

**POPULAR PROTEST IN NORTH AFRICA AND
THE MIDDLE EAST (IX): DALLYING WITH REFORM
IN A DIVIDED JORDAN**

Middle East/North Africa Report N°118 – 12 March 2012

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POPULAR PROTEST IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST (IX): DALLYING WITH REFORM IN A DIVIDED JORDAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Something is brewing in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. It is not so much that protests have been spreading since 2011; the country has experienced these before and so far they remain relatively small. It is, rather, who is behind them and from where dissatisfaction stems. East Bankers – Jordanians who inhabited the area before the arrival of the first Palestinian refugees in 1948 – have long formed the pillar of support for a regime that played on their fears concerning the Palestinian-origin majority. That pillar is showing cracks. The authorities retain several assets: popular anxiety about instability; U.S. and Gulf Arab political and material support; and persistent intercommunal divisions within the opposition. But in a fast-changing region, they would be reckless to assume they can avoid both far-reaching change and turmoil. Ultimately, they must either undertake the former one or experience the latter.

The season of Arab uprisings neither engulfed Jordan nor entirely passed it by. Frustration had begun to bubble up in 2010; the following year, a series of protests of modest size but not modest significance brought together a wide popular spectrum: East Bankers, but also citizens of Palestinian origin, Islamists as well as unaffiliated youth. Those who took to the streets had various grievances, but at their core they were expressing anger with the state of the economy, ostentatious corruption, unaccountability and the concentration of power in the hands of the few.

In the past, it was relatively easy for the monarchy to play on a fault line that has come to define the Jordanian polity, that separating East Bankers from Palestinian Jordanians. The former believe they are the country's genuine inhabitants and fear usurpation of their traditional dominance by the more numerous citizens of Palestinian origin. Their support for the monarchy has stemmed in part from their over-representation in the public sector, the security services and – by dint of gerrymandered electoral districting – parliament. Conversely, Palestinian Jordanians have felt marginalised, shut out from key state positions and at times treated as disloyal; the memory of the bloody 1970 civil war in which Palestinian groups were defeated by

regime forces also informs their perception of central authorities and contributes to a lingering sense of exclusion.

Divisions between the two communities have economic, social and political overtones: East Bankers generally are rural, while Palestinian-Jordanians typically hail from urban centres; the former dominate the public sector, the latter are present in private businesses; and the powerful Islamist movement tends to be more Palestinian-Jordanian than East Banker. This time, too, as protests developed, underlying communal tensions did not go unnoticed. East Bankers at times portrayed Palestinian-Jordanians as greedy capitalists, unpatriotic citizens or worrying Islamists. In turn, Palestinian-Jordanians have been skittish about taking the lead in demonstrations, fearful of a nationalist backlash.

Today, however, it has become much trickier for the regime to contain the protests by dividing the protesters. East Bankers increasingly are fed up too. Their rural strongholds have suffered from the near collapse of the agricultural sector and sharply curtailed public spending that began in the 1990s. Their habitual source of strength – their ties to the state – has been severely damaged by the wave of privatisations that began in the mid-1990s as well as by skyrocketing (and largely unpunished) high-level corruption. The net result of both dynamics has been to shift resources away from them and toward a new, narrow private sector elite with privileged access to the palace. As a result, many East Bankers have reached the conclusion that addressing their economic grievances will require political change, including deep constitutional and electoral reform. At the same time, the powerful Islamist movement has shown itself to be pragmatic in its demands.

This has not erased communal divisions; to an extent, it reinforces them, as East Bankers can blame their hardships on corruption and privatisation, which they associate with the largely Palestinian urban economic elites. But it has undermined the regime and led to unprecedented attacks by its East Banker, rural and tribal constituency. Some cross-communal coalitions have emerged around specific demands for political reform, challenging the hegemony of identity politics. Most East Bankers and Palestinian-

Jordanians are still not united in their anger, but they are simultaneously angry. That is a start.

The regime has responded in time-honoured fashion. The king has shuffled cabinets and then shuffled them again, using prime ministers as buffers to absorb popular discontent. He has charged committees to explore possible reforms, but these remain largely unimplemented. Too, the authorities appear to have sought to exacerbate communal antagonisms. Several demonstrations have been attacked by individuals resorting to explicitly divisive slogans and seeking to stir up anti-Palestinian feelings or, in some cases, inter-tribal rivalry. The regime has resisted creating independent investigations, making it hard to establish authorship. But the level of organisation and the fact that thugs were neither arrested nor held to account raises suspicions.

So far, this mix of tactics arguably has worked. Protesters have failed to reach critical mass, and images from Syria almost certainly dampen the appeal of a protest movement, lest it trigger chaos. But these are poor substitutes for tackling the causes of anger. A far wiser course would be to deal seriously with the issues that unite all those – East Bankers and Palestinian-Jordanians alike – whose impatience is fast growing. A credible electoral reform that provides fairer representation of urban centres would be a huge start. While some East Bankers are reluctant to see urban areas acquire greater political weight, increased government attention to rural socio-economic needs would go a long way in allaying those fears. Other steps would resonate widely: narrowing the State Security Court's jurisdiction (before ultimately abolishing the institution altogether); ensuring tangible accountability for corruption and human rights violations; granting genuine powers to parliament by giving it a lead role in choosing the prime minister; establishing an elected Senate; and ending – or at least dramatically reducing – the political role of unelected bodies, the security services prime among them.

There is always the temptation for the regime to wait and to postpone. But the gradual disaffection of the monarchy's core constituency coupled with efforts to unify opposition ranks by transcending debilitating divisions could portend a new chapter in the Arab uprisings' unfolding drama. And by then, it would be too late.

Amman/Brussels, 12 March 2012

POPULAR PROTEST IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST (IX): DALLYING WITH REFORM IN A DIVIDED JORDAN

I. INTRODUCTION: JORDAN'S TROUBLED SPRING

A. DIVIDED POLITY, CONVERGING DEMANDS

Echoing events throughout the region, Jordanians took to the streets in 2011. The relatively small size of the protests belied their significance in that this time they were dominated by segments of the regime's historical support base, East Bank Jordanians.¹ Over time, these protests evolved to include a wide spectrum of the population, including citizens of Palestinian origin, Islamists and unaffiliated youth.

While each of these constituencies expressed specific grievances and demands, the protest movement's overall thrust crystallised around the call to end political and economic corruption. At its core, the discontent expressed lack of public confidence in politics and governance more than a decade after King Abdullah II's 1999 accession to the throne. Despite continuous official talk of political reform sustained by successive public-relations campaigns, decision-making continues to lack both transparency and accountability, remaining concentrated in the royal palace. Opportunities for ordinary citizens, whether of East Banker or Palestinian origin, to participate in politics remain scarce; their elected representatives in parliament have little influence. Accordingly, protesters emphasised the need for greater separation of powers, increased political participation and effective government accountability. The tone and main objective of Jordan's Arab Spring protests so far have been to reform, not overthrow, the regime.

The common concerns uniting the demonstrators masked substantive differences among them. The principal fault

line separates East Bankers from Palestinian-Jordanians. These two communities' historically fraught relationship and often disconnected realities have stymied the protest movement and stand in the way of establishing a more coherent opposition. Unsurprisingly, reform-averse elements within the regime have sought to exploit these differences.

While East Bankers form the historical pillar of the Hashemite monarchy, Palestinians began arriving en masse only two years after the kingdom was established in 1946.² The political integration of these refugees, most of whom were granted citizenship after Jordan annexed the West Bank in 1950, was reversed after the 1970-1971 "Black September" civil war that pitted the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) against the monarchy. Over time, Palestinian refugee camps increasingly fell under the sway of the Muslim Brotherhood, which the authorities supported at the time,³ even as they simultaneously repressed nationalist Palestinian groups such as the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Palestinian Communist Party and Fatah.

Palestinian-Jordanians have been shut out from both the public sector and security apparatus since Black September; they also have suffered at the hands of an electoral law based on gerrymandered districts that privilege rural East Banker areas at the expense of Palestinian-dominated urban centres.⁴ In reaction, the Palestinian-Jordanian elite

¹ Jordanians who inhabited the area before the arrival of the first Palestinian refugees in 1948 usually are referred to by foreign academics as "Transjordanians", in reference to the name that Great Britain gave the territory after installing Abdullah bin al-Hussein as emir in 1921. However, this term is both anachronistic and confusing, as it could be seen as referring to both banks of the River Jordan, including the Palestinian-inhabited West Bank. "East Banker", commonly used in English-language literature, comes closest to the term used by Jordanians themselves, which translates from Arabic as "East Jordanians".

² The Emirate of Transjordan became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1946, when Jordan gained independence from the British mandate authorities. During the 1948 war, Jordan occupied the West Bank, which voted to remain part of the kingdom in a 1950 referendum. Israel occupied the West Bank as a result of the 1967 war. King Hussein severed administrative ties with the West Bank in 1988 and signed a peace agreement with Israel in 1994. Today, most Jordanians are of Palestinian origin, although there are no publicly available statistics on the country's exact demographic balance.

³ Official support for the Brotherhood came in the wake of the Islamists' neutral stance during the 1970-1971 conflict. See Mohammad Abu Rumman, *The Muslim Brotherhood in the 2007 Jordanian Parliamentary Elections: A Passing 'Political Setback' or Diminished Popularity?* (Amman, 2007).

⁴ This also has had the effect of nurturing tribal and clan loyalties at the expense of a unified, national political identity. For a detailed account of the motivations and mechanisms of the sin-

has invested heavily in the private sector, in which it eventually came to play a leading role. Most refugees moved out of the camps and into the Amman-Zarqa-Irbid conurbation that attracted most infrastructure and industrial development.⁵ By contrast, rural East Banker strongholds suffered from the near collapse of the agricultural sector and curtailed public spending from the 1990s onwards.⁶ Worse, even East Bankers who traditionally benefited from ties to the state were hurt by the wave of privatisations that began in 1996,⁷ as well as by greater high-level economic corruption, both of which shifted resources away from them and toward a new private sector elite with privileged access to the palace.

Socio-economic disparities between the two communities fuelled a “nationalist” East Banker discourse in which Palestinian-Jordanians figured alternatively as greedy capitalists or treacherous Islamists, disloyal and unpatriotic. This has undermined the protest movement and provided opportunities for the regime to exacerbate communal tensions.⁸ While the effort has met with some success, not all East Bankers subscribe to such negative views of Palestinian-Jordanians; some pro-reform activists believe that the communities have suffered equally from mounting corruption and political stagnation and are seeking to bridge communal divides by offering detailed proposals for political reform that include a new electoral law benefiting East Bankers and Palestinian-Jordanians alike.⁹

B. CITIZENS MOBILISE, THE REGIME RESPONDS

Jordan’s protests emerged from a period of mounting social and political mobilisation. This was expressed in several ways. Throughout 2010, public servants, Aqaba port workers, teachers and students, among others, took to the streets to demand better labour conditions and the freedom

to organise.¹⁰ On 1 May 2010, a group of military veterans issued an unprecedented petition warning that Jordan was becoming an “alternative” Palestinian homeland, a significant development considering the army’s large size and central role, particularly among East Bankers.¹¹ Moreover, the Islamic Action Front, the political branch of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood and the country’s largest opposition party, boycotted the November 2010 legislative elections on the ground that the electoral law passed that year failed to address the under-representation of urban areas, where support for the Islamists is strongest.¹²

In 2011, and with the wind of the Arab Spring at their backs, Jordanians stepped up their protests. The Jayeen movement – an East Banker coalition of day workers, pensioners, teachers, students and nationalist and left-wing groups – was created in the early days of January and emerged as an important actor. It called for a march in Amman on 14 January, labelled a “Day of Anger” to decry the rising cost of living and spread of corruption. Seeking to mollify the public and hoping to dampen support for the 14 January protest, the king took some pre-emptive measures. On 10 January, he summoned the government to implement a JD160 million (€170 million) emergency plan, capping food prices and cutting fuel taxes.¹³ The march nonetheless went ahead, and protesters denounced a narrow business-state elite perceived to be enriching itself through corrupt privatisation deals.

Further demonstrations followed, with protesters insisting that the king fire Prime Minister Samir al-Rifai, who in the eyes of many had come to symbolise the nexus between business and political elites.¹⁴ They insisted on greater political representation, demanding the dissolution of par-

gle ballot electoral law, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°10, *The Challenge of Political Reform: Jordanian Democratization and Regional Instability*, 8 October 2003, pp. 16-19.

⁵ Only 17 per cent, roughly 346,000 of the 2 million Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) live in refugee camps. See “Jordan camp profiles”, UNRWA (31 December 2010 figures).

⁶ See Jane Harrigan, Hamed El-Said and Chengang Wang, “The IMF and the World Bank in Jordan: a case of over-optimism and elusive growth”, *Review of International Organisations*, vol. 1 (2006), pp. 263-292.

⁷ “Economic Reforms”, Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Washington DC, undated.

⁸ See Section V below.

⁹ The National Front for Reform has put forward the most detailed common proposals, while other reformist coalitions have sought to work in an inclusive manner. See Sections II.A, III.A(3) and III.D below.

¹⁰ See “Labour protests during 2010”, Phenix Center in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, February 2011.

¹¹ “Famous 1st May Communiqué no. 1 first anniversary”, All of Jordan (www.allofjo.net), 1 May 2011. The National Committee of Retired Servicemen’s “Communiqué no. 1” was first released on 1 May 2010.

¹² See Curtis Ryan, “Jordan’s new electoral law: reform, reaction or status quo?”, *Foreign Policy Magazine*, The Middle East Channel, 24 May 2010.

¹³ “Jordan cuts taxes to offset food rises on poor”, Reuters, 11 January 2011.

¹⁴ Samir al-Rifai’s commitment to fiscal austerity earned the ire of public sector workers, while others criticised the dynastic nature of his tenure. He left a career in investment banking at the head of Jordan Dubai Capital to lead the government in 2009. His father, Zaid al-Rifai, was prime minister in four governments between 1973 and 1989, while Zaid’s father, Samir al-Rifai, served six times as prime minister between 1944 and 1963.

liament and free and fair early legislative elections under a new law.¹⁵

The king soon partially complied, using the tried-and-true tactic of replacing an unpopular prime minister. On 1 February, he replaced Rifai with Marouf al-Bakhit, a former prime minister (2005-2007) with a career in the military. Although Bakhit's persona and declared antipathy for neoliberal economic policy contrasted sharply with Rifai, his appointment drew mixed responses. While Jayeen members speculated that his East Banker origins might facilitate negotiations with East Banker protesters,¹⁶ his relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood was poor, partly because the 2007 parliamentary elections were rigged during his premiership.¹⁷ In his letter of appointment to the new prime minister, the king called on the government to hold a national dialogue concerning new electoral and political parties laws in order to address public concerns.¹⁸

Although the change in government and announcement of a national dialogue initially dampened street mobilisation, political dissent gathered fresh momentum in early February. Long-time opposition figures, including Laith Shubeilat, an independent Islamist, as well as other East Bankers accused high-ranking officials – including members of the royal family – of corruption. In an unprecedented development, 36 figures from prominent East Banker tribes signed a statement accusing Queen Rania of corruption and undue political interference.¹⁹ Further scandals ensured that corruption would remain at the top of the agenda, notably the Khaled Shahin saga in April 2011 and the controversial parliamentary hearings on the Dead Sea casino affair in June.²⁰

In February 2011, a new dynamic emerged at weekly reform protests, as regime supporters staged counter-dem-

onstrations. On 18 February, thugs assaulted pro-reform protesters and members of the media in Amman, resulting in eight injuries.²¹ A month later, on 24 March, a new, short-lived youth coalition held a peaceful overnight protest in central Amman, calling for political reform and an end to intelligence interference in civilian life. The second day, rock-and-baton-wielding individuals, soon joined by security forces, attacked the protesters, causing one death and over 100 injuries.²² While the attack had a dissuasive effect on protests over the following weeks, the sit-in marked the first time that mostly young citizens had mobilised around demands for political change, explicitly bridging the East Banker/Palestinian community divide. This set the stage for the emergence of subsequent coalitions, such as the National Front for Reform, that featured similarly unified demands and cross-community membership.

In mid-March, again seeking to quell the protest movement, the government established the National Dialogue Committee (NDC), charging former ministers, opposition figures and civil society actors with proposing amendments to the electoral and political parties laws within three months; it also created a less publicised Economic Dialogue Committee to suggest economic reforms. Like similar efforts in years past, however, the NDC soon lost momentum and public confidence, as the country's largest party, the Islamic Action Front, refused to participate, citing the committee's limited remit, which excluded constitutional reform. Meanwhile, the NDC's recommendations (including a new two-tier electoral law with a measure of proportional representation) were in effect shelved soon after they were delivered in June 2011.

In April, King Abdullah appointed a royal committee to draft a constitutional reform proposal.²³ Little information about the deliberations filtered out until it delivered its recommendations to the king in mid-August. Bakhit's government then submitted 41 recommended amendments to parliament, which debated and voted on them in nine days (15 to 24 September), passing the bulk of the amendments; the Senate then endorsed them in a mere two days, without further public consultation.²⁴ King Abdullah approved the

¹⁵ Previously, public frustration with politics had expressed itself most visibly in low voter turnout (30 per cent overall, lower still in the main cities of Amman and Zarqa) in the November 2010 elections. Official figures did not provide a breakdown by district. Crisis Group interview, Jordanian pollster, Amman, 26 January 2011.

¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Mohammad Sneid, Jayeen movement, Independent Day Workers' Union, Amman, 1 February 2011.

¹⁷ International observers were not permitted to monitor the elections. A Jordanian NGO that observed the elections reported vote-buying, multiple voting with forged identity cards, bussing of voters and complaints of voter list inaccuracy, as well as irregularities with the computerised voting system. "Voting Process Marred by Violence, Vote-Buying and Breaching the Secrecy of the Vote", Al-Hayat Center for Civil Society Development, 20 November 2007.

¹⁸ See Joel Greenberg, "Jordan's king dismisses cabinet", *The Washington Post* (online), 1 February 2011.

¹⁹ Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Jordan's tribes criticise queen's role", Reuters, 8 February 2011.

²⁰ See Section III.A(2).

²¹ "Eight hurt in Jordan clash: witnesses, medics", Agence France-Presse, 18 February 2011; "Journalists' union condemns what journalists were subjected to during peaceful march", *Al-Arab al-Yawm*, 19 February 2011.

²² Ranya Kadri and Ethan Bronner, "Riot police in Jordan clear camp of protesters", *The New York Times*, 25 March 2011; "Jordan: Set Independent Inquiry in Attacks on Protesters", Human Rights Watch, 28 March 2011.

²³ "King tasks panel to review Constitution", Media & Communication Directorate, Royal Hashemite Court, 26 April 2011. www.kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en_US/news/view/id/9125.html.

²⁴ See "House endorses constitutional amendments", Amman News, 24 September 2011; "Senate endorses changes to constitution", *The Jordan Times* (online), 29 September 2011.

constitutional changes on 30 September.²⁵ The opposition largely welcomed the changes but deemed them insufficient, insofar as they did not substantially alter the balance of power between parliament, government, the royal palace and security agencies.

Further protests were sparked by the government's early October announcement that it would not create new municipalities in time for the 27 December 2011 local elections, despite a law that planned separate municipalities for small towns with less than 5,000 inhabitants. In response, a wave of tribally-inspired demonstrations swept the country, employing disruptive tactics that contrasted sharply with ongoing orderly pro-reform protests.²⁶ Meanwhile, a protest rally in the village of Salhoub was attacked by armed thugs in mid-October, part of a pattern of such incidents.²⁷

Amid the multiple crises, the king ordered yet another cabinet reshuffle. In October, he replaced Bakhit with Awn al-Khasawneh, whose reputation for personal integrity primarily was earned abroad – as a judge and vice president of the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Little known to the Jordanian public, he was thus largely untainted.²⁸ He quickly declared his intention to review the municipalities law and promptly postponed local polls until mid-2012. In so doing, he defused tension, and municipality protests came to a halt.²⁹ Khasawneh also presented a roadmap designed to pave the way to legislative elections that included establishment of an independent electoral commission as required by the new constitution and passage of the electoral and political parties law that the previous administration had promised but failed to deliver.

In yet another move aimed at signalling his reform intentions, several high-profile figures were targeted in anti-corruption proceedings. Omar al-Maani, former mayor of Amman, was arrested on 13 December on charges of fraud and denied bail; then, on 25 January 2012, the government

imposed a travel ban on Mohammad Dahabi, former General Intelligence Directorate chief, and froze his assets.³⁰

Khasawneh's appointment arguably also signalled an effort by the regime to reach an accommodation with the Islamists. He swiftly invited the Islamic Action Front (IAF) for discussions on its possible inclusion in the cabinet and subsequently stated that Amman's 1999 decision to deport leaders of the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas had been both mistaken and unconstitutional. Although the IAF declined the invitation, it indicated greater openness to working with the government. When, on 23 December, a pro-reform protest in the northern town of Mafraq was attacked by thugs, and the IAF's office was torched under the passive eye of security forces,³¹ Khasawneh met extensively with the Front's leadership. In January, amid rumours of a possible deal regarding its participation in future legislative elections, the Front gave a clear indication of willingness to return to parliamentary politics (it had boycotted the 2010 polls) by holding an internal meeting to discuss campaign strategies as well as policies it would implement should it prevail at the polls.³²

²⁵ Abdul Jalil Mustafa, "Jordan's king approves constitutional changes", *Arab News* (online), 30 September 2011.

²⁶ See *The Jordan Times*, 14 October 2011.

²⁷ On 15 October, persons armed with firearms, batons and rocks attacked a pro-reform rally in the village of Salhoub. Protests in Irbid, Sahab and Maan on 14 and 15 October also came under attack, causing a considerable number of injured. "Mid-day news bulletin", podcast, Radio al-Balad (www.balad.fm), 16 October 2011.

²⁸ Khasawneh was chief of the royal court under King Hussein in 1996-1998. He began his term at the International Court of Justice in 2000 and was its vice president in 2006-2009. In late 2008, he was re-elected to a second nine-year term.

²⁹ See *The Jordan Times* (online), 20 October 2011.

³⁰ Until Khasawneh's premiership, few corruption files went beyond the Anti-Corruption Committee, a parliamentary entity that has been widely discredited for its highly politicised and unprofessional handling of past cases, including the Dead Sea Casino file. See Agence France-Presse, 17 December 2011; *The Jordan Times* (online), 26 January 2012.

³¹ Noor al-Amad, "Tension hangs over Mafraq ahead of the Reform and Loyalty Friday protest", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 22 December 2011.

³² See *The Jordan Times* (online), 17 January 2011. Khasawneh consulted a variety of parties regarding the legislative elections.

II. FAULT LINES

A. EAST BANKERS VERSUS PALESTINIAN-JORDANIANS

The deepest fault line undoubtedly is the one separating East Bankers from Palestinian-Jordanians. While Palestinian refugees quickly acquired citizenship and were integrated into local society and state institutions after 1949, the legacy of the 1970-1971 civil war still hovers. It has resulted in a lingering sense of exclusion among many Palestinian-Jordanians and enduring suspicion of their political intentions among some East Bankers.

These twin sentiments of exclusion and suspicion typically have generated Palestinian-Jordanian reluctance to participate in national politics, a situation unlikely to change for as long as they feel insecure about their citizenship status, and the electoral system militates against their fair representation.³³ A form of de facto political segregation also persists in state institutions, where Palestinian-Jordanians likewise are under-represented notwithstanding official attempts to promote an inclusive national identity.³⁴

Even when Palestinian-Jordanians involve themselves in politics, they tend not to emphasise their origins, fearing excessive visibility. Although they have joined pro-reform protests alongside East Bankers, only a single protest was organised in a Palestinian refugee camp throughout 2011.³⁵ This lack of public assertiveness of their Palestinian identity in Jordanian politics has bolstered the view among some East Banker nationalists that Palestinian-Jordanians cling to a more parochial set of interests rather to the detriment of a broader national cause. A Jayeen member said:

During the April 1989 protests in the south, Transjordanians from Maan, Tafileh and Karak participated, but Jordanians of Palestinian origin did not. It was the same during the 1996 bread riots. And even today, some Palestinian Jordanians talk about their “missing rights” in Jordan. But what about missing duties, what about

showing solidarity with other Jordanians? Many Palestinians feel this country isn't theirs. This is dangerous.³⁶

The impact of the East Banker/Palestinian-Jordanian fault line is compounded by its rough overlap with an urban-rural and a private-public sector divide. As economic conditions in rural areas worsen, East Bankers often blame their hardships on corruption and privatisation that they associate with the largely Palestinian urban economic elites. Nahed Hattar, an influential East Banker intellectual, said:

There's a problem linked to the Palestinian presence in Jordan. We have mutual fears. [East Banker] Jordanians wonder: who is this elite class? Palestinian-Jordanians live in cities, whereas the majority of [East Banker] Jordanians live in the provinces, in the Rif and Badia.³⁷ There's social conflict between them, as the jobs are in the cities. Different circumstances have contributed to the wealth being focused on Palestinians.³⁸

In reality, there is no such neat coincidence. Palestinian-Jordanians also form a significant part of the urban poor, while substantial East Banker communities – including members of the economic elite – are well established in the largest cities. Meanwhile, while Palestinian-Jordanians have come to dominate the private sector, especially after being purged in effect from public institutions following the 1970-1971 civil war, East Bankers and Palestinian-Jordanians currently work in both sectors. Recognising these realities, Muhammad Sneid, a leading member of the Jayeen movement, argued against casting Palestinian-Jordanians in the role of corrupt capitalists standing in the way of reform: “Palestinians and East Bankers – no, *poor* Palestinians and *poor* East Bankers – suffer from the current parliament, which represents the rich from both sides”.³⁹

If some equate Palestinian-Jordanians with capitalists, others conflate them with the Muslim Brotherhood and their political branch, the Islamic Action Front. Indeed, urban areas and refugee camps populated by Palestinian-Jordanians form a key Brotherhood support base, even though the organisation also has a fair share of East Banker leaders, members and followers. The Islamist organisation's regional identity and scope, and in particular its relationship with its Palestinian affiliate, Hamas,⁴⁰ feed accusations

³³ According to a local pollster, their turnout in the 2010 legislative elections hit a record low. Crisis Group interview, Amman, 26 January 2011.

³⁴ These include the 2002 “Jordan First” campaign, and the 2006 “We Are All Jordan” initiative. See Marwan Muasher, “A Decade of Struggling Reform Efforts in Jordan: the Resilience of the Rentier System”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 2011, p. 15.

³⁵ There was a single small, ephemeral protest in Baqaa camp in early 2011.

³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Adham Gharaibeh, Amman, 13 March 2011.

³⁷ The Rif is the rural countryside; the Badia is the arid region that surrounds urban centres and associated rural hinterlands.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Nahed Hattar, 9 March 2011.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 1 February 2011.

⁴⁰ Incoming Prime Minister Khasawneh's public criticism of one of his predecessors for expelling Hamas fuelled speculation among East Bankers that the authorities had reached a deal with the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood pursuant to which the Islamists would tone down their political criticism in exchange

by some East Banker nationalists that it is disloyal, harbouring a non-Jordanian agenda.⁴¹ Some pro-reform East Bankers have sought to puncture this narrative, which, they argue, is manipulated by partisans of the status quo to obstruct political reform.⁴² Sheikh Tayseer Azzami, a tribal leader from the East Banker stronghold of Maan, remarked sarcastically: “Palestinians are our bogeyman. Let them rule us and eat us!”⁴³

B. THE ELECTORAL LAW DEBATE

Crosscutting historical, identity and socio-economic fault lines have muddled the debate on constitutional and electoral reform. Indeed, while the parliament remains largely toothless, it is a potent symbol of political disparities, as rural Jordanians – most of whom are East Bankers – enjoy disproportionate representation. Moreover, should the constitution be reformed in such a way as to truly empower parliament, as protesters still demand, the question of electoral reform will become all the more relevant.

For those who believe that Palestinian-Jordanians are unpatriotic, or portray them as such, introducing proportional representation and a fairer districting system in legislative elections would be a dangerous move, enabling a community with uncertain loyalties to translate its demographic majority into a parliamentary one. Some go further, raising the spectre of a Palestinian takeover – and thus of an “alternative Palestinian homeland” – should the

prime minister be elected and the influence of the royal court and intelligence services be reduced.⁴⁴ East Bankers’ position against electoral reform is further enhanced by the widespread perception that Palestinian-Jordanians dominate the Muslim Brotherhood, whose political arm, the Islamic Action Front, is best positioned to emerge as the strongest party in free and fair elections.

The debate surrounding the electoral law has been significantly affected by this underlying tension over Palestinian-Jordanian representation. The most blatant and politically charged form of electoral discrimination revolves around over-representation of predominantly East Bank, rural Jordanians and under-representation of predominantly Jordanian-Palestinian urban ones. Opposition to the current system has thus tended to focus on other, more consensual issues. Most political forces – East Banker and Palestinian-Jordanian alike – have united against the current electoral law, which was introduced by decree in 2010 and kept the single non-transferable vote system introduced in 1993, under which a single vote is cast for a particular candidate. Under the 1986 “block vote” system, a citizen could cast as many votes as there were seats in the district, so could support some candidates on the basis of tribal affiliation, others on the basis of party ideology or program. Due to the power of tribal patronage networks, especially in rural areas, the net effect has been to privilege voting on a tribal as opposed to party basis.⁴⁵

By the same token, there is broad objection to the current law’s inclusion of cryptic virtual sub-districts, also introduced by decree in 2010.⁴⁶ Under this provision, candidates in a given district can request to run in the sub-district of their choice, although the ultimate decision defining sub-districts and matching candidate and sub-district depends on the interior ministry, with little room for appeal.⁴⁷ This

for reopening Hamas’s offices in the country. These rumours were compounded by the visit of Hamas leader Khaled Meshal to Amman on 29 January 2012. Crisis Group interview, former government official, Amman, 20 November 2011.

⁴¹ Then-Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit accused the Brotherhood of taking orders from Cairo and Damascus, faulting them for the unrest at the 24 March Amman sit-in, Agence France-Presse, 26 March 2011. In an attempt to deal with concerns about loyalty, a constitutional amendment banning dual nationals from public office was adopted. However, dual nationality is common among both Palestinian and East Banker Jordanians. Many educated citizens work abroad, mainly in Gulf countries, Europe and North America, and acquire that nation’s citizenship while there. As a result, the amendment triggered protests in the East Banker stronghold of Tafileh: during their weekly Friday protest on 2 December 2011, Tafileh demonstrators chanted slogans against the ban, which disqualified one of their parliamentary representatives. Crisis Group observations, Tafileh, 2 December 2011.

⁴² Crisis Group interviews, Fares al-Fayez, Bani Sakhr tribe, Amman, 20 November 2011; Abdel Karim al-Gwary, Bani Hassan tribe, Amman, 22 November 2011; Khalid al-Daaja, Daaja tribe, Amman, 28 November 2011; Zaid al-Fayez, Bani Sakhr tribe, Amman, 30 November 2011; Hazem al-Oran, parliamentarian representing Tafileh, Amman, 20 November 2011.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Tayseer Azzami, tribal leader, Maan, 17 March 2011.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, General Ali Habashneh, veterans’ movement, Amman, 14 March 2011.

⁴⁵ For a detailed account of the motivations and mechanisms of the electoral law, see Crisis Group Briefing, *The Challenge of Political Reform*, pp. 16-19. Changes introduced by decree in 2002 and in May 2010 increased the transparency of registration and ballot-counting procedures but left these tribal biases unchanged. “Jordan’s New Election Law: Much Ado About Little”, Democracy Reporting International, October 2010.

⁴⁶ The law divided existing multi-seat districts into single-seat sub-districts that have no geographic basis, so are “virtual”.

⁴⁷ These sub-districts gave the interior ministry a broad margin for gerrymandering, which was a reason behind the IAF’s decision to boycott the 2010 legislative elections. Reflecting the convoluted nature of the system, a public opinion pollster commented: “No one knows what virtual districts really are”. Crisis Group interview, Amman, 26 January 2011.

convoluted electoral architecture creates manifold opportunities for gerrymandering.⁴⁸

The National Dialogue Committee envisioned a two-tier system, eliminating virtual districts and introducing fifteen seats to be elected proportionately at a national level, with the remaining 115 to be elected in a block vote system similar to the one used in the 1989 elections⁴⁹ only at the governorate (as opposed to the smaller district) level. In terms of redressing the urban/rural disparity, this barely scratched the surface. Amman would have one parliamentary seat for every 112,000 citizens, whereas rural areas such as Balqa and Tafileh would get one seat per 40,000 citizens and one seat per 25,000 citizens respectively.⁵⁰ Although then-Prime Minister Bakhit paid little public attention to these recommendations after they were delivered in June 2011, his government subsequently backed a similar dual list proposal for twenty seats to be elected proportionally at the national level and 120 by block vote at the governorate level.

The National Front for Reform (NFR), which includes leaders of the IAF, leftist parties, trade unions and independent opposition figures from both East Banker and Palestinian backgrounds, put forward a different proposal. It advocates a dual list system pursuant to which half the seats would be elected proportionately through a national list and the other half via the block vote at governorate level – thereby balancing political representation without entirely eliminating the bias in favour of rural areas.⁵¹

The Khasawneh government, which has engaged more closely with political parties and National Dialogue Committee members, is due to submit a draft law in the middle of 2012. It remains unclear whether it has succeeded in building a consensus among political forces.⁵² The cabi-

net appears to be leaning toward a return to the district-level block vote system used in 1989. Because it would preserve heavy rural over-representation, it enjoys support among East Bankers fearful of Palestinian and Islamist influence.⁵³ At the same time, the IAF – its support for an alternative system notwithstanding – ultimately might be able to accept this option as well, given that Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated candidates won a quarter of the seats in 1989 under the same system.

⁴⁸ A particular case throws light on the unfairness of the virtual sub-district system. In the November 2010 elections, Palestinian-Jordanian candidate Khaled Ramadan failed to win a seat in Amman's Third District even though he had more votes than two candidates in that district who were more advantageously matched within their virtual sub-districts.

⁴⁹ In the block vote system, candidates run either as individuals or affiliated to a political party in multi-member constituencies. Voters can select as many candidates as there are seats in that constituency; those candidates with most votes win the seats.

⁵⁰ Amman's 2.8 million citizens would be represented by 25 parliamentarians, whereas the rural Balqa governorate would get ten seats for 400,000 inhabitants and Tafileh, which is also rural, would get four seats for fewer than 100,000 inhabitants. See Cory Eldridge, "A Complicated Dialogue", *Jo Magazine*, 30 June 2011.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, Ahmad Obeidat, National Front for Reform, Amman, 30 November 2011.

⁵² The cabinet has drawn some criticism for allegedly failing to take opposition recommendations seriously into account. See

Hani Hazaimah, "Masri contests PM's 'plan' to adopt 1989 electoral system", *The Jordan Times* (online), 8 January 2011.

⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, Zaid Mhaisen, National Popular Youth Movement, Amman, 20 November 2011; Hazem al-Oran, parliamentary representative for Tafileh, Amman, 20 November 2011.

III. CONTRASTING AGENDAS FOR REFORM

A. EAST BANK JORDANIANS

1. East Bankers mobilise

While East Bank Jordanians are present in all political currents, a number have mobilised around more specifically “East Banker” social and political grievances. Their vigorous involvement in the protest movement is particularly meaningful in light of the tribal East Banker elites’ central role in establishing and safeguarding the monarchy and given that they continue to be a privileged recruiting pool for the army and security apparatus.⁵⁴

At the core of East Banker complaints is the unravelling of their traditional intimate relationship with the state that had given them preferential access to resources through public sector employment and subsidies. As a result of the economic reforms initiated in the 1990s – notably the privatisation of state-owned enterprises; the gradual lifting of subsidies, including in the agricultural sector; and the imposition of a general sales tax – they gradually lost privileges. As noted above, on 5 February 2011, only three weeks into the protests, 36 Jordanians from prominent East Banker tribes made headlines with an open letter to the king alleging corruption in the highest spheres of power and explicitly criticising his (Palestinian-born) wife.⁵⁵ Their petition attracted wide attention due to its unusually harsh language and the signatories’ political standing.

⁵⁴ Both East Banker and Palestinian-Jordanian families feature a range of traditional social structures, including tribes and clans, depending mainly on whether they originate from arid, fertile or urbanised areas. The popular image of East Bankers as essentially rural, tribal and mostly bedouin and Palestinians as intrinsically urbanised and trade-oriented is largely inaccurate. That said, the Palestinians’ experiences of forced displacement in 1948 and 1967 and subsequent life in refugee camps dramatically accelerated their urbanisation. See Adnan Abu Odeh, *Jordanians, Palestinians, and the Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East Peace Process* (Washington, 1999), and Joseph Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York, 2001).

⁵⁵ Signatories included senior figures from prominent tribes such as the Bani Sakhr, Abadi, Shobaki and Manaseer. See Suleiman al-Khalidi, “Jordan’s tribes criticise queen’s role”, Reuters, 8 February 2011. The explicit targeting of Queen Rania by East Banker figures also reveals the erosion of King Abdullah’s relationship with East Banker tribes. Unlike his father, King Hussein, King Abdullah II has placed far less emphasis on maintaining ties with Jordan’s tribes through regular and extensive personal visits. He reversed this trend somewhat in 2011 amid increasingly obvious East Banker discontent.

Still, the constituency remained largely unorganised until 15 October, when members of leading tribes⁵⁶ assembled in the village of Salhoub near Jerash to host a conference at which a wide array of reformist currents were represented.⁵⁷ A violent attack on the gathering failed to dissuade them, instead triggering further protests across the country.⁵⁸

Other East Bank constituents expressed their discontent. The ominously-named Jayeen (“We’re Coming”) movement⁵⁹ helped coordinate the first wave of protests in Amman and across Jordan in mid-January 2011 in the wake of Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s ouster. Muhammad Sneid, one of its founders, recalled how the protests started:

The Rifai government waged war on unions. Union leaders were imprisoned, fired or relocated to distant sites for having organised strikes. These transfers made us think of new ways to struggle for change: using protests and echoing people’s grievances about the government, such as economic policies that raised the prices of basic goods used by the poor, increased unemployment and poverty. So we founded the Jayeen movement. We organised demonstrations all over the country, calling for a new national unity government. We have also demanded a special tribunal against the corrupt individuals who sold national assets such as phosphate mines transportation and water [by granting foreign companies exclusive mining and management rights] at prices that didn’t reflect their value.⁶⁰

In like manner, a constellation of local, largely East Banker protest groups from Tafileh, Karak and Maan in the south, Irbid, Jerash and Ajloun in the north, and other towns

⁵⁶ These included the Bani Hassan, the Bani Sakhr, the Bani Hamida, the Daaja, the Ajarma and others. The Bani Hassan are the largest tribe in Jordan, with an estimated 500,000 members in Zarqa, Jerash and Mafraq governorates. While less numerous, the Bani Sakhr from Central Badia played a key role in protecting Emir Abdullah when Britain established the Emirate of Transjordan in 1921. They retain significant political weight to this day.

⁵⁷ Participants included representatives from the Muslim Brotherhood and associated Islamic Action Front, the National Front for Reform and protest coalitions from across the country.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Khaled al-Daaja, Daaja tribe, Amman, 28 November 2011; Zaid al-Fayez, Bani Sakhr tribe, Amman, 30 November 2011; Abdel Karim al-Gwary, Bani Hassan tribe, Amman, 22 November 2011.

⁵⁹ Founded in January 2011, see above. Among Jayeen’s most active members was Khaled Kalaldeh’s Social Left Movement which has been involved at a grassroots level in a wide range of political and labour rights campaigns before 2011, including with military veterans, public-sector day workers and teachers challenging the authorities’ union ban.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 1 February 2011.

across the country took central stage in mid-2011. Youth movements have been particularly involved.⁶¹ The National Committee of Retired Servicemen, a military veterans association that – given the armed forces’ demographic composition, is almost exclusively East Banker – also has been active, led by a sub-group of senior members who claim support from rank-and-file veterans.⁶² The activist veterans began their political activities in May 2010, when 60 leading members of the association, including several former generals, published a statement denouncing corruption and accusing the regime of issuing Jordanian passports in exchange for bribes.⁶³ They then participated in demonstrations in 2011 and joined the government-created National Dialogue Committee in March of that year. In January 2012, they announced they were applying for permission to create a political party.⁶⁴

2. Shared economic woes and perceptions of corruption

That the 2011 protest movement began not in the capital but in the southern East Banker town of Dhiban, also Jayeen’s birthplace, is significant. Rural areas, unlike Amman, have experienced little development since the 1980s. Agriculture has all but collapsed, depriving inhabitants of a reliable livelihood that previously complemented modest wages and pensions derived from employment in the public sector, the army and the security apparatus. This population also has been disproportionately affected by reduced public spending, compared to urban dwellers, who

have had access to a larger spectrum of private sector jobs. Over the past two years, soaring commodity and fuel prices have placed an additional strain on citizens, although continued subsidies so far have maintained an important buffer.⁶⁵

Despite diverging interests, all East Banker groups – from Jayeen to the veterans,⁶⁶ from tribal figures to the protest groups that mushroomed outside the capital – have been united in their economic grievances and desire to redistribute wealth in reaction to a system that, they feel, has disproportionately caused rural poverty and unemployment among them. In parallel, East Banker elites employed in the public sector, including the army, have witnessed a growing concentration of wealth in the private sector and in Amman. Muhammad Sneid, a protest organiser, said:

There’s no fair distribution of revenue between rich and poor. There are very rich people, due to privatisation. Madaba, 80km from Amman, does not have a single factory and unemployment reaches 40 per cent. It’s similar in northern villages around Irbid and in the south. There’s no social justice, no fair distribution of development projects. Dhiban has no factories. The agricultural sector, which was Jordan’s most important sector and the basis of the economy in rural areas, was destroyed by government policies. People are in debt due to increasing prices.⁶⁷

Under this view, economic pressure on rural Jordanians is largely the result of post-1989 policies and practices. Fares al-Fayez, a leading member of the group of 36 tribesmen who denounced state corruption in February 2011, insisted that rural East Bankers face growing poverty due to successive governments’ economic policies since the 1990s:

Poverty has increased. Some people consume only bread and tea. There is tuberculosis in the Badia. Unemployment has increased. The elites are colluding with the regime’s privatisation strategy. There are a lot of thieves and pickpockets in the country. We lack social justice. All of this is due to fifteen years of neoliberal economic policy. Jordan is currently an oligarchy; there’s no just redistribution of state income.⁶⁸

⁶¹ These include, among others, the Maan Movement for Reform and Change, the Free Tafileh Movement, the Irbid Popular Movement, the Mafrq Popular Youth Movement and the Jerash Popular Youth Movement. Several came together in a nationwide network, the National Popular Youth Movement. According to Zaid Mhaisen, an organiser with the movement’s local section in Tafileh, weekly Friday protests continued uninterrupted since May, with an average turnout of 800. Mhaisen said, “there are 80,000 people in Tafileh. Most agree with us, but they don’t join protests out of fear of being arrested. They feel pressure from the security apparatus. They’re scared they will lose their jobs. The security apparatus is sowing divisions. But I believe that 80 per cent of people here support us protesters”. Crisis Group interview, Amman, 20 November 2011.

⁶² The activist veterans, including former General Ali Habashneh, who sits on the executive committee of the 140,000-strong National Committee of Retired Servicemen, claim strong support among military veterans countrywide. See Robert Fisk, “Why Jordan is occupied by Palestinians”, *The Independent* (online), 22 July 2012. However, this support is difficult to assess, as the veterans have failed to mobilise significant numbers in protests.

⁶³ See “Famous 1st May Communiqué no. 1 first anniversary”, All of Jordan (www.allofjo.net), 1 May 2011. The National Committee of Retired Servicemen’s “Communiqué no. 1” was first released on 1 May 2010.

⁶⁴ “Military veterans initiate political party”, Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 22 January 2012.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Ibrahim Saif, economist, Amman, 27 January 2011.

⁶⁶ General Ali Habashneh of the veterans’ movement also stressed the primacy of economic concerns among rural Jordanians: “People in the villages whose everyday worries keep them awake at night don’t care if communists or the Brotherhood take power as long as the economic situation improves”. Crisis Group interview, Amman, 14 March 2011.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 1 February 2011.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 14 March 2011.

These critics cite the country's worsening debt – estimated at JD12 billion (€13 billion)⁶⁹ as proof that the policies have failed and that privatisations did not further the national interest. Adham Gharaibeh, a member of Jayeen and the Irbid Popular Movement, said:

Over the last years, state assets have been privatised. Where did the money go? Debt has increased, not declined. Jordan has phosphates, potash, uranium, gas – in the Risha area – oil shale, tourism and human resources. It's a rich country, contrary to what people think. That's why we want a special tribunal on unlawful privatisations.⁷⁰

Corruption became and has remained a recurrent, central theme since demonstrations began in January 2011. As a senator put it, "corruption is important in people's minds. They see business people in government and government people doing business. This convergence of money and power is very damaging".⁷¹ The issue gained prominence in large part because it has become more conspicuous and therefore less tolerable amid growing economic hardship. A string of scandals surrounding the mismanagement of public funds fuelled the widespread perception that corruption had spiralled out of control over the past decade. A Jordanian journalist said: "Under King Hussein [King Abdullah's father and predecessor, who died in 1999] there was corruption but with a political end. Now it's just politics for money's sake".⁷²

Three scandals in particular captured public attention: corruption allegations surrounding the state-owned National Resources Investment and Development Corporation (Mawared), which led to prosecution in 2011;⁷³ the

allegedly illegal licensing of a Dead Sea casino, in which Marouf Bakhit reportedly was involved when he was prime minister in 2007;⁷⁴ and a €1.6 billion contract involving the Jordan Petroleum Refinery and private sector subsidiaries.⁷⁵ Both the Mawared and the refinery scandals involved Khaled Shahin, a millionaire businessman who, following conviction in the refinery case, was given prison leave for medical care abroad.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, general tales of private palaces built with stolen public moneys feed local gossip.⁷⁷

Government officials concede the sensitivity of the corruption issue. Musa Maaytah, then-political development minister, said, "people can bear the economic situation, but when they see corruption, it arouses their discontent".⁷⁸ A former official went further: "Privatisation appears to have been done for the benefit of the king and those close to him. As in Tunisia, this has had an impact on how people view the regime".⁷⁹

To some extent, the anti-privatisation and anti-corruption rhetoric has become a seductively simple paradigm that simultaneously appears to explain East Bankers' econom-

tember 2011. While the case remains pending, Shahin reportedly returned \$16.8 million in brokering fees and two farms to the state. Eyad Jaghbeer, "Convicted business tycoon returns 12 million to Treasury", ammannews.net, 20 December 2011.

⁷⁴ While Bakhit publicly denied responsibility for the casino, documents reportedly showed he authorised it. See Seumas Milne, "Jordan supercasino secret deal was personally approved by prime minister", *The Guardian*, 12 September 2011. In February 2012, the general prosecutor reopened the case for further examination by the parliamentary Anti-Corruption Committee (ACC) after fresh evidence emerged. The ACC may refer the case to the courts. Linda al-Maayia, "General prosecutor reopens casino case for parliamentarians after fresh evidence emerges", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammanet.net>, 28 February 2012.

⁷⁵ In July 2010, a State Security Court convicted millionaire businessman Khalid Shahin, a former finance minister, former director of Jordan's only oil refinery and economic advisor to the prime minister, of corruption in relation to a bribery scandal at the Jordan Petroleum Refinery in relation to a €1.6 billion contract to upgrade the facility. He was sentenced to three years in prison. For more about the prosecution's case, see Brian Whitaker, "Jordan's refinery scandal", *Al-Bab* (www.al-bab.com), 14 March 2010.

⁷⁶ Following his 2010 conviction, Shahin was allowed to leave prison in February 2011 for medical treatment abroad. This caused an outcry when he was spotted dining in a London restaurant in April; he was escorted home from Germany in August. The Shahin case became a symbol of impunity for politically-connected entrepreneurs, receiving continuous and intense coverage in the Jordanian media. See, for example, Randa Habib, "Jordan Islamists, leftists unite against corruption", *Agence France-Presse*, 1 June 2011.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Jordan, 2011.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 27 January 2011.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 27 January 2011.

⁶⁹ The estimate released by the government in August 2011 corresponds to nearly 60 per cent of GDP. See "Kingdom's debt rises to 12 billion dinars", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammanet.net>, 19 October 2011.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 13 March 2011.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 24 January 2011.

⁷² Crisis Group interview, 14 February 2011. Likewise, Naseem Tarawneh, a young and widely-read blogger, commented: "There was no public oversight of privatisation deals. This is why there's talk of corruption now". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 2 March 2011.

⁷³ *Mawared* is Arabic for "resources", the shorthand name for the National Resources Investment and Development Corporation, a state-owned company devoted to urban regeneration. It has been accused of involvement in several corruption cases dating back to 2005. Judicial action was initiated in 2011. Although publicly owned, it in effect operates like a private corporation, partnering with private sector companies and increasing private sector involvement in state-funded real estate projects. In September 2011, a State Security Court prosecutor indicted Khaled Shahin, a millionaire businessman, for embezzlement, theft of public funds and fraud in that case. See Rana Hussein, "Khaled Shahin indicted in Disi case", *The Jordan Times*, 3 Sep-

ic disempowerment and focuses the resulting ire on new, often Palestinian-origin business elites who have replaced them as the Hashemites' privileged partners.⁸⁰ In turn, in pressing their demands, East Bankers seek to renegotiate their unwritten social contract with the Hashemite monarchy to return the distribution of wealth back to where it was prior to the emergence of the new state-business elites. Calls to renationalise privatised industries, especially those privatised at a loss, and reinstate the supply ministry⁸¹ are best understood in this light.⁸²

3. Diverging political demands

Although economic concerns have figured prominently among East Banker demands, the focus largely has been on calls for political reforms. As they see it, the two are closely related, insofar as an empowered parliament would have a greater role in shaping economic policy which thus would more accurately reflect citizen economic concerns. At a more general level, the demand for reform also springs from dissatisfaction with political interference by unelected figures, whether royal advisers,⁸³ the intelligence service (the General Intelligence Directorate, *mukhabarat*)⁸⁴ or the queen,⁸⁵ all of whom are seen as exerting real power behind the scenes.⁸⁶ In East Bankers' view, therefore, the electoral bias that has yielded them disproportionate parliamentary representation since legislative elections resumed in 1989 after a 22-year hiatus has lost much of its

allure, insofar as the institution itself has proved largely powerless.⁸⁷

Zaid Mhaisen, a member of the National Popular Youth Movement, recalled how swiftly political demands emerged in the Tafileh protests:

At the beginning, demands were specific to Tafileh, focused on development projects. Tafileh is locked in; it has neither agriculture nor borders that generate trade. Most people are in the army or employed in the public sector. Within three weeks, however, the focus switched to political reforms.⁸⁸

Although East Bankers broadly agree on the critique of the status quo, they diverge over the extent to which parliament ought to be empowered. Disagreement has centred on the role of Palestinian-Jordanians, who would be likely to dominate a more representative parliament. This has given rise to competing proposals. On the conservative end of the spectrum, East Bankers oppose both proportional representation and an elected government, assessing that this would spell the end of their political dominance. They favour keeping in place the original 1952 constitution, which would preserve strong unelected executive institutions, but advocate repealing subsequent amendments. In particular, they call for cancellations of clauses that make it easier to rule by decree when parliament is either not in session or is dissolved (1958 amendment) and that empower the king to indefinitely postpone elections (1973 amendment).⁸⁹ This view is articulated by General Ali Habashneh, a leading figure of the veterans' movement:

The main point for us is to prevent executive excesses by repealing amendments to the 1952 constitution. This would preserve the Jordanian specificity and let the king keep some power. We completely reject having an elected prime minister, because Palestinians are over half of the population and most of them are organised in parties. Their voice will be louder than the voice of East Bankers in the elections. That is why we insist on the 1952 constitution, under which the king nominates the prime minister. Parliament would still be free to withhold confidence from the cabinet.⁹⁰

⁸⁰ The veterans' 2010 public statement claimed the country was controlled by "the forces of business, corruption and suspicious investments". "Famous 1st May Communiqué no. 1", op. cit.

⁸¹ It controlled the prices and availability of basic commodities and was dismantled in 1998 amid free-market reforms.

⁸² However, some East Banker demands transcend their rural constituency and reflect broader aspirations. These include the call to abolish the 16 per cent general sales tax and replace it with a regime of progressive taxation. In the late 1980s, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) advised Jordan to institute this tax. Due to fierce parliamentary opposition, its introduction was delayed for almost four years. It finally was introduced at a 7 per cent rate in 1994, after new parliamentary elections under a reworked electoral law, and was increased to 16 per cent in 2004. See Harrigan, El-Said and Wang, op. cit., p. 273. A visitor to Amman can see protest placards calling for the elimination of the 16 per cent general sales tax. Crisis Group observations, Amman, 1 April 2011.

⁸³ Crisis Group interviews, Sheikh Abd-al-Shafiq al-Majamik, tribal leader, Maan, 17 March 2011; Sheikh al-Kuttab, tribal leader and member of the Jordanian National Movement, Maan, 17 March 2011.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interview, Tayseer Azzami, tribal sheikh, Maan, 17 March 2011.

⁸⁵ In February 2011, prominent East Bank figures accused Queen Rania of wielding undue political influence. See above.

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interview, Mohammad Abu Rumman, analyst, Center for Strategic Studies, Amman, 25 January 2011.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group Briefing, *The Challenge of Political Reform*, op. cit., pp. 16-19.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 20 November 2011.

⁸⁹ See "What is Jordan's Constitution", *JO Magazine* (online), 30 April 2011.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 14 March 2011. The demand to return to the 1952 constitution is shared by non-East Banker opposition activists as well. For Basel Hamad, the Palestinian-Jordanian founder of the 1952 Constitution Movement, the original constitution provided sufficient safeguards against executive excesses by empowering parliament to dissolve the

Some go further. Nahed Hattar, an influential East Banker columnist, demanded that the constitution require the king to consult with parliament before appointing the prime minister.⁹¹ Other East Bankers called for a new constitution that would genuinely empower parliament while ensuring greater separation of powers and accountability. Fares al-Fayez, member of the prominent Bani Sakhr tribe and leader of the group of 36 tribesmen who published the February 2011 open letter to the king, said, “we need something better than the 1952 constitution, which placed ministers above the law and prevented government accountability. We need a new constitution that genuinely empowers the parliament”.⁹²

Others insist on full constitutional reform that ensures strong and representative parliament, as well as a fairer electoral law. Abdel Karim al-Gwary, a member of the Bani Hassan tribe who was involved in organising the first tribally-backed reform in Salhoub in October 2011, said:

We want an elections law that’s equal and fair between East Bankers and Palestinian-Jordanians. I want free and fair elections. I don’t care who wins. I’m a democrat. I can’t anticipate the outcome. Let the prime minister be elected, so we can have accountability. We respect the king to reign, but not to rule, because he who rules must be accountable. The only one who has no one to account to is God.⁹³

It is difficult to assess how much support these views enjoy within the community, though there clearly is a diversity of opinion both among East Bankers and within individual tribes. Even as East Bankers supportive of the regime invoked the concept of tribal loyalty to discredit activists, the latter rejected the notion of monolithic tribes; al-Gwary commented:

The latest argument they’ve used against us is to say we don’t represent the tribes. Of course we don’t pretend to speak in the name of all members of our tribes. We refuse to speak in their name, and we also reject the notion that tribal elites speak in our name, especially if

government. The 1952 Constitution Movement began campaigning on 30 January 2011 and succeeded, according to Hamad, “in putting the issue of the 1952 constitution on the table”. Crisis Group interview, Amman, 23 November 2011. For those who saw the unamended 1952 constitution as sufficiently liberal, it had the additional merit of being a familiar text that was less likely to generate resistance among conservative elements than an entirely new document.

⁹¹ Hani Hazaimah, “Constitutional amendments quantum leap, but more should be done”, *The Jordan Times* (online), 16 August 2011.

⁹² Crisis Group interview, Amman, 14 March 2011.

⁹³ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 22 November 2011.

they are corrupt. This is the problem: everyone pretends to represent the entire tribe.⁹⁴

B. PALESTINIAN-JORDANIANS

Unlike East Bankers, Palestinian-Jordanians have not mobilised politically as a community since Black September; at most, identity politics resurface intermittently during football games.⁹⁵ Historically, Palestinian-Jordanians were rapidly absorbed into national politics after they first began acquiring citizenship in 1949, enjoying greater rights than in most other Arab countries where refugees resettled. This came at a price: in deference to official policy, they suppressed their Palestinian political identity.⁹⁶ Later, the rise of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in the 1960s and the concomitant growth of Palestinian nationalism formed the backdrop to the 1970-1971 civil war. In the wake of that conflict, Palestinian-Jordanians were mostly purged from state institutions, including the public sector and the security apparatus, while many turned away from political participation altogether.

Palestinian-Jordanians feel their citizenship status remains insecure. King Hussein’s 1988 decision to sever administrative ties with the Israeli-occupied West Bank led to the overnight loss of citizenship for roughly 1.5 million of them who were in the West Bank. The government stripped a further 2,700 Palestinian-origin Jordanians of their citizenship between 2004 and 2008, a step officials justified as encouraging holders of expired Israeli-issued West Bank residency permits to renew them and thus thwart Israeli attempts to get them to permanently resettle in Jordan.⁹⁷ Faced with Israel’s refusal to renew Palestinian residency permits,⁹⁸ Palestinians stripped of their Jordanian citizen-

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Communal tensions can be evident during matches that oppose the Amman-based Wihdat and Faisali teams, which are seen to represent respectively Palestinian-Jordanians and East Bankers, although both teams have a mix of players. For a detailed account, see “Jordanian soccer game halted amidst anti-regime chants, hooliganism towards Palestinians”, cable from U.S. embassy, Amman, 28 July 2009, as published by WikiLeaks and cited in “US embassy cables: Anti-Palestinian chants mar Jordanian soccer match”, *The Guardian* (online), 6 December 2010.

⁹⁶ See Jalal al-Husseini and Riccardo Bocco, “The Status of the Palestinian Refugees in the Near East: the Right of Return and UNRWA in Perspective”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2-3 (2010), p. 263.

⁹⁷ “Stateless Again: Palestinian-Origin Jordanians Deprived of their Nationality”, Human Rights Watch, February 2010.

⁹⁸ According to Human Rights Watch, “In most but not all cases that Human Rights Watch reviewed, Jordanian authorities withdrew nationality from its nationals of Palestinian origin who did not have valid Israeli-issued residence permits The experiences of these persons Human Rights Watch interviewed show

ship found themselves stateless.⁹⁹ A parliamentary inquiry commission currently is investigating 1,500 cases; it is due to suggest solutions to the House of Representatives once it completes its work.¹⁰⁰ In the meantime, little information is filtering into the public domain, while redress remains elusive, perpetuating Palestinian-Jordanian apprehensions.

The veterans' May 2010 communiqué also suggested that some Palestinian-Jordanians had illegitimately acquired their citizenship, alleging – without providing evidence – that the government had granted tens of thousands of passports in exchange for bribes. Fearing that any future Jordanian role in the West Bank could pave the way for an alternative Palestinian homeland in Jordan, the veterans also have sought to entrench the separation between the two territories by demanding that the 1988 disengagement – which was not legislated but rather occurred via a royal speech followed by administrative orders – be confirmed in accordance with the constitution.¹⁰¹ Veteran leader Ali Habashneh explained:

Jordan must make the disengagement from the West Bank constitutional in order to relieve all Jordanians [who fear the alternative homeland] and Palestinians who have Jordanian passports [who fear losing their citizenship]. We say that with disengagement, Palestinians with Jordanian citizenship should have full rights and preserve their right of return. Palestinians will always feel like a mother-in-law staying with her

daughter-in-law as long as they're not politicised, unlike Jordanians who are supported and protected by their tribe.¹⁰²

Although the practical implications of such a step are unclear, the issue adds to the Palestinian-Jordanian unease regarding citizenship. As one consequence, they have tended to eschew forms of mobilisation based on their community identity; likewise, they have tended to avoid demands reflecting their particular status. Instead, participants in the reform movement have joined wider-based, cross-communal groupings. Labib Kamhawi, a Palestinian-Jordanian and founding member of the National Front for Reform, a broad coalition that emerged in April 2011, said:

There is no political framework that includes Jordanians of Palestinian origin as such. They express themselves through existing frameworks like the Islamic Action Front, left wing parties and also currents close to the regime. They are part of the mainstream. Some happen to live in camps, so they tend to act as a group on issues that unite them [such as advocating the right to return to the West Bank, Gaza or Israel or improving access to services in the camps], but otherwise, they have diverse political views.¹⁰³

Consequently, despite attempts to characterise Palestinian-Jordanians as a monolithic group that collectively supports proportional parliamentary representation, their views and politics are as diverse as those of East Bankers. Their specific demands for reform reflect the political currents to which they belong more than their origins.

how difficult it is to obtain these Israeli documents. Israel's system for issuing the documents of legal residence appears to be as obscure and arbitrary as the Jordanian procedures for withdrawing nationality or appealing that decision", *ibid*, pp. 42-43.

⁹⁹ The citizenship regulations issued by the Jordanian government as part of its disengagement from the West Bank determined a person's citizenship status on the basis of his or her habitual place of residence. While Palestinian-Jordanians living in the West Bank lost their Jordanian citizenship, those residing in Jordan retained it. However, the interior ministry departed from these guidelines and targeted Palestinian-Jordanians residing in Jordan who had material and family connections to the West Bank and held Israeli-issued West Bank residency permits. (Some Palestinian-Jordanians who never held West Bank residency permits also were targeted.) These citizens carried Jordanian-issued yellow national identity cards to symbolise their dual residential status. Since 1988, thousands of yellow-card holders have been stripped of their citizenship, although no official statistics are available. See "Stateless Again", *op. cit.*, p. 3; Hazem Jamjoum, "Interview: Jordan revoking citizenship from Palestinian refugees", *The Electronic Intifada*, <http://electronicintifada.net>, 27 February 2011.

¹⁰⁰ "Parliamentary inquiry commission looks into 1500 cases of national identity number withdrawals", *Amman Net*, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 27 February 2012.

¹⁰¹ Taylor Luck, "New planned party may pull Kingdom into polarising national identity debate", *The Jordan Times* (online), 27 January 2012.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interview, Amman, 14 March 2011.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 22 November 2011. The refugees' advocacy of the right of return further complicates their posture in Jordan. Some refugees feel that simultaneously seeking return to Palestine and full citizenship in Jordan may be in tension. Nimer Abu Ghneim, a schoolteacher and veteran political activist in Baqaa refugee camp, Jordan's largest, who spent twelve years in Jordanian jails for his association with Palestinian armed factions, said, "we feel that in Jordan we have relatively more rights than other Palestinian refugees in the Arab world, and when we compare our lives to those of other Jordanian citizens [in material terms], we don't feel a great difference. However, a refugee's quality of life differs from that of other citizens. We're hoping for the resolution of our refugee status. Palestinian refugees and Jordanian citizens have a similar perspective on political reform, but there is some tension between seeking the right of return and integration in Jordan". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 4 March 2011.

C. THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND IAF

1. A cautious protest strategy

The Muslim Brotherhood and its political branch, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), are the country's largest organised political force. Despite its strong, mostly urban support base with significant Palestinian-Jordanian membership, the IAF is not represented in parliament. The party boycotted the 2010 legislative elections, arguing the electoral law was biased in favour of rural and tribal constituencies and because of the rigging that occurred in the 2007 elections.¹⁰⁴

Initially, it adopted a cautious posture toward the protest movement, in line with its historical neutrality in times of crisis.¹⁰⁵ It shunned the first large protest, the 14 January 2011 "Day of Anger", opting instead for a more muted sit-in in front of parliament the following Sunday.¹⁰⁶ That stance began to change when Bakhit, with whom the IAF had had a testy relationship during his previous tenure (2005-2007), became prime minister.¹⁰⁷ Pointedly, the IAF rejected Bakhit's attempt to reach out to opposition groups before he formed the new cabinet. Sheikh Hamza Mansour, its secretary general, explained the party's rationale:

We met the prime minister twice. He asked us to join the government. We refused because our past experience with him was not positive. We also felt that his government was disinclined toward reform and didn't have decision-making power. The *mukhabarat* and the Royal Court have that power. The hidden government is stronger than the apparent government.¹⁰⁸

After his February 2011 appointment, the IAF started to visibly participate in weekly Friday protests outside Am-

man's Al-Husseini Mosque, and its supporters soon became the largest bloc of demonstrators. IAF participation was all the more noticeable insofar as some East Banker groups – willing to give the new cabinet the benefit of the doubt – reduced their own mobilisation. However, even at the height of IAF street activism, the number of protesters remained relatively limited, suggesting it had not intended or succeeded in fully mobilising its base.¹⁰⁹

It was not long before the IAF and Muslim Brotherhood came under verbal and physical attack, notwithstanding their efforts to emphasise that they neither dominated nor controlled the protest movement. The harsh repression of the 25 March demonstration in Amman had clear anti-Islamist overtones, which were confirmed by Bakhit's subsequent televised statement in which he accused the Muslim Brotherhood of provoking the violence.¹¹⁰ Tensions escalated the following week, when the IAF came under direct attack. Its website allegedly was hacked,¹¹¹ and, on 30 March, unidentified individuals broke into its Amman headquarters, ransacking offices and stealing documents. On 4 April, a man apparently carrying an explosives belt entered the headquarters and approached Mansour, the IAF secretary general, although authorities later claimed the explosives were fake.¹¹²

When Khasawneh replaced Bakhit in October 2011, he too invited the IAF to join his government. At first, Mansour welcomed the proposal and stressed that the party respected the new prime minister.¹¹³ In the end, though, the IAF turned down the offer, stating it "would only join an elected cabinet", while underlining the need for the new government to first address popular demands for political change.¹¹⁴ Muslim Brotherhood spokesman Jamil Abu Baker said, "[w]e appreciated the invitation, it is a positive step. But we have to be sure that this government will be in line with the demands of the people before we can move

¹⁰⁴ Shortly after taking office, Prime Minister Khasawneh acknowledged the problem: "There will be no more rigged elections in the Kingdom. The country will not tolerate any more manipulation in any future elections". *The Jordan Times* (online), 3 November 2011.

¹⁰⁵ The Muslim Brotherhood remained neutral during the 1970-1971 civil war and several food riots. For a detailed analysis of the Islamist movement's relationship with the Jordanian state, see Mohammad Abu Rumman, *The Muslim Brotherhood in the 2007 Jordanian Parliamentary Elections: A Passing 'Political Setback' or Diminished Popularity?* (Amman, 2007).

¹⁰⁶ See Linda al-Maiaa, "Brotherhood will not participate in 'March of anger'", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 14 January 2011.

¹⁰⁷ During the September 2007 municipal elections, the IAF withdrew its candidates in the midst of voting, protesting that the open bussing of soldiers to vote amounted to flagrant fraud. In turn, Bakhit used unusually harsh language against the IAF and the Muslim Brotherhood, accusing them of dragging the country to the brink of war. Mohammad Abu Rumman, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 6 April 2011.

¹⁰⁹ Protests in the capital rarely exceeded 3,000, a small albeit not insignificant number given a total population of 6 million.

¹¹⁰ "Bakhit to the Brotherhood: Jordanians will get rid of you", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 25 March 2011.

¹¹¹ "Jordan Islamist opposition says website hacked", Agence France-Presse, 27 March 2011.

¹¹² Mohammad Fdeilat and Linda al-Maiaa, "Individual tries to blow up Islamic Action Front HQ with suicide belt", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 4 April 2011. Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Hamza Mansour, Amman, 6 April 2011.

¹¹³ Initially, the IAF welcomed the proposal, adding that its decision would depend on "the person of the Prime Minister, the ministerial team, and a clear timeline to implement reforms". Eyad Jaghbeer, "Islamist leader welcomes participation in new government, with determinants", Amman News (www.ammonnews.net), 17 October 2011.

¹¹⁴ Jamal Halaby, "Jordan Islamists turn down offer to join cabinet", Associated Press, 23 October 2011.

any further".¹¹⁵ Still, the visible reduction in the IAF's participation in protests for several weeks following the new government's appointment signalled a grace period of sorts before mobilisation resumed in December.

2. Pragmatic demands

The most salient dynamic within the Muslim Brotherhood and the IAF is the dichotomy between so-called hawks, who emphasise relations with Hamas, and so-called doves, who prioritise participation in the national political process. Despite the IAF's boycott of the 2010 legislative elections, reformists' efforts to shift the movement's ideology and political discourse toward democratic participation appear to be paying off.¹¹⁶ Still, the Islamic movement's main decision-making body remains split between the two camps after the latest round of Muslim Brotherhood internal elections. Ultimately, the IAF's decision whether to participate in the next legislative polls likely will depend on the details of the electoral law.¹¹⁷

Overall, the IAF's strategy has been to reestablish a parliamentary presence in a context where such participation would yield tangible benefits. Its broad and disciplined membership and history of opposition likely put it at an advantage in any future free and fair legislative elections. As a result, IAF demands focus on two items: first, constitutional changes – including an elected prime minister and additional limits on the king's ability to dissolve the government and parliament, as well as on royal court and security sector interference in political life;¹¹⁸ secondly, an electoral law that addresses both the virtual districts and the under-representation of urban areas, where the party enjoys strong support. Mansour said:

We know the objective behind the virtual districts: blocking the IAF and increasing tribal fanaticism, sectarian, religious, and provincial divides. If we have an elected parliament under a sovereign government, without control by the security apparatus, there will be popular trust, legitimacy, and respect for the government.¹¹⁹

The party's last experience of participation in parliamentary elections, in 2007, was bitter. It won only six of 100 seats, the worst result in its history and a shock both to the IAF and observers at home and abroad. Although the Muslim Brotherhood's internal struggle between doves and hawks may have affected the IAF's popularity,¹²⁰ widespread reports of vote-buying, vote transfers and other irregularities suggest that its low score was at least partly due to electoral fraud.¹²¹

The IAF likely would score highest under a single national proportional system reflecting urban areas' demographic weight. That said, aware that it is perceived as a proxy for Palestinian-Jordanian interests,¹²² it has joined the National Front for Reform alongside prominent East Banker reform supporters such as Ahmad Obeidat in advocating an electoral law pursuant to which half the parliament would be elected under a proportional national system and the other half under a majoritarian system at the governorate level. The Front considers this a fair compromise between demographic and geographic representation – balancing between urban areas on the one hand and less populated as well as more remote rural areas on the other. In a related sign of the IAF's flexibility, it did not formally challenge districting (although its officials openly criticise them), despite their clear bias for rural over urban areas.¹²³ The IAF arguably would be willing to compromise further on the electoral law if its main demands for constitutional change were met.¹²⁴

In any event, the party is beginning to prepare for elections. On 14 January 2012, it held a special session of its *Shura* (council, the IAF's supreme decision-making body), during which members discussed the policies it might implement should it join the government after the elections. Participants also spoke of ways to strengthen internal party democracy and better engage youth. According to

¹¹⁵ Taylor Luck, "Islamists reject gov't posts", *The Jordan Times* (online), 23 October 2011.

¹¹⁶ "Doves" – influenced by the writings of Rached Ghannouchi from the Tunisian An-Nahda movement – largely felt vindicated by the Tunisian party's 2011 electoral success. See Muhammad Abu Rumman, "Jordan's Parliamentary Elections and the Islamist Boycott", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 20 October 2010.

¹¹⁷ See Taylor Luck, "Hawks, doves split Brotherhood shura council", *The Jordan Times* (online), 5 March 2012.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Hamza Mansour, IAF secretary general, Amman, 21 November 2011.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 6 April 2011. The IAF criticised the constitutional amendments voted in September 2011 for not going far enough in these areas. See below.

¹²⁰ Mohammad Abu Rumman, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, op. cit., p. 67.

¹²¹ "Voting Process Marred by Violence, Vote-Buying and Breaching the Secrecy of the Vote", Al-Hayat Center for Civil Society Development, 20 November 2007.

¹²² While Palestinian-Jordanians form the majority of the membership and support base of both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front, East Bank Jordanians also are well represented. In the 2007 legislative elections, IAF candidates were split equally between members of both communities. Muhammad Abu Rumman, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, op. cit., p. 60.

¹²³ Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Hamza Mansour, IAF secretary general, Amman, 6 April 2011.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Abu Rumman, analyst and Islamism expert, Amman, 1 December 2011. The party reportedly has received positive signs that its demands for constitutional revisions might be addressed. See Taylor Luck, "Jordan's Islamists 'preparing to govern'", *The Jordan Times* (online), 17 January 2012.

an IAF official, if the Front's main demands are met, it will pull out of street protests and focus on the campaign.¹²⁵

D. NEW COALITIONS

1. 24 March

The first truly non-partisan and transcommunal youth movement for political change, initially largely organised through social media, emerged in Amman on 24 March 2011, when protesters assembled at the Gamal Abdel Nasser roundabout for an open-ended sit-in.¹²⁶ Among core organisers were East Banker and Palestinian-Jordanian youth, including independent, left-leaning and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated individuals.¹²⁷ Members of the Jayeen movement also joined in. The event self-consciously drew inspiration from the Tahrir Square protests in Egypt,¹²⁸ with overnight camping and protesters sweeping the streets, as well as heavy reliance on social media. In this sense, the protest marked a sharp contrast with the weekly demonstrations organised by Jayeen and the IAF, which tended to be dominated by an older generation of organisers and political activists and typically followed a traditional routine of marches and speeches.

The sit-in sought a broad appeal. Organisers emphasised the need for reform, voicing slogans that echoed those raised at weekly protests as well as demands of opposition parties such as the IAF. These included calls for an elected, parliamentary government; an elected senate; an independent judiciary; accountability for corruption; civil and media liberties; free education and health care; economic reforms; and an end to security apparatus interference in public life.¹²⁹ The timing was deliberate and further unified ranks:

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ The roundabout is also known as the Interior [Ministry] Circle (Duwwar al-Dakhiliya), because the main interior ministry building previously was located nearby.

¹²⁷ According to Khalid Kamhawi, a member of the Coordination of Youth Movements in Jordan who participated in the sit-in, "65-70 per cent of the core members were Islamist but not all belonged to the Brotherhood; 25 per cent were left-leaning; the remaining 5 per cent were intellectuals and academics". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 27 November 2011.

¹²⁸ Khaled Kamhawi said, "the protest achieved many things on a symbolic plane. The choice of location, besides the logistics factor, was symbolic: officially it is called the Gamal Abdel Nasser Square. This name aligned our protest with the Arab Spring. In Jordan, 99 per cent of public spaces are called after ruling monarchs and princes, so the choice was deliberate". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 27 November 2011.

¹²⁹ "We have several demands with the ultimate aim of creating free democracy where authority is truly exercised by the people: a parliamentary system with both houses of parliament elected and free: separation of powers, with emphasis on judicial independence; the return of stolen state resources, lands and

it was the weekend closest to the anniversary of the 1968 Battle of Karama (21 March), when the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Jordanian army joined forces in repelling an Israeli incursion.¹³⁰

On the second day, 25 March, hundreds more joined the protest; most were politically aware but unaffiliated. Members of existing pro-reform groups, such as Jayeen, also participated. According to Naseem Tarawnah, a widely-read Jordanian blogger who witnessed the protest:

A significant portion of them, and perhaps nearly the majority, were neutral There were some leftists, communists, socialists and, yes, even some Islamists – but for the most part this seemed to be a group of people who represented "the other". Many of those I spoke to came only because they did not feel represented by other mainstream political parties, and saw 24 March as an alternative they could get on board with. The fact that the movement had "banned" any flag other than the Jordanian flag to be raised, seemed to appeal to some of them, and the fact that there were also tribes and families involved, was another appeal factor (a large banner featuring the king could be seen hung from the bridge above them, donated by an Abbadi, a [member of a] known Jordanian tribe).¹³¹

As in Cairo's Tahrir Square, the protesters' objective was to stay encamped and thus to confront authorities with a new form of non-violent political action to test their stated commitment to civil liberties. In addition, protesters broke new ground by publicly criticising the security services.¹³² In response, the security forces allowed counter-demonstrators to use violence before themselves resorting to violence. Carloads of regime supporters converged on the roundabout despite the police barrages and the presence of riot police. In the afternoon, protesters came under a

money (some, not all, argue for renationalisation); accountability for, and struggle against, corruption; civil liberties and free media; economic reforms, including a progressive income tax; free education and health care; and an end to security apparatus interference in public and political life". Crisis Group interview, Khalid Kamhawi, Amman, 27 November 2011.

¹³⁰ "The date was close to the Karama anniversary, which symbolised unity between Palestinian *fedayin* and Jordanians against Israel, and a success". Crisis Group interview, Khalid Kamhawi, Amman, 27 November 2011. On 21 March 1968, Israeli troops crossed the Jordan River to raid two PLO camps. At Karama, they faced a combined Jordanian army-PLO guerrilla force. The short battle has near-mythological status among Palestinians and Jordanians as exemplifying Arab fortitude.

¹³¹ Naseem Tarawnah, "The Quick Death of Shabab March 24 And What It Means For Jordan", *The Black Iris* (www.blackiris.com), 26 March 2011.

¹³² Crisis Group interview, Dr Khaled Kalalkeh, Social Left Movement secretary general, Amman, 27 November 2011.

joint attack from plain-clothed individuals and uniformed security forces that left one dead and over 100 injured. Following the attack, assailants accused the protesters of being controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood.¹³³

To maintain unity, 24 March protest organisers avoided pressing for any particular electoral reform, instead demanding greater freedom and fairness in elections. Because the event itself was very open and spontaneous, some participants nonetheless chanted slogans in favour of proportional representation; others demanded the departure of the chief of the General Intelligence Directorate.¹³⁴ These actions dismayed members of the Jayeen movement, which issued a statement accusing the protest of being controlled by the IAF.¹³⁵ Then-Jayeen member Khaled Kalaldehy said:

The Muslim Brotherhood youth made the mistake of declaring slogans that were not agreed upon. Our demand was a return to the 1952 constitution, but on that Friday [25 March] the Islamists took over the demonstration and called for a demography-based electoral law and the fall of the *mukhabarat* director, whom they called by name. There were lots of East Bankers in the 24 March movement. For us these demands were too divisive, as they suggested support for the idea that the regime should fall.¹³⁶

To an extent, the repression had a deterrent effect. Organisers failed to replicate the event's size and visibility; in Amman, protests dropped to several hundred people for the rest of March 2011, while no information emerged about attackers being arrested or tried, perpetuating the climate of impunity.¹³⁷ Nonetheless, the protest helped thrust youth demonstrators onto the political scene and demonstrate that mobilisation using non-partisan slogans was possible. Core activists involved in the 24 March event remained active in subsequent months but shifted their focus outside the capital, building a nationwide coalition, the Coordination of Youth Movements in Jordan. Khaled Kamhawi, one of the organisers, commented:

In the four months between 25 March and 25 July, the movement grew, as other people came into our field of gravity. The movement started to build bridges with other governorates, which was the goal: a country-wide mobilisation, not just in Amman. The 24 March movement is part of a coordination of youth movements in Jordan in which we represent Amman. It was at the core of the initial mobilisation but does not claim to be the leader.¹³⁸

2. The National Front for Reform

The broadest pro-reform coalition to emerge was the National Front for Reform (NFR), which brought together an extensive spectrum of opposition actors united around a specific set of demands.¹³⁹ Its leader, Ahmad Obeidat, is a highly respected former prime minister, intelligence chief and member of an important East Banker tribe in the north.¹⁴⁰ He also has a record of pro-reform activism: in 1990 he chaired the royally-appointed National Charter Commission, which guided the political liberalisation drive that followed the 1989 Maan riots.¹⁴¹

The NFR's members include the IAF's secretary general, Hamza Mansour, and the head of its political bureau, Zaki Bani Irsheid, independents such as Toujan Faisal, nationalist and leftist parties and trade union and professional associations leaders, as well as politically active youth.¹⁴² Labib Kamhawi, a member of its executive committee, said:

¹³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 27 November 2011.

¹³⁹ The NFR was formally launched at a press conference on 21 May 2011.

¹⁴⁰ Obeidat was involved in founding the National Front for Reform and remains its leading figure. Alia Toukan Homoud, "Reform Gets a Heavyweight", *Jo Magazine* (online), 3 July 2011.

¹⁴¹ Cross-community opposition alliances including Islamists, leftists and independent figures such as Ahmad Obeidat periodically have emerged since the mid-1990s. They typically were formed around such issues as opposing normalisation with Israel, boycotting the 1997 legislative elections and opposing press censorship. See Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge, 2006). For an overview of the 1989 political reforms, see Ranjit Singh, "Liberalisation or Democratisation? The Limits of Political Reform and Civil Society in Jordan", in George Joffé (ed.), *Jordan in Transition: 1990-2000* (London, 2002), pp. 66-90; on political dynamics in Maan, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°5, *Red Alert in Jordan: Recurrent Unrest in Maan*, 19 February 2003.

¹⁴² No party or organisation is formally part of the NFR, but members include senior individuals from each organisation. Other political figures in the NFR include leaders of the Jordanian Communist Party, the Democratic Popular Unity Party (Wihda), the Baathist Progressive Party, the Socialist Party, the Nation Party, the Social Left Movement and the Jordanian

¹³³ Crisis Group interview, protester present at the Gamal Abdel Nasser roundabout, 25 March 2011. Omar Assaf, "Jordan after March 25: East Jordanian nationalism and Palestinian concern", *Amman Net*, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 10 April 2011; see the accusations in a video interview with pro-regime youth involved in the violence, episode 1031, Aramram Web TV, www.aramram.com/episode/1031, 25 March 2011. (This website is blocked in some Arab countries.)

¹³⁴ Cory Eldridge, "The Young Reformers", *Jo Magazine* (online), 1 June 2011.

¹³⁵ "Jayeen to stop coordinating with March 24 youth", *Amman Net*, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 30 March 2011.

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 27 November 2011.

¹³⁷ Crisis Group observations, Amman, March 2011.

It's not a political party but a framework for action that includes political parties, independents, civil society, trade unions and syndicates. It's a framework to harness and streamline efforts. We have offered the general public, the government and the king a platform for reform.¹⁴³

The NFR swiftly put forward demands that focused on comprehensive political reform and combating corruption.¹⁴⁴ More specifically, its founding document called for a parliamentary monarchy with appropriate constitutional guarantees; fair elections under a new electoral law that respects both geography (rural, East Banker areas) and demography (more densely populated, majority Palestinian-Jordanian urban centres) and that are administered by an independent electoral body; as well as judicial reform, the creation of a constitutional court and reform of the security apparatus to make it more accountable and curb its political interference.¹⁴⁵

All in all, it sought to provide an umbrella for the reform movement, emphasising principles shared by a wide array of members.¹⁴⁶ Although its political platform is most salient, the NFR also made demands relating to economic policy, calling for continued state ownership of national resources, redistributive fiscal policies, welfare provision and state spending for the poor, as well as fair wages, including a minimum wage, to reduce "the class polarisation that threatens the country's political and social stability".¹⁴⁷

On 1 December 2011, following parliament's vote approving Khasawneh's government, the NFR issued a statement which emphasised that genuine constitutional review should be the priority. While welcoming the initiative to reform the constitution, it stressed that amendments adopted in September 2011 did not go far enough to constitute an acceptable basis for the adoption of laws regulating political

life – notably a fair electoral law.¹⁴⁸ Obeidat similarly stated that the amendments failed to implement a clear separation of powers.¹⁴⁹ By proposing concrete policies, the NFR sought to generate consensus among political forces on a clear and specific reform program. In this, it has been relatively successful; various opposition strands coalesced around a proposal for a new, mixed electoral system with half the seats to be elected under proportional representation on a national list and the other half through majoritarian voting at the governorate level.¹⁵⁰

Women's Union. Some of these have very small constituencies. For a full list of signatories, see <http://jordanreform.org>.

¹⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 22 November 2011. Labib Kamhawi is a close relative of Khalid Kamhawi of the Coordination of Youth Movements in Jordan.

¹⁴⁴ Muhammad al-Najjar, "Proclamation of the National Front for Reform in Jordan", Al Jazeera, 21 May 2011; Thameen Kheetan, "Newly launched National Front for Reform seeks rule of law", *The Jordan Times*, 22 May 2011.

¹⁴⁵ Obeidat's previous tenure as head of the General Intelligence Directorate lends special credibility to the NFR's demand to reform the security-intelligence apparatus. "Broad lines for the National Front's programme", National Front for Reform, <http://jordanreform.org>, undated.

¹⁴⁶ Alia Toukan Homoud, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁷ For the full text of the National Front of Reform's foundational demands, see <http://jordanreform.org>.

¹⁴⁸ "Policy statement issued by the National Front for Reform", <http://jordanreform.org>, 1 December 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, Ahmad Obeidat, National Front for Reform, Amman, 30 November 2011.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

IV. THE REGIME RESPONDS

A. BUYING TIME

The authorities responded promptly to expressions of discontent before the pro-reform protests even reached the capital. Their steps were only partly successful. Many regime moves were perceived by the public as little more than attempts to buy time. Moreover, reform implementation consistently is delayed, likely a result of the perception that protesters had failed to mobilise a critical mass. As a result, although the regime maintains its stated support for political reform, it is unclear how or when such rhetoric might materialise into a tangible shift in the distribution of power. In a June televised speech, the king raised the possibility of an elected government¹⁵¹ but later qualified his statement, explaining that he did not anticipate such government for “at least” another “two or three years”.¹⁵²

There may be lessons from the past. The most recent period of comparable political upheaval was in 1989, when an economic crisis coupled with subsidy cutbacks triggered riots in the East Banker stronghold of Maan. This in turn ushered in a short era of political liberalisation. The regime organised parliamentary elections for the first time since 1967 and established a royal commission under Ahmad Obeidat’s leadership to draw up a National Charter to guide political reform. It also lifted martial law, legalised political parties and relaxed restrictions on freedom of expression.

By 1991, the trend was already reversing, partly reflecting the regime’s attempt to shield itself from public opposition to its foreign policy.¹⁵³ Indeed, the alliance with the U.S. and negotiations with Israel that led to the 1994 peace treaty drew significant dissent, especially inside parliament. Legislators scheduled a no-confidence vote on the cabinet ahead of the October 1991 Israeli-Arab Madrid peace conference – a move that King Hussein aborted by

suspending parliament for two months.¹⁵⁴ The king likewise modified the electoral law ahead of the 1993 parliamentary elections, weakening the opposition by increasing the representation of tribal and rural constituencies.¹⁵⁵ The regime also reinstated severe controls on the media, political parties, unions and professional associations.¹⁵⁶

In January 2011, a senior government official warned against repeating the mistakes that led to that demise of political liberalisation:

In 1989, honestly, the state was not interested in real political and economic reform. Nothing came out of it. If the king had been genuinely interested and had the political will to do it, he would have done it, and we would have a constitutional monarchy today. It was in King Hussein’s interest that the National Charter process not produce meaningful change. But 2011 is not 1989. If King Abdullah doesn’t realise that, if he doesn’t open the system but keeps playing games, there will be problems with the masses in the street, and he will lose it all.¹⁵⁷

1. Ministerial buffer

King Abdullah’s most noteworthy attempt to address the political crisis has been to repeatedly replace prime ministers and reshuffle cabinets. Responding to the first major popular protest, he substituted Bakhit, an East Banker from the prominent Abbadi tribe and former general, for Rifai, who in the eyes of many had come to embody the business-government nexus. After tribe-driven protests over delayed implementation of a municipalities law shook the country during the first two weeks of October¹⁵⁸ and

¹⁵¹ “Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II On the occasion of Arab Revolt, Army Day & Coronation Day”, www.kingabdullah.jo, 12 June 2011.

¹⁵² Jamal Halaby, “Jordan’s king says elected government may take 2-3 years; ‘no time to waste’”, Associated Press, 14 June 2011.

¹⁵³ Jordan’s effort to balance public opinion on the one hand and its alliance with the U.S. and Saudi Arabia on the other by steering a middle-course in the 1991 Gulf War was costly. The U.S. and Gulf Cooperation Council members cut their financial aid and oil subsidies to the country. See Musa Braizat, “Jordan’s Diplomacy: Balancing National Survival with the Nation’s Revival”, Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, July 1995, p. 22.

¹⁵⁴ Russel E. Lucas, *Institutions and the Politics of Survival in Jordan: Domestic Responses to External Challenges, 1988-2001* (Albany, 2005), p. 53.

¹⁵⁵ The return of approximately 300,000 Palestinian-Jordanian expatriates from the Gulf during the 1991 war triggered hostility from some nationalist East Bankers, who vehemently opposed their active political participation inside Jordan. This contributed to the reversal of the 1989 democratic opening. See Françoise de Bel-Akir, “Returnees du golfe et processus de construction nationale en Jordanie (1990-1994)”, in Nadine Picaudou and Isabelle Rivoal (eds.) *Retours en Palestine: Trajectoires, rôle et expériences des returnees dans la société palestinienne après Oslo* (Paris, 2006), pp. 191-218.

¹⁵⁶ For a full account of the 1989-2003 period, see Crisis Group Briefing, *The Challenge of Political Reform*, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

¹⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 27 January 2011.

¹⁵⁸ A new municipalities law unveiled in September 2011 proposed strong decentralisation by allowing towns of over 5,000 inhabitants to have their own local councils. On 2 October, the Bakhit government announced that this clause could not be implemented in time for the December elections. Discontent swept the country, as protesters burned tyres and shut down main roads and highways. On 12 October, a policeman was injured

pro-reform activists in Salhoub came under attack, the king replaced Bakhit with Khasawneh, in an effort to prove he was serious about amending key legislation.

This has become a recurrent pattern: King Abdullah has appointed nine prime ministers over his now thirteen-year reign. Heads of government are a valuable buffer between the monarch and the public at times of discontent: protesters directed their ire at Rifai until the king dismissed him in February 2011 and then took aim at Bakhit until he was replaced in October.¹⁵⁹ In like manner, individual ministers can be convenient shields during less acute and more focused crises. The health and justice ministers resigned in May 2011, in what was widely interpreted as tacit admissions of fault in the controversial medical leave from prison granted Khaled Shahin; a partial cabinet reshuffle on 2 July saw a change in interior ministers as well.¹⁶⁰

How effective this practice is remains to be seen. In twice appointing prime ministers with significantly different backgrounds from their predecessors and enjoying at least some affinity with segments of the opposition, the king halted the protesters' momentum. In February, East Banker activists reduced their protests to give Bakhit's cabinet some respite.¹⁶¹ Likewise, in October the Islamic Action Front reduced its presence in the street as it engaged with Khasawneh's government.¹⁶² But in both instances, the breathing space arguably was short at best.

The regime also sought to mollify the public by bringing opposition figures into the government. Bakhit's cabinet spanned a broad spectrum, with five left-leaning ministers and an independent Islamist, even though the IAF kept its

distance.¹⁶³ Khasawneh's comprises a remarkable geographic and tribe-sensitive mosaic, with ministers from all twelve governorates as well as key tribes such as the Bani Hassan, Bani Sakhr, Bani Hamida, Bani Abbad and Adwan.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, Salim Zoubi, a member of the National Front for Reform's executive committee, joined as justice minister; that should not be over-interpreted, however: the NFR announced that Zoubi made his decision in his personal capacity,¹⁶⁵ and the IAF, NFR and other groups significant in the protests have refused to enter the cabinet. Many in the opposition believe that changing ministers does not guarantee a policy change. Speaking of the new Bakhit government, Fares al-Fayez said at the time: "All appointments to the new cabinet are made from inside the house [the royal court]. They're changing people, not policies".¹⁶⁶ Jayeen's Adham Gharaibeh added:

We've not seen constitutional amendments. There have been statements, not actions, concerning the teachers' union. We were confused about why the most important, fundamentally controversial ministers have not been changed. So it's clear that Bakhit didn't have a free hand in composing the government. The royal court interfered.¹⁶⁷

As the opposition by and large sees it, cabinet reshuffles essentially highlight the government's powerlessness vis-à-vis unelected institutions.¹⁶⁸ That is true even of Khasawneh's, whose political integrity they praised but whose cabinet they criticised for its members' relative weaknesses and lack of political experience.¹⁶⁹ Khalid Kamhawi, the youth activist, said, "the appointment of a new prime minister was nothing really revolutionary. Appointing a clean,

as protesters closed the Amman-Azraq road and fired gunshots into the air. The IAF declared it would boycott the polls until political reforms were implemented.

¹⁵⁹ See Laurie A. Brand, "Why Jordan isn't Tunisia", *Foreign Policy* (online), 18 January 2011.

¹⁶⁰ See Taylor Luck, "Reshuffle a move of 'necessity' rather than response to the street", *The Jordan Times* (online), 4 July 2011. On the Shahin case, see Section III.A(2) above.

¹⁶¹ Maysara Malas, a prominent member of both the engineers' professional association and the Muslim Brotherhood, said, "the veterans are not pressuring Bakhit, and even the socialist left has changed its discourse. Some sides took a breather when Bakhit came in". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 15 February 2011.

¹⁶² The Muslim Brotherhood and IAF also refrained from participating in pro-reform protests for a month after Khasawneh was appointed in October, leading to a significant drop in the size of weekly demonstrations in the capital. Some attributed the decision to negotiations with the about the IAF's possible participation in the government, although the IAF later turned down the invitation. Crisis Group interview, Hazem al-Oran, parliamentary representative for Tafileh, Amman, 20 November 2011.

¹⁶³ The left-leaning ministers were Hussein Majalli, Mazen Saket, Tarek Massarweh, Samir Habashneh and Taher Adwan, who previously edited the Jordanian daily *Al-Arab al-Yawm*; the independent Islamist was Abd-al-Rahim Akour.

¹⁶⁴ Awwad Khalailah and Banan Malkawi, "A Reading into Jordan's New Government", *Ammon News*, 24 October 2011.

¹⁶⁵ "A statement by the president of the National Front for Reform", www.jordanreform.org, 24 October 2011. Khasawneh added three portfolios to his cabinet, making 30 ministers. "New government sworn in", *The Jordan Times*, 25 October 2011.

¹⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, Fares al-Fayez, academic and tribal leader, Amman, 14 March 2011.

¹⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 13 March 2011. In Bakhit's cabinet, incumbents remained at strategic ministries, such as foreign affairs, interior, planning, water and finance.

¹⁶⁸ Responding to allegations of royal and security meddling in government affairs, Khasawneh declared prior to announcing his cabinet: "My government will be reform-oriented, and I will form it myself with no interference from any party whatsoever", *The Jordan Times* (online), 20 October 2011.

¹⁶⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Sheikh Hamza Mansour, IAF secretary general, Amman, 20 November 2011; Ahmad Obeidat, National Front for Reform, Amman, 30 November 2011.

well-known judge known for his integrity was a good sign, but this king is still acting on his own".¹⁷⁰

2. Forming committees

Another measure to which the regime has resorted is to create reform committees. The Bakhit cabinet's main contribution to political reform was to establish the National Dialogue Committee (NDC), which met between March and June 2011 under the leadership of Taher Masri – a respected senior politician who served as prime minister in 1991 and was then Senate speaker. It was comprised of 52 former and current government officials, opposition members, entrepreneurs and religious leaders, who drafted consensus-based proposals for new electoral and political parties laws. Bakhit said:

Our mandate is to go as fast as possible in political, economic, social and administrative reform. We need to increase the pace, to send a signal that we are positive and serious about reform. Our priority is the elections law. There will be a team that will consist of a few ministers, civil society organisations, parties, professional unions, labour unions, universities, youth groups, women's groups, academics, human rights organisations and cultural organisations. Business, bankers and industry will also be represented. It will be a large team. There will be internal dialogue at first on the electoral, parties and municipalities laws. The team will go out to society, into the governorates, to measure people's hopes and expectations. Then they will draft new laws based on consensus.¹⁷¹

From the outset, the NDC was plagued by several problems. Small opposition groups, such as Khaled Kalaldehy's Social Left Movement, agreed to participate, but the IAF refused, diminishing the committee's credibility and value. Both the Islamist Front and a dozen committee members criticised its limited mandate, which excluded constitutional review.¹⁷² Instead, the government consigned constitutional reform to a narrowly-based royal commission that lacked opposition and civil society representation.¹⁷³ Eventually, the NDC's agenda was widened to include constitutional issues related to amending the elections and political parties laws, but the IAF still refused to join.¹⁷⁴ Further

undermining NDC effectiveness was its strictly advisory role, there being no guarantee the government would meaningfully adopt or translate its recommendations into draft laws for parliament's consideration. Indeed, a year after the process was launched, it is unclear to what extent the present government will consider the proposals presented in June 2011 before submitting its own draft reform laws to parliament.¹⁷⁵

Under the circumstances, there was widespread public perception that the dialogue process was meaningless. NDC member Khaled Kalaldehy recalled: "When we toured the country, we were confronted with the public perception that the main official strategy behind the NDC was to buy time".¹⁷⁶ The secretary general of the IAF said:

The country doesn't need dialogue committees. The authorities have researched the electoral law to death: we have the National Charter and the National Agenda, which now have become part of the archive. We need political will. The authorities are just buying time.¹⁷⁷

Such scepticism was further fuelled by the past failure of similar initiatives. In 1990, the inclusive royal commission headed by Ahmad Obeidat drafted the National Charter, which recommended lifting martial law, legalising political parties and relaxing press restrictions. After initial progress, it soon fell by the wayside, as the regional situation evolved and the regime's priorities changed.¹⁷⁸ In 2005, a 27-strong committee headed by Marwan Muasher, a former foreign minister and deputy prime minister, drafted the so-called National Agenda, an integrated plan for political, economic and infrastructural development.

¹⁷⁵ Abdalla Nsour, a parliament member, claimed that Bakhit's government had planned to disregard most NDC recommendations and present its own proposal, which was not made public and was in any event put aside after the October 2011 cabinet reshuffle. Raed Omari, "Bakhit Government Proposed Formula for Electoral Law", *The Jordan Times* (online), 23 October 2011. On 6 January 2012, Khasawneh met with NDC members, including Taher Masri, at the latter's request to discuss the government's apparent intention to disregard the NDC's recommendations on electoral law reform. Masri reportedly said, "[d]uring the meeting, several committee members harshly criticised Khasawneh for taking the decision individually and also criticised the government's reluctance in implementing the committee's recommendations". Hani Hazaimah, "Masri contests PM's 'plan' to adopt 1989 electoral system", *The Jordan Times* (online), 8 January 2011.

¹⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 27 November 2011.

¹⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Hamza Mansour, Amman, 6 April 2011.

¹⁷⁸ A former senior government official said, "the National Charter was lost to the preparation of the Madrid Conference. The state entered the tunnel of the lie of peace, expecting peace to deliver, and then entered a political and economic coma". Crisis Group interview, Amman, 26 January 2011.

¹⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 27 November 2011.

¹⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 22 February 2011.

¹⁷² Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Hamza Mansour, IAF secretary general, Amman, 6 April 2011; see also Cory Eldridge, "Taher Masri: The Struggle for Reform", *Jo Magazine* (online), 17 April 2011.

¹⁷³ Cory Eldridge, "Recrafting the Constitution", *Jo Magazine* (online), 6 October 2011.

¹⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Dr Khaled Kalaldehy, Social Left Movement secretary general, Amman, 27 November 2011.

As Muasher later said, it “was dead on arrival, shelved just as soon as it was completed”.¹⁷⁹ As prime minister in 2005-2007, Bakhit oversaw both the National Agenda and the 2006 “We Are All Jordan” initiative, which reflected the regime’s attempt to capture the brief upsurge in nationalist sentiment generated by the November 2005 hotel bombings.¹⁸⁰ That 700-strong forum of notables convened for two days and produced little more than vague, general, never implemented conclusions.¹⁸¹

Without actual implementation, the regime runs the risk that its gradualist approach will be seen by the public as merely an attempt to buy time; greater frustration and restiveness could follow. The October 2011 municipalities protests, which unlike the reform demonstrations often were deliberately disruptive and explicitly threatened violence – participants fired gunshots into the air, unwittingly wounding a policeman on one occasion – were an important signal of rising public dissatisfaction.¹⁸² The gap between talk of reform and non-implementation led a former royal adviser to conclude: “In Jordan, public relations is a substitute for policy”.¹⁸³

B. REFORM WITHOUT CHANGE?

In April 2011, King Abdullah convened a royal committee of ten senior officials – but no representatives of the political opposition or civil society – to review the constitution.¹⁸⁴ The amendments it proposed on 15 August after a series of closed-door meetings and consultations were reviewed and modified by the government, then hastily approved by the parliament. Ordinary citizens, who widely consider the parliament illegitimate, were excluded from the entire operation; most appeared unaware it was taking place.¹⁸⁵

The most important established an independent commission to oversee elections, replacing the interior ministry in that role. Others reduced somewhat the government’s authority to rule by decree, set up a constitutional court and narrowed the State Security Court’s jurisdiction to terrorism, high treason, espionage, drug trafficking and counterfeiting.¹⁸⁶ A crucial issue remains implementation. Article 128 of the amended constitution stresses that current laws remain in force until the government amends or repeals them. While the council of ministers submitted a draft law on an independent electoral commission to parliament in January 2012, it also announced that the State Security Court’s jurisdiction would not be changed for the next three years.¹⁸⁷

Within opposition ranks, both partisans and critics of the 1952 constitution united in calling for further constitutional changes, deeming the most recent revisions superficial and insufficient. As seen, virtually all East Bankers who support reform share a desire for greater separation of powers and genuine empowerment of parliament and government. The IAF remains focused on the needs for an elected prime minister and to restrict the king’s ability to dissolve parliament. Other opposition demands include an elected senate, civil liberty guarantees and abolishing the military State Security Court. Whatever else they did, the amendments failed to protect government and parliament from interference by unelected institutions, such as the intelligence apparatus or the royal court. To the IAF’s dissatisfaction, they also did not explicitly establish an elected prime minister. In the words of its secretary general: “The issue goes beyond elections: with the continuing influence of the intelligence and the royal court, and with the king’s continued powers, even a good parliament would yield limited results”.¹⁸⁸

¹⁷⁹ Marwan Muasher, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁸⁰ On 9 November 2005, suicide attacks carried out by Iraqi militants in three hotels in Amman took the lives of over 60 civilians. Reportedly masterminded by Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian militant who fought in Iraq, they reflected the spread of violent jihadi Islamism in Jordan fed by disaffection with the government and its unpopular alliance with the U.S. See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°47, *Jordan’s 9/11: Dealing With Jihadi Islamism*, 23 November 2005, p. 19.

¹⁸¹ Marwan Muasher, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁸² Although the government backtracked by beginning to authorise new municipalities, it failed to contain the crisis. It took a cabinet change and Prime Minister Khasawneh’s announcement that polls would be postponed until the spring of 2012 to halt the protests. Khaled Neimat, “New municipalities emerge as violent protests continue”, *The Jordan Times*, 14 October 2011.

¹⁸³ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 23 January 2011.

¹⁸⁴ “King tasks panel to review Constitution”, op. cit.

¹⁸⁵ Only 38 per cent of those questioned in a national poll had heard, read or knew about the existence of constitutional amend-

ments. “Public opinion poll about proposed constitutional amendments – 2011”, Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan (www.jcss.org), September 2009.

¹⁸⁶ “Recommendations made by the Royal Committee on Constitutional Review”, Royal Committee on Constitutional Review, available on the Guide to Political Life in Jordan website (www.jordanpolitics.org), 15 August 2011. The State Security Court’s current jurisdiction extends to political charges such as “undermining his majesty’s dignity”, as well as corruption. See “Jordan: Drop Charges for ‘Undermining Royal Dignity’”, Human Rights Watch, 19 January 2012.

¹⁸⁷ “Evening news bulletin”, podcast, Radio al-Balad (www.balad.fm), 26 January 2012. In fact, the State Security Court continues to try political cases. On 26 January 2012, it sentenced a youth to two years in jail for burning a portrait of the king. “Jordan jails teen activist for burning king’s picture”, Al Akhbar English, <http://english.al-akhbar.com>, 26 January 2012.

¹⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Hamza Mansour, Amman, 21 November 2011.

Several East Banker activists also questioned the drafting committee's membership and called for a more transparent and participatory process. Moreover, they criticised its limited changes, arguing that crucial constitutional provisions were placed out of bounds from the start. In particular, Article 34, which gives the king unrestricted powers to dissolve parliament, was left untouched.¹⁸⁹ Hazem Oran, a parliamentarian, said:

Lots of articles in the constitution were not open to revision. It is the government that proposes amendments, not the parliament. The fundamental issue in the constitution is that the people must be the source of authority. Not only was this point not amended, it was not even discussed.¹⁹⁰

NFR executive committee member Labib Kamhawi went further:

The constitutional amendments were a big joke. The king formed a committee of non-believers in constitutional reform, and they were not necessarily qualified either. The ensuing amendments were incoherent and contradictory, and they gave the king powers he didn't have before. For instance, he can now appoint constitutional court judges.¹⁹¹

C. SOWING DISCORD?

The existence of deep fault lines within the opposition – between East Bankers and Palestinian Jordanians; Islamists and non-Islamists; and between tribes – has presented opportunities for the regime and its supporters to undercut the reform movement. Indeed the spectre of communal antagonism has arisen at several demonstrations in the form of attacks and intimidation with explicitly divisive overtones. While the lack of transparent investigation into these incidents makes it difficult to attribute authorship, they were well organised and almost certainly intended to simultaneously inflame existing tensions and associate protests with the threat of communal violence. To date, they have at least partly succeeded in their apparent goal, keeping the pro-reform movement on the political margins, without an active mainstream following.

The earliest recorded instance of manipulation purportedly occurred at one of the first protests in January 2011. An apparently fake pamphlet claiming to represent the opinions of prominent East Bankers appeared on the internet, blaming Palestinians for the status quo. However, if the intent was to trigger tensions between the two groups, it

failed; those named in the document swiftly rejected it as a hoax.¹⁹²

By March, street dynamics had changed: East Bankers who supported the new prime minister, Marouf al-Bakhit, temporarily reduced their activism, while the Muslim Brotherhood and IAF, which strongly distrusted him, stepped up theirs. Following the violent incident on 25 March described above, demonstrators were labelled "Palestinians" and "Islamist traitors" by assailants and "royalist" youth attempting to justify the violence,¹⁹³ despite the fact that the protesters represented a mix of citizens, including many East Bankers.¹⁹⁴ Bakhit blamed the Muslim Brotherhood for the violence that same evening, accusing it of taking orders from its brethren in Cairo and Damascus.¹⁹⁵ Jayeen, which participated in the sit-in, lent credence to these accusations by publicly stating that the protest had been hijacked by Islamists.¹⁹⁶ The polarisation at least temporarily undermined mobilisation; as noted, no large demonstrations followed in the wake of the 24-25 March sit-in.

On 15 May, Jordanians and Palestinian refugees commemorating the 1948 *Nakba* and 1967 *Naksa*¹⁹⁷ in the border village of Karama faced violence from security forces and pro-regime thugs, who claimed to be local East Bankers. Organisers responded to the claim by emphasising East Banker support for the protest and for Palestinian refugees' right to return.¹⁹⁸ Here too, the outcome was mixed: East Banker activists of the veterans' movement voiced their

¹⁹² See the statement rejecting the pamphlet, "Nahed Hattar, Tarek Tall: fabricated Zionist statement belongs in the trash can", Kul al-Urdun (All of Jordan), www.allofjo.net, 30 January 2011.

¹⁹³ The labels "Palestinian" and "Islamist" and the term "occupying the square" were used interchangeably by different parties to justify why they supported or took part in the violence. This discourse sought to discredit pro-reform protesters by portraying them as illegitimate outsiders with hidden agendas and a threat to the monarchy. See Omar Assaf, "Jordan after March 25: East Jordanian nationalism and Palestinian concern", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 10 April 2011; and Episode 1031, Aramram Web TV, op. cit.

¹⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Abdel Karim al-Gwary, Bani Hassan Gathering for Reform, Amman, 22 November 2011. For a more detailed commentary and testimony on the 25 March events, see Naseem Tarawnah, "The Quick Death", op. cit.

¹⁹⁵ "Jordan opposition demands PM's ouster after unrest", Agence France-Presse, 26 March 2011.

¹⁹⁶ "Jayeen stops coordinating with 'Youth of 24 March' to clarify its relationship with a current of the Islamist movement", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 30 March 2011.

¹⁹⁷ The term *Nakba* (catastrophe), refers to the flight and expulsion of Palestinians from the territories of what became Israel in 1948; *Naksa* (setback), refers to Israel's 1967 defeat of Arab armies and occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

¹⁹⁸ Crisis Group observation, 15 May movement, press conference outside the interior ministry, Amman, 16 May 2011.

¹⁸⁹ Zaid al-Fayez, leading member of the Bani Sakhr tribe, stressed this. Crisis Group interview, Amman, 30 November 2011.

¹⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 20 November 2011.

¹⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, Amman, 22 November 2011.

support for the protesters, while reiterating their opposition to the naturalisation of Palestinians in Jordan.¹⁹⁹

Attacks against protesters also have played on inter- and intra-tribal rivalries among East Bankers, which have been on the rise in recent years and months.²⁰⁰ On 15 October 2011, activists staged the first tribally-hosted pro-reform event, bringing several hundred participants from activist and opposition groups, including the Islamic Action Front and the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as the National Front for Reform to the village of Salhoub outside of Jerash. Among tribes represented were the Bani Hassan, Bani Sakhr, Daajna, Bani Hamida, Ajarma and Hajaya.²⁰¹ Half-way through the event, assailants fired gunshots into the air and hurled rocks at speakers and audience members before attacking them, sabotaging the sound system and smashing cars, leaving 35 injured and 27 vehicles damaged.²⁰²

In a press conference the same day, participants held the regime responsible for the attack, denounced government attempts to stir up strife between tribes and noted the conspicuous police absence. Public Security spokesperson Lt. Colonel Mohammad Khatib told CNN that security forces did not want to interfere in a tribal dispute.²⁰³ Abdel Karim al-Gwary, who helped organise the event, said, “what annoyed them [anti-reform regime elements] about the festival was that the Bani Sakhr hosted the event in a Bani Hassan area and that different tribes were working together. In indirect ways, they [anti-reform regime elements] tried to foment division between our tribes”.²⁰⁴

Two months later, another protest suffered a similar fate, as domestic rifts again were exploited. On 23 December, the IAF and several local and national pro-reform groups – including some representing members of the Bani Sakhr and Bani Hassan tribes – organised a demonstration in the

northern town of Mafraq.²⁰⁵ It had been rescheduled from the previous week upon interior ministry advice to avoid clashes, after other members of the local Bani Hassan tribe threatened a counter-demonstration.²⁰⁶ According to Moath al-Khawaldeh, an organiser present at the scene and son of IAF leader Abdul Majid al-Khawaldeh, authorities had been notified of the demonstration and its intended trajectory. However, when it began, the director of public security purportedly ordered a route change, after which the protesters were attacked by thugs armed with rocks and sticks. Some attackers reportedly pursued injured protesters and continued to assault them inside the mosque from where the march began.²⁰⁷

The security forces’ slow response – particularly in light of prior knowledge of the protest and of previous threats – triggered accusations of complicity. There has been no independent investigation of these events or the authorities’ behaviour.²⁰⁸ What appears clear is that the police did not attempt to protect the protesters and, later, when riot police moved in, they fired teargas at both protesters and their assailants.²⁰⁹ The same afternoon, the IAF’s headquarters was ransacked, looted and torched; authorities only intervened after the assault had begun. The two incidents left a total of 50 injured, including Moath al-Khawaldeh, who sustained a fractured skull from a severe beating, and Imad al-Saleh, an Islamist activist who lost an eye after being hit by a rock. The public security director himself, Lt. General Hussein al-Majali, was lightly injured.²¹⁰ Commenting on the fact that no assailant was arrested, Laith Shubeilat, an independent opposition figure, said:

All this was done by ghosts in a country known for its security. This leaves no room for doubt that this inci-

¹⁹⁹ The veterans’ position on the protest is consistent with their take on Jordanian citizenship and their rejection of the naturalisation of Palestinians in Jordan after 1988. See Taylor Luck, “New planned party may pull Kingdom into polarising national identity debate”, *The Jordan Times* (online), 27 January 2012. The full text of the veterans’ statement is available in “Warning against naturalisation of Palestinian expatriates in the Gulf”, Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 18 May 2011.

²⁰⁰ See Jillian Schwedler, “Jordan’s Risky Business As Usual”, Middle East Report Online (www.merip.org/mero), 30 June 2010.

²⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, Fares al-Fayez, Bani Sakhr tribe, Amman, 20 November 2011.

²⁰² “Evening news bulletin”, podcast, Radio al-Balad (www.balad.fm), 16 October 2011.

²⁰³ He presented the assailants as local members of one of the organising tribes who objected to the Muslim Brotherhood’s participation in the event. Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, Abdel Karim al-Gwary, Bani Hassan Gathering for Reform, Amman, 22 November 2011.

²⁰⁵ The protest was organised by a committee of the Mafraq National Forum for Reform, the Sons of the Tribes movement, the Mafraq Youth Gathering, the Sons of the Baida Reform Forum, the Sons of Bani Sakhr for Reform, the Mafraq Youth movement, the Irhamouna movement against the nuclear reactor, and the Mafraq Democratic Youth Gathering. Noor al-Amad, “Tension hangs over Mafraq ahead of the Reform and Loyalty Friday protest”, Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 22 December 2011.

²⁰⁶ This is according to Khadr Bani Khalid, IAF bureau chief for Mafraq. Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Dana Jibril, “Video: Saleh loses an eye and Khawaldeh has a fractured skull”, Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 24 December 2011.

²⁰⁸ Both the IAF and tribal groups supporting reform have demanded independent probes into the incidents. Haneen al-Ramhy, “The Islamic movement to resort to justice for Mafraq events”, Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 23 November 2011.

²⁰⁹ Dana Jibril, “Video”, op. cit.

²¹⁰ “Evening news bulletin”, podcast, Radio al-Balad (www.balad.fm), 24 December 2011; “Mafraq statement: the thuggery came from the Brotherhood”, Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 23 December 2011.

dent was planned by the security agencies and protected by the authorities The government is at a crossroads: either it stays quiet like previous governments when the real centres of power dominate the country's institutions, or it imposes its authority by sacking the heads of the security agencies and prosecuting the officials responsible for these crimes.²¹¹

Both counter-demonstrators and the official media sought to portray the incident as a manifestation of antagonism between East Banker tribes and Islamists. Bani Hassan members demonstrated under the banner of "loyalty and allegiance to the [tribal] leader and the nation".²¹² The day of the attack, Jordan's official news agency published a statement attributed to a Mafrqa youth organisation that blamed the violence on the Muslim Brotherhood's insistence on holding the march, calling the Islamists "disloyal", "traitors" and "terrorists".²¹³

Not all Bani Hassan tribe members agreed. On 22 January, 74 sheikhs and prominent figures published a statement denying that the tribe had endorsed the attack: "The deplorable incident that happened in the city of Mafrqa on 23 December 2011 was not the work of the tribe which we proudly belong to, but the work of a few individuals who held and still hold private agendas, who manipulated the youth in the name of loyalty and allegiance". The statement emphasised support for reform, non-violence and freedom of expression and demanded that the attackers be held fully accountable.²¹⁴ An assembly from the Bani Hamida tribe also came out in support of the activists, denouncing the attack in Mafrqa and urging the government to move ahead with reforms.²¹⁵

V. CONCLUSION

At the heart of the kingdom's stability over the years has been a privileged relationship with East Banker elites, the prudence of the majority Palestinian-Jordanian population and the regime's ability to play one group against the other. The latter in particular appeared as a kind of firewall against the consolidation of a united, mobilised opposition.

There are signs this is changing. Unlike in the past, both communities increasingly and simultaneously are frustrated. East Bankers have raised the banner of protests, angered by political as well as socio-economic realities and the feeling that the regime is narrowing the circle of beneficiaries of its largesse. Palestinian-Jordanians remain wary of political activism, fearful of provoking a strong backlash. But they have found ways to participate through movements that are not specific to their community. That does not mean the two communities are working fully in tandem. Differences persist, as do suspicions, stoked by proponents of the status quo. In particular, fear of a Palestinian-Islamist takeover through the ballot box has led some East Banker "nationalists" to limit their demands for political reform and oppose establishment of a parliamentary monarchy. In this sense, the East Banker Palestinian-Jordanian divide continued to shape the evolution of reform protests and the regime's response throughout 2011.

Still, reform-minded political actors increasingly are seeking to overcome the divide and present a more united front. New coalitions cutting across community and partisan divides have appeared to demand clear separation of powers, a more representative electoral system, an empowered parliament and an end to corruption and interference by the security apparatus.

Although it exhibits some signs of anxiety, particular in light of the broader Arab upheaval, the regime has taken only modest steps to meet its critics' demands. Over a year after popular protest escalated, it has little to show for its avowed commitment to change. Intentions aside, its actions – including cabinet reshuffles and the creation of committees – appear to pro-reform forces and much of the opposition essentially as a means of buying time.

There are reasons for the regime's approach. Participation in street demonstrations has remained low, arguably a reflection of fear of instability exacerbated by recent developments in neighbouring Syria. The opposition has expressed some satisfaction with the nomination of Prime Minister Khasawneh, whose roadmap for reform – a one-year timeframe until legislative elections, time it asserts it will use to create an independent electoral commission, a

²¹¹ "The National Front for Reform calls Mafrqa events 'thugery' and the Jordanian Progressive Current returns the accusation", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 23 December 2011.

²¹² Islam al-Mashaqbeh, "Video: burning of 'Islamic Action' in Mafrqa and request for independent probe", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 23 December 2011.

²¹³ The full text is published in "Mafrqa statement", Amman Net, op. cit. While state-controlled media offered this view a platform, journalists covering the event were targeted and physically assaulted by the same individuals who attacked the march; media websites reported intimidation from the intelligence service after reporting on the incident. "Evening news bulletin", op. cit., 24 December 2011; Islam al-Mashaqbeh, "Video", op. cit.

²¹⁴ "74 figures from Bani Hassan condemn the use of the tribe's name to attack reformers", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 22 January 2012.

²¹⁵ "The 'Bani Hamida' question the state's prestige", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 24 December 2011.

new electoral law and a political parties law²¹⁶ – represents a first step forward.

Regimes in the Gulf, desperate to avoid instability in a fellow monarchy, have pledged JD1.7 billion (€1.9 billion) to Jordan over five years and are considering extending membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council as a means of shoring up King Abdullah's rule.²¹⁷ Meanwhile, the EU has granted Jordan JD2.8 billion (€3 billion) in financial aid over the next three years,²¹⁸ while the U.S. has offered it JD500 million (€530 million) in military and financial assistance in 2011, in addition to JD195 million (€200 million) in development aid over five years.²¹⁹ Khasawneh's appointment helped placate the Muslim Brotherhood, as did, possibly, the king's efforts to normalise relations with Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist movement.²²⁰ Finally, Amman's efforts to bring Israeli and Palestinian negotiators back to the table earned the king substantial goodwill from the U.S. by demonstrating both his willingness to take risks and his importance at a time when neither Cairo – absorbed by internal upheaval – nor a Washington constrained by elections is in a position to play that role.²²¹

But the monarchy would be foolhardy to believe the storm has passed. Fear of instability and divisions within the opposition could buy it some time, as could a greater infusion of foreign assistance. But deeper sources of discontent have yet to be addressed. The Arab uprisings built on years of accumulated perceptions of social injustice and other grievances. In Jordan, a combination of economic policies that favoured a narrow entrepreneurial elite, spreading corruption, a dearth of opportunities for young graduates of schools and universities and obstacles to meaningful political participation has fuelled protests. Instability

is likely to endure as long as core issues are unaddressed and the wider region remains in crisis.

Although divided on some of their demands, which stem from their own unique experiences, East Bankers and Palestinian-Jordanians converge on several points: the need to amend the electoral law; empower parliament; immediately reduce the jurisdiction of the State Security Court as a first step toward abolishing it; prosecute persons suspected of corrupt practices; and hold to account those within the security forces who ordered excessive force – by security officers or others – to suppress peaceful demonstrations.

Of these, electoral reform is one of the more important but also complicated. Any electoral system that addresses the two communities' basic needs will have to enable greater Palestinian-Jordanian participation without raising East Banker fears of being marginalised. Under a possible compromise, East Bankers would have to accept greater Palestinian-Jordanian representation (through the IAF and otherwise), while Palestinian-Jordanians would have to defer their demand for re-districting in order to diminish the scope of an IAF victory. Any such reform likely would need to be gradual. An elected Senate giving more weight to certain remote and less populated areas might be a good way to balance a parliament skewed more heavily toward proportional representation, thereby better balancing demographic and geographic interests.

So far, the regime has shown an inclination – and, to an extent, an ability – to exploit the communal divide, keep the opposition off-balance and thus put off any substantial reform. That hardly is a recipe for long-term stability. The region is in turmoil and Jordan's protesters, while perhaps less visible and less numerous than some of their Arab compatriots, have proved resilient and resourceful. The National Front for Reform, an umbrella group covering a wide spectrum of the opposition and bridging the communal divide, has proposed a peaceful and constructive way forward. The regime would be unwise to ignore or reject the hand extended to it in these turbulent, unpredictable times.

Amman/Brussels, 12 March 2012

²¹⁶ Hamza al-Saud, "Khasawneh: elections law in March and confidence debate on Monday", Amman Net, <http://ar.ammannet.net>, 23 November 2011.

²¹⁷ "Jordan to receive USD 2.5bln in GCC funding", Kuwait News Agency, 16 February 2012.

²¹⁸ Lénaïc Vaudin d'Imécourt, "Amman receives 3 bn euro EU aid package", Euro Politics (www.europolitics.info), 23 February 2012.

²¹⁹ "US Assistance to Jordan", State Department, 17 May 2011, www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/163555.htm.

²²⁰ On 29 January 2012, Hamas leader Khaled Meshal made his first official visit to Jordan since he was expelled from the country in 1999; it was arranged through Qatari mediation. See "Hamas leader Khaled Meshal returns for Jordan visit", BBC News, 29 January 2012.

²²¹ U.S. officials were lavish in their praise for the king and his efforts to revive Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. During their 17 January 2012 meeting, President Obama reportedly said Jordan could count on U.S. support. Crisis Group interview, U.S. official, Washington DC, February 2012.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF JORDAN



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APPENDIX B

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Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former U.S. Undersecretary of State and Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since July 2009 has been Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

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