Wefaq has contributed modestly to shifts in government policy, signs of dissatisfaction with its parliamentary experiment are increasing. Sheikh Salman hinted on October 8 that he is considering resigning, suggesting he might be more influential from the outside. The Bahraini press has since reported widespread disagreement within al-Wefaq about whether to finish out the current parliamentary term (ending in 2010) or to withdraw sooner in order to shore up al-Wefaq's credibility with the public. (The group denies these differences.)

At the same time, al-Wefaq faces relentless criticism from al-Haqq, a protest movement that disputes any gains from political participation. For example, when Sheikh Salman intervened with the government to procure the release of three non-Wefaq opposition leaders, including al-Haqq's leader Hassan Mushaima, in February 2006, al-Haqq dismissed the idea that Salman's mediation had been effective, ascribing the activists' release instead to riots and protests by Shi'i villagers on their behalf. In the end, it is quite possible that the government's moves have been motivated by a combination of al-Wefaq's polite pressure from inside parliament and the noisier demands of al-Haqq from without, with al-Haqq essentially playing the bad cop.

Among the challenges al-Wefaq faces is how to make the transition from an opposition movement to a parliamentary bloc, as shown in the income tax law episode. Al-Wefaq's MPs initially approved the law, badly misjudging the public mood.

Many al-Wefaq constituents were angered by the introduction of even a small income tax when the government budget is in surplus and prices for essentials are rising. Moreover, the country's leading Shi'i cleric, Sheikh Issa Qassim, declared the tax to be un-Islamic, arguing that wealth should be taxed rather than income. Al-Wefaq then belatedly tried to oppose the bill that it had already approved, with a predictable lack of success. The law went forward over al-Wefaq's objections, although the government did agree to a 15 percent rise in public sector salaries.

Meanwhile, al-Haqq and other activists press for government concessions through street protests and other forms of direct action. When a local landowner deployed fish traps that prevented Shi'i villagers from fishing the waters off Malkiya village in August, opposition activists removed them by force. Clashes with police ensued, but the King eventually ordered the traps to be removed. Access to the sea is an issue that resonates in the tiny island of Bahrain, where many beaches are privately owned, and supporters of direct action have publicized the Malkiya incident as a victory for their approach.

Al-Wefaq's participation in politics is still young, and it would be unfair to judge its success purely on legislative grounds. The group's entry into parliament is not just a means to opposition ends; it is also a signal of conciliation to the ruling establishment at a time when regional tensions are rekindling fears that the country's Shi'i opposition groups are a potential fifth column for Iran. Meanwhile, al-Wefaq will face the challenges of a ruling establishment that resists significant concessions to the Shi'a, internal arguments about how to proceed, and a rival opposition group that threatens to draw al-Wefaq's supporters away from electoral politics and into the streets to make their demands heard.

*Jane Kinninmont is a Middle East editor and economist at the London-based Economist Intelligence Unit.*

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## **Arab States: Human Rights and Non-State Actors**

### ***Eric Goldstein***

In August, a Hizballah-led effort prevented Human Rights Watch from holding a press conference in Beirut, where the organization was to release its report documenting how Hizballah violated the laws of war by firing rockets toward civilians in Israel during the 2006 conflict. Hizballah's television channel announced that protesters planned to prevent the conference, and a pro-Hizballah lawyer filed a suit to stop it. That was enough for the hotel to cancel the venue.

Never mind that Human Rights Watch had also documented and condemned Israeli violations, and had sought to meet with Hizballah prior to publicizing its findings. Hizballah's foreign affairs chief, Nawaf Moussawi, had told Human Rights Watch before the 2006 conflict, "It is not our cause, not in our interest as a resistance force, to kill Israeli civilians." But afterwards, Hizballah would brook no criticism of how it conducted its military operations.

The credibility of human rights organizations hinges on their confronting armed movements as well as governments. Human rights activism hits a nerve by exposing abusive conduct that a government wants to hide. But does traditional naming and shaming work with armed movements such as Hizballah or Hamas? Human rights organizations have been seeking new ways to hold such groups accountable and change their conduct, even if the grim daily headlines dispel any illusion of progress.

As parties to armed conflicts, insurgent groups are obliged to respect international humanitarian law. A fundamental duty is to spare civilians to the greatest extent possible, no matter how just the cause, who started the conflict, or how grievous the abuses by the other side.

One of Human Rights Watch's responses to armed groups has been to conduct a dialogue with Arab opinion-makers. Since 2005 we have talked with intellectuals, civil society actors, clerics, political party leaders and journalists in the Middle East. If they took the initiative to tell the public that nothing ever justifies attacks on civilians, these influential individuals could help stigmatize such attacks in the eyes of those who sympathize with the militants' grievances.

Two observations emerge from these often-difficult discussions, held in countries from Morocco to Saudi Arabia. First, Islamists and non-Islamists who questioned the absolute prohibition on targeting civilians based their positions on political grounds. Instead of invoking Islam, they spoke in terms of military occupation, neo-imperialism, or asymmetrical warfare.

Second, many Arab opinion-makers still observe an Israeli exceptionalism. They opposed attacks by militant groups on civilians in Algeria, Iraq, London, and New York--but not when the victims were Israeli. They have argued variously that Palestinians have the right to resist the better-armed occupier through any means necessary, that Palestinians have no other way to make Israel feel pain, that the international community does nothing to restrain Israeli oppression, and that Israeli civilians are not truly civilians.

Others said that while they opposed attacks on Israeli civilians, they could not espouse such a position publicly. An activist in Tunisia explained, "The state controls the media here and is eager to discredit us. If we criticize Palestinian suicide bombings, the media would tar us as Zionists and then deny us a venue to explain our position."

When suicide bombings multiplied during the second Intifada, Palestinians were the first Arabs to denounce them, though mainly on the grounds that they were counterproductive. More principled denunciations came later, such as the final communiqué of a conference of Arab civil society organizations in Rabat in December 2004, which condemned "targeting and terrorizing civilians on both sides." Still, few local groups have campaigned publicly in support of these principled positions.

Human Rights Watch has confronted abusive insurgent groups elsewhere in other ways. The Tamil Tigers finances its war against Sri Lanka in large part through donations from the Tamil Diaspora. Many Tamils living abroad fled because of government abuses and eagerly fund the Tigers. Human Rights Watch documented how pro-Tiger fundraisers extorted money from Tamil households and businesses in Canada and the UK and urged more aggressive law enforcement against their strong-arm practices.

Beyond the efforts of human rights organizations to publicize abuses and influence public opinion, there is the International Criminal Court, which has jurisdiction over war crimes and crimes against humanity when domestic jurisdictions cannot or will not prosecute. The human rights movement actively supported the ICC creation and provides documentation of crimes that fall within its purview. Notably, seven of the eight persons indicted thus far by the ICC are rebel fighters from African conflicts, all of them charged with attacks against civilians. Over the long term, the court's jurisprudence can help delegitimize insurgent violence against civilians.

There is no denying that Hizballah's heavy-handed effort to silence Human Rights Watch's criticism drew applause from many in Lebanon and beyond. Still, Hizballah's reaction showed concern about how its fighting methods are perceived, and therein lays a modest opportunity for leverage.

*Eric Goldstein is research director of the Middle East and North Africa Division of Human Rights Watch.*

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## **Saudi Arabia: Human Rights, Reform, and the Rule of Law**

### ***Muhammad Helmy***

Many Arab regimes share a questionable commitment to the principles of human rights, but the Saudi ruling establishment's commitment is even weaker than that of others in the region. To date, the Saudi government's reform initiatives have had a negligible impact on improving respect for human rights in the Kingdom. On the contrary, peaceful Saudi reform activists have faced increased police brutality in recent years and continue to be denied the right to counsel and to fair trials. In addition to serving extended prison terms, many have been barred from leaving the country. Most recently, on August 19, Saudi police re-arrested two of the country's most prominent reform activists, university professor and attorney Abdullah al-Hamid and his brother activist Issa al-Hamid. Five women were arrested at the same time for demonstrating in favor of an expedited trial for their relatives. The arrests were made under the pretext of a legally dubious ban on peaceful demonstrations.

Since 2004, Saudi security forces have arrested hundreds of reform activists, and barred twenty-two from traveling, among them Abdullah al-Hamid, professor Matrouk al-Faleh, poet Ali al-Domaini, and Ibrahim al-Makitib--head of "Human Rights First". Many activists, including Said bin Zuir and Abdullah al-Hamid, have also lost their jobs because of their political views. Critical journalists, such as Khalid al-Dakhil and Saad al-Suwan, have not escaped either and have sometimes been banned from writing in the Saudi press. These violations constitute a sort of collective punishment for advocates of reform in the kingdom. As such, they are evidence that the government's limited reform initiatives, such as local elections, will count for little as long as Saudi citizens are prevented from freely expressing their views and debating the future of their country.

In addition to releasing jailed reformers, the Saudi government should begin abiding by its own laws. It should implement the criminal procedure code introduced in 2002, which guarantees the protection of human rights. Article 2 prohibits torturing or physically or psychologically harming defendants, as well as treating them in a degrading manner. Article 102 prohibits interrogators from influencing defendants' testimonies. Article 162 guarantees the defendants' right to a fair trial and Article 4 gives them the right to counsel at both the investigation and trial stages. According to Article 182, trials must be public, and in the event that a case is reviewed privately, the court must announce its verdict publicly. Judges, police investigators, and other concerned agencies have yet to fully implement the code, in part due to the lack of executive regulations. The absence of such regulations has opened the door to personal interpretation and led to abuses and violations.

There are also important provisions in the Saudi Basic Law that need implementation and monitoring. For example, defendants must be afforded the right to a speedy trial, and Article 114 of the Basic Law, which permits detention of suspects for up to six months, must not be interpreted freely. Interrogators must also be monitored to prevent abuse of their right under Article 69 to investigate suspects in the absence of a lawyer when they deem appropriate. Ensuring protection of the rights provided by the Basic Law necessitates establishing a Saudi supreme court with the authority to overrule laws that contradict the Basic Law. The recently-announced Supreme Court, established as per the King's judicial reforms, seems to lack this authority. Ordinary courts are ill-suited for such a task, lacking both the expertise and the needed clout.

Political reform initiatives in Saudi Arabia will be meaningful only if the ruling establishment begins to allow for dissent, free circulation of information, improve respect for human rights, and take serious steps towards holding accountable those involved in torture and mistreatment of civilians.

*Muhammad Helmy is managing editor of Rawaq 'Arabi, a publication of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies. Dina Bishara translated this article from Arabic.*

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## Readers React

It is extraordinary that Sarkis Naoum's [article](#) (September 2007) about the Lebanese presidential issue never once mentions political murder. The legal/constitutional dispute is a fake dispute because the opposition claims are transparently threadbare; the reality is a struggle for existence between the March 14 alignment and Syria and its allies, who have absolutist requirements. It is difficult to imagine a genuine truce when Saad Hariri and Walid Jumblat regard Hizballah as the friend and protector of murderers, and Hizballah regards becoming an "empowered minority" as meaning its own takeover of the country. At the time of writing, the most salient option is none of Naoum's five, all of which imply capitulation of the majority. On 24 November, in the absence of agreement, Prime Minister Siniora's cabinet will automatically assume presidential functions under article 62 of the Constitution; opposition assent or dissent is irrelevant. That is, unless bullying and the serial murder campaign finally succeed in cracking majority resolve or in destroying the government's two-thirds quorum. The avarice of individual Maronites to occupy the presidential seat is also of course a factor.

*William Harris  
Professor, Department of Politics  
University of Otago, New Zealand*

Muhammad Abu Rumman's [article](#) (July 2007) is an important, illuminating overview of fissures among Sunni insurgents in Iraq, especially following the declaration of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and its strategic missteps. The ISI was ultimately an act of desperation by transnational Salafi-jihadists to present a rival nationalist narrative to more Iraq-centric groups. Aside from its dogmatic demands of allegiance, which Abu Rumman highlights, the ISI's assassination of nationalist insurgent leaders such as Harith Zahir al-Dari of the 1920 Revolution Brigades provoked a significant internal backlash. Yet the real impact of the ISI may be felt outside Iraq, in its effect on global Salafi-jihadist deliberations about the advisability of establishing a proto-caliphate before the ejection of foreign occupiers and without any viable governing institutions, as well as larger debates related to ideological purity, political participation and nationalist legitimacy. These divisions certainly define the Iraqi insurgent landscape, but also transcend it, reverberating in conflict zones as diverse as Afghanistan, Somalia, and Algeria.

*Frederic M. Wehrey  
International Policy Analyst  
The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA*

Send your views on what you have read in the *Arab Reform Bulletin* to the editor at [arb@carnegieendowment.org](mailto:arb@carnegieendowment.org).

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## News and Views

**Yemen, Morocco: New Millennium Challenge Corporation Agreements; Fact Sheet**

In September 2007, the [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#) (MCC) approved a two-year \$20.6 million threshold program with Yemen to fight corruption, increase judicial capacity, improve elections, and strengthen the investment climate. After suspending Yemen from eligibility for threshold assistance in November 2005 due to a decline in eight categories (including corruption control, regulatory quality, trade policy, and fiscal policy) MCC reinstated Yemen as eligible for threshold assistance in February 2007, citing a series of reforms. Broad improvements in governance would be necessary for Yemen to become eligible for a full MCC compact.

The MCC also signed a compact agreement valued at \$698 million--representing a six-fold increase in annual U.S. assistance--with Morocco in August. The planned projects will target productivity and employment in agriculture, fisheries, and tourism, and the financial sector, as well as promoting entrepreneurship among young people.

Click [here](#) for a fact sheet on the MCC and Arab countries compiled by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

### **Egypt: Media and Human Rights Crackdown; Brotherhood Leaders Released**

On October 7, twenty-two Egyptian newspapers staged a one-day strike to protest the recent crackdown on independent journalists. The latest case came on September 24, as *al-Wafd* opposition newspaper editor Anwar al-Hawari, deputy editor Mahmoud Ghalab, and political editor Amir Salim were convicted under Article 102 of the penal code for publishing news that "disturbs public security," after the newspaper published the minutes of a closed session of the Shura Council's Legislation Committee. The three editors were sentenced to two years in prison and ordered to pay 2201 Egyptian pounds (US \$397) each in fines and damages. They filed an appeal and are free on 5,000 Egyptian pounds (US \$895) bail each. Click [here](#) for details. On September 13, four independent newspaper editors received similar sentences for criticizing President Mubarak and Gamal Mubarak.

In a related development, the trial of Ibrahim Eissa, editor of the Egyptian daily *al-Dustur* has been postponed to October 24, 2007. Eissa was charged on September 5 with publishing false rumors that President Husni Mubarak was seriously ill. On October 1, the court announced that eight additional related charges have been filed against Eissa, seven of which have been filed by lawyers affiliated with the ruling National Democratic Party. Click [here](#) for more information.

The Cairo Governor's Office shut down the [Association for Human Rights Legal Aid](#), which reports on human rights violations and provides legal assistance to victims, and took control of its assets on September 18. The governor had issued a decree September 4 that ordered the closure of the organization, citing article 17 of the Law on Associations (84/2002), which bans nongovernmental organizations from receiving foreign funding without prior government permission. The organization has appealed the decree before the Administrative Court, and a hearing was set for October 21. Click [here](#) for details. The White House expressed "deep concern" at the closure and the crackdown on journalists; click [here](#) for the statement.

Muslim Brotherhood political department chief Isam al-Aryan and nine other leading Brotherhood members were released from detention on October 6. The men were arrested on August 27 in an escalating Egyptian crackdown on political dissent. On October 3, the State Security Court ordered the release of senior members Mohyi Hamid, Mahmoud Ghazlan, and Mustafa al-Ghonaimi within fifteen days.

Two Egyptian activists for Shi'i rights were detained and questioned on September 29, after they criticized torture in Egyptian prisons. The Public Prosecutor charged Muhammad al-Dereini and Ahmed Sobh under Article 98(f) of the penal code with "promoting extreme Shi'i beliefs with the intent of creating contempt for the Islamic religion," and under Article 102 with "spreading false rumors" to "undermine trust in security agencies." Conviction on these charges can result in up to five years in prison. Click [here](#) for more information.

Authorities detained eight trade unionists at a giant textile factory north of Cairo on September 24 on accusations of "unlawful gathering" and "destruction of public property." Thousands of workers at the government-owned Misr Spinning and Weaving Company went on strike September 23 to protest unpaid profit shares and low wages. The strike ended September 29 after management agreed to give higher bonuses and improve working conditions. Since 2006, local media have documented over 200 instances of labor unrest, primarily demanding wage increases, in Egypt.

### **Lebanon: Presidential Elections; Anti-Syrian MP Assassinated**

Parliament adjourned a session to elect a new president until October 23, after members of the Hizballah-led opposition bloc boycotted and the required two-thirds quorum was not reached. The opposition wants to prevent the Western-backed majority from electing an anti-Syrian head of state. President Emile Lahoud is due to step down no later than November 23, by which time the parliament must choose a successor who, by political consensus, must be a Maronite Christian. Leading presidential candidates include Nasib Lahoud, Boutros Harb, Robert Ghanim, Jean Obeid, and Michel Aoun.

MP Antoine Ghanim, a member of the Maronite Phalange Party, was assassinated September 19 in a car bomb attack in the mainly Christian Sin al-Fil District in East Beirut. MP Ghanem belonged to the March 14 coalition led by Prime Minister

Fouad Siniora, which now has a dwindling majority of 67 in the 128-seat parliament. Since the February 2005 murder of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, six March 14 MPs have been assassinated.

### **Syria: Blogger Sentenced**

On September 23, the Supreme State Security Court convicted online writer Ali Zine al-Abidine Mejan of "writings unauthorized by the government that harm ties with a foreign state" and sentenced him to two years in prison for posting online commentaries criticizing Saudi Arabia. Syrian authorities have held two men in incommunicado detention since June 2007 for expressing online views that are critical of the Syrian government. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Jordan: Ex-Legislator Sentenced; IAF to Contest Elections; Publication Restrictions**

A state security court sentenced on October 9 former parliamentarian Ahmad Oweidi al-Abadi to two years in prison for "attacking the state's prestige and reputation." Al-Abadi, a member of parliament 1989-1993 and 1997-2001 and head of the Jordan National Movement (a party not recognized by the government) was arrested on May 3 after posting an open letter to U.S. senator Harry Reid on his party's [website](#) that accused Interior Minister Eid al-Fayez and other government members of corruption. Click [here](#) for more information.

Jordan's principal opposition party, the Islamic Action Front, issued a statement on September 25 announcing that it will participate in parliamentary elections scheduled for November 20 "in view of the difficult national and regional situation and to spare our youth from pessimism and depression." The Front had threatened to boycott elections, alleging that the current electoral law favors tribal constituencies over the Islamist-strongholds of Palestinian-populated cities.

The Jordanian Press and Publications Department announced on September 25 that regulations of the Press and Publications Law will be extended to websites and online publications. The department stated that it will not attempt to censor content, but will monitor it and prosecute if needed. Journalists and civil rights activists protested the measure as "damaging to freedom of expression." The press law provides for fines of up to 28,000 Jordanian Dinars (approx. US \$40,000) for defamation, libel, and insult to religious beliefs, or publishing material that fuels sectarianism or racism.

### **Tunisia: Pressure on Newspaper; Activists' Hunger Strike**

A Tunisian court on October 1 ordered the eviction of the opposition weekly *al-Mawkiif* from its offices. Editor-in-chief Rachid Khechana called the eviction a punishment for publishing a joint statement with the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) calling for political reform on July 25, 2007. *Al-Mawkiif* Director Nejib Chebbi and Secretary General of the PDP Mia al-Gariby have been on a hunger strike since September 20 to protest the government's use of the judicial system to intimidate reformists. Lotfi Hajji, the local correspondent for *al-Jazeera*, was physically abused by plain-clothed police four times between September 20 and 27 as he tried to report on the hunger strike. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Algeria: FIS Leader Arrested**

Algerian police arrested Abdel Qader Bourkhamkham, a founding leader of the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), on October 3 at Jijel airport as he was boarding a plane to the capital. Authorities did not announce a reason for the arrest, but observers attribute it to a September 22 online statement in which Bourkhamkham denied Islamist involvement in armed activities, attributed the violence to pro-government forces, and called al-Qaeda operations in the Maghreb countries a myth. Boukhamkham was previously sentenced to five years in prison in 1991, of which he served three together with other FIS leaders.

### **Morocco: New Cabinet; Journalist Sentenced to Jail**

Morocco announced on October 15 its new thirty-three member government, led by Prime Minister Abbas al-Fassi. Al-Fassi, previously Minister of State without portfolio, is leader of the nationalist Istiqlal (Independence) party, which won a plurality in September 7 elections for the lower house of parliament. The most significant cabinet changes include new Finance Minister Salaheddine Mezouar and Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri. Minister of Interior Chekib Binmoussa and Minister of Islamic Affairs Ahmed Toufiq will continue in their positions, considered key to national security. The new cabinet includes seven women, up from two in the previous government, and is formed of a coalition of Istiqlal, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, the National Rally of Independents, and the Party of Progress and Socialism, plus independents. Al-Fassi did not invite the Islamist Party of Justice and Development, which won the second highest number of seats in the elections, to join the government. Click [here](#) for the cabinet line-up in Arabic.

A Casablanca court of appeals sentenced *al-Watan al-An* journalist Mustafa Hurmatallah to seven months in prison September 18 for publishing a leaked internal security memo. Hurmatallah had appealed an earlier sentence of eight months on the same charge. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Saudi Arabia: Succession Law; Judicial Reforms; Women Driving Campaign**

Saudi King Abdullah issued a royal decree outlining regulations to implement the October 2006 succession law aimed at ensuring a smooth transition of power. The succession law created a committee, to be comprised of sons and grandsons of Abdul Aziz al-Saud, the Kingdom's founder, to select crown princes, thus future kings. The new rules will not apply to succession after King Abdullah, who has already chosen Prince Sultan al-Saud to follow him. Succession in the past has been decided by a small group of powerful royals; the new procedures aim to broaden the process.

The Saudi King announced on October 3 a comprehensive overhaul of the Kingdom's legal system. The King issued a number of new laws regulating the judiciary and the Board of Grievances and allocated seven billion Saudi riyals (approx. \$2 billion) for the planned reforms. The new rules, which emphasize the independence of judges, set up a supreme court whose main functions will be to oversee the implementation *sharia* as well as laws issued by the king, commercial courts, labor courts, personal status courts, and a fund for training judges. The Board of Grievances will continue to handle administrative disputes involving government departments. Currently, justice in Saudi Arabia is administered by a system of religious courts, and judges have wide discretion to issue rulings according to their own interpretation of Islamic *sharia*. Click [here](#) for more information.

Over 1,100 Saudi activists, men and women, petitioned Saudi King Abdullah on September 23 to lift a ban on driving for women. The petition, submitted on Saudi Arabia's National Day, is the brainchild of four activists (Fawzia al-Ayouni, Wajiha al-Huwaider, Ibtihal Mubarak, and Haifa Usra) who established the Committee for Women's Rights to Drive. This petition marks the second major effort by women to break the ban on driving. In November 1990, a group of forty-seven women defied the ban in Riyadh, only to be rounded up by police. The following year, a fatwa was issued by then-mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bin Baz prohibiting women from driving. Click [here](#) to view the petition in Arabic.

Lawyer Isam Basrawi, one of nine advocates of an Islam-based constitutional monarchy, was released from prison on September 22 after being held without trial for more than seven months. His release came after a September 13 petition to King Abdullah signed by 135 activists calling for the nine detainees (who include lawyers, university professors, and businessmen) to be freed or tried publicly. The interior ministry attributed their arrest to alleged involvement in terror funding. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Oman: Run-up to Shura Elections**

Elections for Oman's Shura Council will be held on October 27, with 717 candidates (including 20 women) running in 61 districts. Districts with more than 30,000 inhabitants will elect two members; smaller ones will choose one member each. All nationals aged 21 and above are qualified to vote and stand as candidates. A total of 338,683 voters has registered for this year's ballot, an increase of 50 per cent compared to the last election in 2003.

### **United Arab Emirates: Jail Sentence for Journalists Abolished**

UAE prime minister Sheikh [Muhammad bin Rashid al-Maktum](#) decreed on September 25 that journalists can no longer be imprisoned for reasons relating to their work, setting a first for the decriminalization of media offenses in the region. A long-time demand of journalists, the decision came two days after a Dubai court sentenced two journalists to two months in prison for libel against a woman involved in a domestic dispute. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Kuwait: TV Producer Charged with Insulting Shi'a**

The Kuwaiti Public Prosecutor charged on October 1 Nayef al-Rashid, producer of a controversial television series, with insulting Shi'i beliefs and practices and producing a program for the Saudi-owned satellite channel MBC without prior approval by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information. The TV series had already been banned.

### **Bahrain: NDI Returns; Cabinet Change; Anti-Corruption Efforts**

Bahrain's Crown Prince, Sheikh Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, announced on September 22 a campaign to combat corruption and bring corrupt high officials to justice. A wide-ranging investigation into the country's major government-owned companies resulted in the criminal prosecution of a number of high executives in Bahrain's Aluminum Company (ALBA) and Gulf Air.

The Bahrain government announced on September 25 that the National Democratic Institute (NDI) will resume its work in Bahrain under the supervision of Bahrain's governmental Institute for Political Development (BIPD) with a series of training programs for parliamentarians. NDI's operations in Bahrain were suspended and its representative was ordered out of Bahrain in May 2006, several months before parliamentary elections.

Two ministers left office in September under pressure from parliament. Minister of Health Nada Haffad was removed from office September 25 following a parliamentary probe into deteriorating health services and alleged mismanagement. Haffad, Bahrain's first female minister, had announced that she would resign if the parliament continued to abuse its investigatory powers for political gains. Information minister Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar was also removed from office on September 25; he was facing a parliamentary investigation for allowing an allegedly provocative dance performance at a cultural festival. He was also facing criticism from the business community for measures banning alcohol and entertainment in hotels.

The opposition al-Wefaq parliamentary bloc submitted on September 19 draft amendments to the controversial Public Gatherings Law. The current law stipulates that permission of the Ministry of Interior is to be obtained three days before a public gathering and that rallies may not take place within 500 meters of a school or a health center. The Law provides for a jail sentence of up to six months for violations. Al-Wefaq's amendments seek to reduce the notice period to 24 hours, remove geographical restrictions, and reduce the jail sentence to one month.

Eleven Bahraini human rights organizations, opposition groups, and representatives from the International Center for Transitional Justice met in a conference September 24-27 to discuss a proposed Truth and Reconciliation Committee to address government human rights violations from the 1970s to the 1990s. The Committee's launch date was set for December 10, 2007, the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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### Upcoming Political Events

- Lebanon: Parliamentary session to elect president, October 23, 2007
- Oman: Shura Council Elections, October 27, 2007
- Egypt: National Democratic Party Conference: November 3-6, 2007
- Jordan: Legislative Elections, November 20, 2007
- Middle East International Meeting, Annapolis MD, November 2007 (tentative)
- Algeria: Municipal Elections, November 29, 2007

### Views from the Arab Media

- The "sense of Congress" resolution supporting a federal solution for Iraq recently approved by the U.S. Senate is a misguided step that will only lead to greater divisions and conflict, argues Jordanian writer Muhammad Barhouma in an October 11 [article](#) in *al-Ghad*. According to him, the resolution calls for a strictly sectarian division of the country, but Iraqis should instead strive to reach a consensus-based federal democratic solution that will allow for administrative autonomy within a unified Iraq.
- In an October 2 [article](#) in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Saudi writer Tariq al-Humayad hails the recent *fatwa* by Saudi Arabia's grand mufti prohibiting Saudi youth from traveling abroad under the pretext of jihad as a long-awaited positive development. The *fatwa* have a far-reaching impact on both Saudi youth and their parents he believes, and he hopes that it will take away a card that some politicized sheikhs have been exploiting.
- In a September 27 [article](#) in *al-Hayat*, Arab-Israeli activist Azmi Bishara writes that the recent push for peace is aimed only at polishing Israeli Prime Minister Olmert's image following his defeat in the 2006 Israeli war against Lebanon. According to Bishara, the Arab regimes are doing their utmost to portray Olmert as a peace partner and to burnish his image without guaranteeing anything in return, not even a pledge to implement the Arab peace initiative.
- The September 25 [episode](#) of al-Jazeera's "al-Ittijaah al-Mu'akis" (the Opposite Direction) debated the current standoff between the West and Iran. Iranian affairs expert Muhammad al-Hussaini viewed Western threats to Iran as "Nazi" attempts to weaken and dominate the Muslim world. On the other hand, U.S.-based Syrian political analyst Walid Faris supported Western efforts to contain the Iranian regime, accusing it of supporting terrorism, destabilizing the region, and exploiting the issue of Palestine to gain Arab sympathy.
- Several articles discuss the political crisis in Lebanon:

- While the Lebanese opposition and MP Saad al-Hariri are serious in their efforts to resolve the political crisis, the March 14 alliance and their regional backers are constrained by fear of U.S. reactions to a compromise, writes Ibrahim al-Amine in an October 1 [article](#) in *al-Akhbar*. The March 14 alliance is attempting to divide the opposition by tempting General Michel Aoun with the presidency in exchange for giving up his alliance with Hizballah.
- It will be very difficult for the Lebanese to elect a compromise president, as any future president will inevitably be in conflict with either the U.S.-Israeli camp or the Iran-Syria camp, or both, argues Lebanese columnist Hussam Ittani in his September 26 [article](#) in *al-Safir*.
- In a September 20 [article](#) in *al-Nahar*, Lebanese politician and writer Ghassan Tuani criticizes Syria for continuing to sabotage Lebanese progress towards establishing a true state by assassinating Lebanese politicians. He calls on the United Nations and the international community to try to work to protect the remaining Lebanese politicians from a similar fate and to help Lebanon elect a new president.

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## Read On

Recent publications on **Iraq** include:

- U.S. attempts to create an Iraqi military are facing difficulties similar to those of the British mandate in 1921, and are producing the same Iraqi public reactions, contends Ibrahim al-Marashi in “[Disbanding and Rebuilding the Iraqi Army: the Historical Perspective](#)” (*Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 3, September 2007).
- In “Iraq and Vietnam: Some Unsettling Parallels,” Ted Galen Carpenter concludes that the conflict in Iraq resembles a Hobbesian struggle of all against all that will continue to bewilder U.S. military commanders (*Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Summer 2007, 21-30).
- In *al-Ihtilal al-amriki lil-Iraq: al-mash’had al-akheer (The U.S. Invasion of Iraq: the Final Act)*, a number of Arab and American scholars examine the U.S.-lead invasion of Iraq and its consequences (Beirut, Center for Arab Unity Studies, August 2007). Click [here](#) for a table of contents in Arabic.

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

- Top-down liberalizing reforms in Gulf States are setting the stage for wider enfranchisement of civil society, argue Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Steven Wright in “[Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies: From Liberalization to Enfranchisement](#)” (*International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 5, September 2007).
- In [Ramifications of the Second and Third Gulf Wars on the Security of the Gulf States: A Comparative Study](#), Ashraf al-Eissawi concludes that the Third Gulf War, the invasion of Iraq, and U.S. attempts to restructure the region have increased the danger of terrorism and extremism (Dubai, Gulf Research Center, October 2007). Click [here](#) for an Arabic summary.
- The September issue of *Araa’ (Opinions)*, published by the Gulf Research Center, includes analysis of civil society in the Gulf States, oil and economic reforms, and challenges to U.S. foreign policy in the region. Click [here](#) for a table of contents and selected articles in Arabic.

Several new publications discuss **reform-related developments in specific Arab countries**:

- The U.S. State Department’s [International Religious Freedom Report 2007](#) documents numerous violations of religious freedom in Arab countries and declares **Saudi Arabia** and **Sudan** “Countries of Particular Concern.”

- The September 2007 issue of the *Election Observer Bulletin*, published by Arab Election Watch, includes analysis of past and upcoming elections and electoral laws in **Syria, Jordan, Algeria, and Egypt**. Click [here](#) for Arabic.
- The World Bank's *Doing Business 2007* places **Egypt** at the top of the world's business reformers list, for greatly improving its business regulations and competitiveness. Saudi Arabia ranks second in the region.
- Despite the existence of a separate family status law, the informal application of *sharia* in courts presents difficulties for Copts in **Egypt**, according to Adel Guindy in "[Family Status Issues Among Egyptian Copts: A Brief Overview](#)" (*Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 3, September 2007).
- Hizbollah's regional role is likely to expand with the growing strength of Tehran and the fading of **Syria's** influence over **Lebanon**, concludes Robert Rabil in "Has Hezbollah's Rise Come at Syria's Expense?" (*Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 4, Fall 2007, 43-51).
- The summer 2007 issue of *al-Ghaida' (Woman)* published by the Women's Affairs Center in Gaza monitors the women's rights situation in **Gaza**, emphasizing the recent increase in honor killings that go unpunished. Click [here](#) for Arabic.

Two new publications address **media freedom**:

- In "[Media in the Arab World between Liberalization and Reproducing State Domination: a Study of Audio-Visual Broadcasting in Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco](#)," Essam Edin Hassan, Muhammad Quotaishat, and Abdel Karim Abdullaoui contend that governments continue to upgrade mechanisms to restrict freedom of expression (Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, September 24, 2007). Click [here](#) for Arabic.
- As Morocco moves slowly from authoritarianism to managed democracy, continuous government interventions stifle freedom of the press and weaken civil society, contends A.E. Souaiaia in "[Politics of Appearance: Religion, Law, and the Press in Morocco](#)" (*Muslim Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 4, No. 2, September 2007).

Other publications discuss **region-wide developments and U.S. policy**:

- In "[Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World](#)," Steven Heydemann argues that Arab autocratic regimes have adapted to external pressures for reform by formulating new mechanisms of political and economic control that blunt the impact of Western democracy promotion programs (Brookings Institute Analysis Paper No. 13, October 2007).
- In "A Quarter-Century of Promoting Democracy," Thomas Carothers, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Larry Diamond, Anwar Ibrahim, and Zainab Hawa Bangura contend that the past twenty-five years have seen great advances in democracy promotion, but new challenges are emerging (*Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 18, No. 4, October 2007). Click [here](#) for table of contents.
- In "[Pushback or Progress? Arab Regimes Respond to Democracy's Challenge](#)," Barry Rubin argues that Arab regimes are using a variety of tools to neutralize the democratization challenge, with potentially profound consequences on future Arab governance. (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus No. 75, September 2007).
- According to Azmi Bishara in *Fi al-mas'ala al-'arabiya: muqaddima li-bayan dimoqrati 'arabi (On the Arab issue: a Prelude for an Arab Democratic Declaration)*, obstacles to democratization in the Arab world can be overcome only through a cooperative pan-Arab democratization project driven by Arab activists (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, September 2007). Click [here](#) for a table of contents in Arabic.
- The October 2007 issue of *al-Mustaqbal al-'arabi (Arab Future)*, published by the Center for Arab Unity Studies, includes analysis of political and economic development in Iraq and a special report on expatriate labor in Gulf

states. Click [here](#) for a table of contents in Arabic.

- The Center for Arab Unity Studies' fall 2007 issue of *al-Majalla al-'arabiya lil-'ulum al-siyasiya (Arab Journal of Political Science)* contains a special report on democracy, elections, and political parties in the Arab world, including case studies of Morocco and Bahrain. Click [here](#) for a table of contents in Arabic.
- The September 2007 issue of *Rawaq 'arabi (Arab Pavilion)*, published by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights', includes several articles that address constitutional protections of human rights in Egypt, Syria and Morocco. Click [here](#) for Arabic.
- The September 2007 issue of *Sawasiya (Equal)*, published by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, discusses Iraqi politics, election fraud, and the future of democratic change in the Arab world. Click [here](#) for Arabic.
- The fall 2007 issue of the *Middle East Report* focuses on issues of displacement and refugees in the Arab world.

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