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# THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN JORDAN: TIME TO REFORM

NEVEN BONDOKJI

**B** | Foreign Policy  
at BROOKINGS

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# THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN JORDAN: TIME TO REFORM

NEVEN BONDOKJI<sup>1</sup>

The unfolding internal crisis within the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Jordan will determine the future role and political relevance of the movement in the country. Not only does it take place against a background of regional political chaos, but the crisis is also largely the outcome of unresolved tensions between its members over the need for internal reforms. Calls for reform have been on the rise since 2010 in response to organizational challenges and opportunities that resulted from the Arab Spring. Despite the debates and disagreements between MB members becoming public, the current leadership has marginalized the crucial need for reforms. The current crisis testifies to the movement's internal turmoil and may represent a political opportunity to encourage serious organizational reforms.

In Jordan, the MB and its political party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), represent the main political opposition force. Historically, the MB has acted as a "loyal opposition" movement, opposing some government policies but largely cooperating with the palace.<sup>2</sup> Despite a degree of tension since 1993, both the MB and the palace have kept the door open for cooperation: the palace allows the MB space to operate and the MB respects the authority of the king and the continuity of the monarchy in Jordan.

The Arab Spring protests, however, highlighted the need for political and economic reform in Jordan. During 2011 and 2012, mass protests led by the MB, professional associations, and leftist parties dominated Jordan's political scene. Their demands emphasized economic

reform, social justice, strengthening anti-corruption laws, and changing the 1993 election law.

Particularly alarming for the Jordanian regime and outside observers was the participation of East Bank Trans-Jordanians, traditionally the backbone of the monarchy's support, including army veterans and tribal youth movements.

Today, though, protests have largely subsided. Political parties in Jordan are reluctant to follow the course of Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and especially Syria, fearing a similar descent into turmoil. "The public is dominated by fear [of any protests or political turmoil] now... [they do not want] the chaos they see in Syria today," said IAF Consultative Council member Dima Tahboub, in surveying the situation.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the threat and military success of the Islamic State group since the summer of 2014 has contributed to rising concerns among the public, and further hindered calls for reform.

The MB in Jordan, for its part, appeared more preoccupied with rearranging its internal affairs than with organizing further political protests. A number of reform initiatives were proposed by MB members, some of which were undertaken by the organization after 2010. While such efforts remained incomplete, these reforms indicated that the MB, or at least a large segment of its members, feels the urge to reposition the movement and its affiliated political party, the IAF, in order to enhance its relevance and stature in Jordanian politics. But tensions over the scale and nature of needed reforms have led to confrontations between MB members, resulting in repeated crises since 2012, which are now

<sup>1</sup> Neven Bondokji was a joint fellow at the Brookings Doha Center (BDC) and Qatar University (QU) in January-July 2014. She obtained her Ph.D. in Peace Studies from the University of Sydney in 2012. She is grateful to the BDC and QU staff for their support during her fellowship. In particular, she would like to acknowledge the help and support of Deputy Director Ibrahim Sharqieh, and thank Vittoria Federici and Bill Hess for their constructive feedback and editorial help, as well as the communications team for its work in translating, formatting, and promoting the paper. This research would not have been possible without the cooperation and generosity of experts and Muslim Brotherhood members in Jordan who were interviewed for this policy brief.

<sup>2</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2001), 95.

<sup>3</sup> Dima Tahboub, IAF Consultative Council member, interview with the author, March 27, 2014.

threatening the organization's sizable support and political influence.

Internal reform efforts will help the movement define its role in Jordan, contribute more effectively as an opposition force, and pull Islamic-oriented supporters away from extremist groups operating in the region. If the MB fails to follow through on such reform efforts, it runs the risk of being weakened by internal divisions and losing political clout. Resolving the current crisis of the MB—its split into two distinct entities in Jordan as of March 2015—is a top priority, the root causes of which can be understood through analyzing the areas of reform that remain unaddressed and will continue to rock the MB without prompt resolution. This paper discusses the MB's reform efforts since 2010 and highlights the underlying causes and fault lines that have contributed to the current crisis.

#### WHY EXAMINE MB REFORMS?

Given the conflict in Syria, the rise of the Islamic State group, and the deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt, any instability in Jordan could have a deleterious effect on the region. Examining pathways to reform is crucial to helping Jordan maintain its stability. As indicated in the March 2014 elections of the Teachers Union and the Student Union at the University of Jordan, the MB still attracts a significant level of support from the public.<sup>4</sup> An active and influential MB, therefore, is key to strengthening the country.

The MB is currently undergoing a critical transitional phase due to a number of regional challenges. The designation of the MB as a terrorist organization by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE has demonstrated to the Jordanian MB the importance of seeking strong local alliances and a shared political vision and agenda with other political parties. Acting alone as the dominant political opposition party can expose the MB to an unequal confrontation with the government. This has

prompted the MB to amend its inner workings by introducing structural changes to increase the group's inclusivity, empowering female membership, and addressing tensions between younger and older members.

For some members, however, these reforms were not sufficient. Tensions over serious disagreements about the current leadership's rejection of or hesitation to adopt further reforms even became public. Two major crises took place. First, in late 2012, prominent MB members challenged the current leadership with a national initiative for reform. Then, in early 2015, some of the same members submitted an application to the government to register and license the MB in Jordan. Both instances represent serious cases of dissent where MB members did not abide by the strict structural rules that prevent individual members from acting without the MB leadership's approval.

In light of these crises and regional turmoil, there is an urgent need today for the gradual reform of the MB in Jordan to organize its inner workings, and for the Jordanian regime to create the space for a more proactive opposition. Any radical weakening of the MB could destabilize Jordan by prompting MB supporters and sympathizers to back alternative political movements that are less pragmatic and moderate, like the country's Salafis and Islamic State supporters. Both the monarchy and the MB can work together to enhance Jordan's stability. The monarchy can push for a more representative election law and amend the political parties law, which is responsible for restricting the activity of political parties. The MB, on the other hand, should move to adopt a more participatory approach to shaping government policies.

#### THE MB IN JORDAN

Since the MB was established in Jordan in 1942, relations between the movement and the monarchy have been marked by tacit cooperation, with the MB generally benefiting

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<sup>4</sup> Osama al-Sharif, "Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood Maintains Grassroots Support," *Al Monitor*, 31 March 2014, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/03/jordan-muslim-brotherhood-union-elections.html>>.

from government policies until 1993. The MB, for example, was the main beneficiary in Jordan's brief democratization "experiment" from 1989 to 1993.<sup>5</sup> From 1993 onward, however, Jordan underwent a period of political repression. With the economic pressure following the 1991 Gulf War leading the government to seek a peace treaty with Israel by 1994, "democratization became an inconvenience."<sup>6</sup> In 1996, a human rights organization accused the government of arbitrary arrests and torture of detainees.<sup>7</sup> The most crucial development for the MB in Jordan during this period, however, proved to be the 1993 election law.

In 1993, the government changed the election law to a single non-transferrable vote system, which was introduced to engineer election results away from party-focused politics and toward a loyalist, trans-Jordanian-dominated parliament.<sup>8</sup> The MB responded to the ensuing government repression by boycotting the 1997 elections. More recently, the MB boycotted the 2010 and 2013 elections, citing fraud. In 2012, the government partly reversed course and amended the election law, combining the single vote system with the election of 27 seats from a national list. Although the new election law was amended to meet calls for political reform following the mass protests of 2011-2012, the changes neither empowered political parties nor changed the political system.<sup>9</sup>

The MB participated in earlier elections through the IAF, which it established in 1992 as an independent party in response to legal

changes pertaining to political parties. But according to Hamid, the IAF failed to present itself as independent from the MB, adopting the movement's discourse, including by focusing on the "Zionist" threat posed by Israel and the challenges to Islamic values in Jordan.<sup>10</sup>

The wave of protests in the region in 2011 and 2012 empowered the MB in Jordan. In Jordan, Egypt, and elsewhere, the MB "realized that the struggle was not one of the MB against governments but one of freedom-seeking nations against dictatorial regimes."<sup>11</sup> This strengthened its existing alliances with leftist and communist groups, and led to the formation of relations with new opposition groups, like the veterans' movement and several rural and semi-rural protest movements.

Although this was not the first alliance the MB had forged with leftist and liberal parties, observers note the 2011 alliance was marked by an unprecedented level of coordination in demonstrations and demands.<sup>12</sup> MB members said that the movement's leadership pushed for greater coordination with other groups.<sup>13</sup> Previous egotistic concerns disappeared, with MB leaders wanting to share podiums with leaders from other parties and movements to address joint rallies. "The most important structural change within the MB was to reject a monopoly on the reform movement. It sought to neutralize differences and build alliances."<sup>14</sup>

This cooperation, however, decreased in 2012 and was totally severed in mid-2013. The unfolding crisis in Syria brought ideological

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<sup>5</sup> For more on this, see Glenn E. Robinson, "Defensive Democratization in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 3 (1998): 387-410. For a brief but more recent account, see Shadi Hamid, *Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 77-85.

<sup>6</sup> Hamid, *Temptations of Power*, 105.

<sup>7</sup> "Arab Human Rights Watchdog Alleges Violations in Jordan," Associated Press, 21 October 1996, <[http://www.nexis.com/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21\\_T21373365957&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29\\_T21373365961&cisb=22\\_T21373365960&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=138211&docNo=10](http://www.nexis.com/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T21373365957&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T21373365961&cisb=22_T21373365960&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=138211&docNo=10)>.

<sup>8</sup> See Sean L. Yom, "Jordan: Ten More Years of Autocracy," *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 4 (2009): 154.

<sup>9</sup> *Map of Political Parties and Movements in Jordan* (Amman: Identity Center and Netherlands Institute of Multiparty Democracy, 2014), <<http://identity-center.org/sites/default/files/Map%20of%20Political%20Parties%20and%20Movements%20in%20Jordan%20English.pdf>>, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Hamid, *Temptations of Power*, 82-84.

<sup>11</sup> Salem Falahat, MB Consultative Council member and former general overseer of the MB in Jordan from 2006-2008, interview with the author, March 26, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Abu Ruman, scholar on Islamic movements in Jordan, interview with the author, April 2, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Gaith Qdah, head of the IAF Youth Committee, interview with the author, March 30, 2014; Tahboub, interview.

<sup>14</sup> Tahboub, interview.

rifts between the MB and leftist and communist parties to the forefront.<sup>15</sup> While the latter sided with the Syrian regime, the MB supported the rebels. In June 2013, the IAF proceeded to freeze its own membership in the Higher Coordination Committee of the Jordanian Opposition Parties. While this severed alliance was not directly responsible for the waning of the protest movement, it did undermine the opposition parties' strength and collective political will.

#### REFORM EFFORTS AND OBSTACLES WITHIN THE MB IN JORDAN

Since 2012, the MB and the IAF have undertaken a number of internal reform efforts in response to regional, domestic, and internal challenges. Although some MB members have denied such efforts—arguing that “internal matters are organized and settled already”—other members confirm that there have been attempts to address emerging challenges.<sup>16</sup> When analyzing the current status of the MB and IAF in Jordan, four prominent challenges and areas for reform emerge. These are: the overlap between the political party and the MB; the issue of female membership and inclusion in the party's organizational structure; the ongoing ideological shifts and reorientation of the movement's political discourse; and finally, the tensions between the MB's younger and older generations.

In order to examine preliminary reform efforts by the MB, this paper will focus on the above-mentioned areas of reform. Limited success in addressing these four challenges has contributed to the current crisis, and how they are handled going forward will determine whether the MB and the IAF will be able to remain cohesive and relevant political forces in Jordan.

#### Structural Aspects

The legal status of the Muslim Brotherhood Association in Jordan was the prominent factor through which the current crisis manifested. Former general overseer Abdel-Majid Thnaibat submitted a formal request to the government in February 2015 to register the MB as a political association under the umbrella of Ministry of Political Development. The MB has been operating without legal cover since 1965.<sup>17</sup> In justifying his action, Thnaibat argued that registering the MB in accordance with current Jordanian laws will protect the MB against any regime crackdown in case the regime succumbs to regional and international pressures to classify the MB as a terrorist organization.<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting here that Zaki Bani Ersheid, the MB's deputy overseer, was sentenced to 18 months in prison in February 2015 for criticizing the UAE. However, opponents criticized Thnaibat and his supporters for acting unilaterally without the approval of the MB's current general overseer and executive council. The government granted the new license on March 2, 2015, and the MB responded by expelling Thnaibat and ten other members. Thus, two Muslim Brotherhood entities are operating in Jordan now: the one led by the general overseer, and the newly registered one that Thnaibat leads.

Before the recent request for a new license, the MB was registered and licensed as a charity organization. The IAF, despite previous assertions that it would be financially and administratively independent, still relies on the MB to oversee its policy choices and decisions.<sup>19</sup> While membership in the IAF is open to all Jordanian citizens, MB members tend to dominate the party.

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<sup>15</sup> See Rania al Ja'bari, “Al-mu'aradah al-'urduniyyah tuhalliḡ kharīj al-hudud wa 'uyunuha 'ala al-dakhil” [Jordanian opposition circling beyond borders but with eyes on the interior], *Al Safir*, 28 January 2014, <<http://www.assafir.com/Article/1/335702>>.

<sup>16</sup> S'oud Abu Mahfouth, member of the MB Executive Council, interview with the author, June 26, 2014; Qdah, interview.

<sup>17</sup> A law for associations was introduced in 1965. The law stipulated that any association that does not correct its legal status in accordance with the new law in three months will be considered dissolved. The Muslim Brotherhood Association did not correct its legal status.

<sup>18</sup> “Khafaya wa asrar lam tunshar hawl 'azmat al-ikhwan” [Unpublished Secrets and Details about the Brotherhood Crisis], *Rai al Yawm*, 18 March 2015, <<http://www.raialyoum.com/?p=232346>>.

<sup>19</sup> Ishaq Farahan, former IAF secretary-general, quoted in Naser Al Ma'aytah, *Usul al-abzab al-'urduniyya: dirasa 'an al-abzab al-'urduniyya min 1921 – 1993* [Origins of Jordanian Political parties: Study on Jordanian Political Parties from 1921-1993] (Amman: Al Balsam Publishers, 1994), 105.

Apart from Thnaibat's step to define the legal status of the MB, a lack of clarity on the legal status of the organization in Jordan led to confusion regarding the political role of the IAF and the preaching role of the movement. This, according to the deputy secretary-general of the IAF, Mohammed Zyoud, is caused by two fundamental factors. First, there is no regulation that prevents MB officials from holding positions within the IAF, thus merging priorities and responsibilities and hindering a clear separation of tasks between the party and the movement. A second factor is the dysfunctional nature of Jordanian politics, whereby government policies are designed to inhibit the development of successful and functional political parties.<sup>20</sup> In June 2014, for example, the government did not allow the IAF to hold its fourth general meeting in a public hall and prevented private entities from renting halls to the party.<sup>21</sup>

Under such conditions, it has become hard for the IAF and the MB to differentiate their identities and responsibilities.<sup>22</sup> This condition is also exacerbated by the fact that the MB is older and well-established, enjoying deeper roots and links within Jordanian society, thus making the movement, not the party, the main vehicle for popular mobilization during elections and protests. This important organizational relationship between the MB and the IAF has yet to undergo any significant reform. According to Muhammad Abu Ruman, a scholar on Islamic movements in Jordan, two problems are prominent in this regard. First, when the MB Consultative Council (CC) makes a decision, MB members in the IAF CC are "obliged" to comply with it in IAF voting sessions. Second, the IAF secretary-general was chosen by the MB CC until very recently.<sup>23</sup> This rule was changed in 2013 to only allow the MB CC to suggest names for this position.

In September 2013, the IAF amended six articles of its basic code. These include reducing the membership of its CC from 120 to 80, giving the CC the authority to give a vote of no confidence on the Executive Council, and allowing the IAF CC to elect up to ten percent of the MB CC, divided equally between men and women.<sup>24</sup> These amendments were undertaken for practical reasons like reaching quorum and conforming to the new Political Parties Law in Jordan.<sup>25</sup> They were not designed to effectively address the structural relationship between the party and the movement. The amendment that allows the IAF CC to elect ten percent of the MB CC contributes to the confusion of roles, albeit in the opposite direction. This change was designed to balance the MB's dominance over the IAF by giving the IAF a greater say on the MB CC.

This situation contributes to the larger confusion between the MB's religious preaching (*da'wa*) role and its perceived political role. The Jordanian MB has engaged in political activities from early on and participated in the 1956 elections, therefore combining its preaching and social role with active political participation. This combination of roles is problematic as it creates confusion between the political policies of the MB and the general Islamic education and *da'wa* that the movement engages in.

### Strengthening Female Membership

One important area of transformation within the IAF was the amendment of the party's basic code in order to include articles that were more favorable to women. This occurred "by force, not by choice," according to IAF CC member Dima Tahboub. As a result of the new amendments, 11 out of 80 seats within the IAF CC are now reserved for women. In addition, women can

<sup>20</sup> Zyoud, interview with the author, June 29, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Hadeel Ghaboun, "Shakhsiyyat barizah fi mu'tamar al-'amal al-islami" [Prominent personalities at the Islamic Action Front conference] *al-Ghad*, 21 June 2014, <<http://www.alghad.com/articles/809533>>.

<sup>22</sup> Zyoud, interview.

<sup>23</sup> Abu Ruman, interview.

<sup>24</sup> Musa Kara'een, "Ta'dilat tanthimiyya 'ala al-qanun al-asasi li jabhat al 'amal" [Regulatory amendments to the basic code of the Islamic Action Front], *Al Sabeel*, 14 September 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Ahmad Abu Aysha, IAF office manager, interview with the author, April 17, 2014.

run for other seats through open elections. Previously, the number of women in the IAF CC was between 4 and 11, amounting to roughly 5-9 percent of the total seats. The “force” that Tahboub refers to is that of female participation in the Arab Spring protests of 2011 in both Jordan and Egypt. The important role that women played in such protests compelled the MB to acknowledge their position in the group, and to allow for more favorable regulations in the IAF. “In Egypt women have been at the forefront of mass protests and suffered. The Islamic movement recognized that women are a source of power, and also that encouraging more female membership will deter claims that Islamic parties marginalize women.”<sup>26</sup>

While women of the Islamic movement (i.e., the MB and other Islamic-oriented movements and parties in Jordan such as al-Wasat al-Islami Party) have been active administrators and educators running many MB services, they still remain a marginalized voice within the country’s political sphere. Other than Dima Tahboub, Hayat al-Musaimi, and Eida al-Mitlaq, almost no women are known to the public as IAF members, even though new female members such as Do’a Jaber, Nawal al-Otoum, and Samira al-Azeh were elected to the IAF CC in June 2014. The MB, meanwhile, has yet to formalize its female membership. Unlike its mother organization in Egypt, where women are officially part of the organizational structure, women are not allowed to be members of the MB, just the IAF. Women members work on specific committees, but have not attained the right to vote or to hold elected positions in the MB.<sup>27</sup> Unless the MB officially includes women, female participation will remain minimal. Female membership will not only ensure that the MB is more representative demographically, but it will also help bring the concerns and demands of women into the political arena, particularly

employment discrimination and the restrictions on Jordanian women married to foreigners.

### Re-orientation of the Political Discourse

Perhaps the most important transformation in the MB today is the revision of the movement’s discourse and literature to embrace the concepts of a civil state and plural politics. Observers note that the MB’s insistence on constitutional reform and its positions on political reform mark a quantum leap in the group’s political thinking toward democratization and plural politics.<sup>28</sup> While this constitutes a gradual development of earlier debates on democracy and consultation in Islam, MB members assert that serious changes and efforts are currently taking place in this regard. Despite such assertions, this transformation has yet to yield practical effects.

According to Salem Falahat, former general overseer of the MB, the movement is seeking to establish how Islamic religious texts embrace political pluralism as a way of reviewing its discourse. He explains that when the Quran says “there is no compulsion in religion,” it prevents Muslims from discriminating against non-Muslims, thus advocating for religious pluralism and, by extension, political pluralism.<sup>29</sup>

This revision in discourse is taking place as the MB introduces its members to the writings of moderate Islamists like Rachid Ghannouchi and Abdel Fattah Moro.<sup>30</sup> Since 2011, MB internal discourse has presented the concept of a civil state as one in conformity with Islamic principles, shown a more pronounced commitment to plural politics manifested by new alliances such as with the National Reform Front, and embraced calls for a constitutional monarchy. According to analysts, this also includes a greater emphasis on Jordanian national concerns in comparison to Arab and

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<sup>26</sup> Tahboub, interview.

<sup>27</sup> Nabil Kofahi, MB member and co-founder of Zamzam Initiative, interview with the author, July 1, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Mohamad Abu Ruman and Hasan Abu Hanieh, *Al-hal al-islami fi al-urdun: al-islamiyyun wa al-dawla wa rihanat al-dimuqratiyya wa al-amm* [The ‘Islamic Solution’ in Jordan: Islamists, the state and the prospects for democracy and security] (Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Jordan & Iraq, 2013), 150.

<sup>29</sup> Falahat, interview; Quran 2:256.

<sup>30</sup> Tahboub, interview.

Palestinian affairs.<sup>31</sup> Falahat notes, for example, how the Jordanian MB is currently discussing the concept of a civil state as presented in Islam by the Prophet Muhammad's Constitution of Medina. The MB is seeking to show its members how the basis for a civil state was originally provided in Islam, while trying to develop its own understanding of that same concept today. According to Falahat, *shura* (consultation) is the only principle of governance in Islam, allowing Muslims to choose mechanisms that suit their political and cultural traditions, including working with other political actors that may be ideologically different.<sup>32</sup> This marks a key advance in the MB's thinking on democratic governance.

The current reorientation of the political discourse marks a further progression from these earlier discursive shifts. It discusses a civil state concept within the framework of equal citizenship rights and obligations, going well beyond the MB's internal debates on democracy in 2003 and 2005. Such a civil state would require the MB to accept and acknowledge different visions for good governance in Jordan, including ones that do not rest on "Islamic" concepts. This would also involve compromises and working with communist, liberal, and secular parties along with tribal and youth movements to produce a vision for the Jordanian state that satisfies these diverse actors. Likewise, in 2010 Nabil Kofahi presented a paper on the idea of a civil state at a Jordanian MB conference on reform. According to Kofahi, the reference point of this civil state is Islam, but it functions according to plural politics, rule of law, and the separation of powers.<sup>33</sup> Eventually, these ideas were formally adopted by the MB and a number of other parties and reform movements under the banner of the National Front for Reform (NFR) in May 2011.

The first of the NFR's twelve articles sets the goal of "adopting a national strategy for reform to place the country on its democratic path. The constitution and the National Charter form the basis to establish a democratic civil state that builds on values of freedom, justice and respect for human rights; and relies on citizenship as its constitutional, legal and moral base."<sup>34</sup> While the MB has thus far shown a commitment to the principles of a civil state, this commitment remains untested in office, as the MB has boycotted the 2010 and 2013 elections.

Both reformers and hardliners within the Jordanian MB have expressed an acceptance of plural politics. Zaki Bani Ersheid, deputy general overseer, confirmed the MB's dedication to the participation of other political and social actors in Jordan in this current transitional period in the region. This stated but untested commitment to building stronger alliances with ideologically different parties stems from "a conviction that the struggle in the region is not between Islamic parties and other political actors. It is rather between the current political status and the desire to empower nations to design their futures."<sup>35</sup>

The call for a constitutional monarchy further clarifies the shift in MB discourse. When Irhail Gharaibeh introduced an initiative on constitutional monarchy back in 2009, the issue was still a "red line" in Jordan. Contrary to what Gharaibeh asserts, the MB leadership denied approval of this initiative. He attributed the MB leadership's hesitation to openly embrace the call for constitutional monarchy to the distance and indifference of the hawks to the domestic concerns of Jordanians. Some more hawkish leaders, he noted, perceived any goal other than the liberation of Palestine as a

<sup>31</sup> Hamid, *Temptations of Power*, 147-148.

<sup>32</sup> Falahat, interview.

<sup>33</sup> Mohannad Mbaydeen, "Al-muwatanah wa tasawurat al-dawla fi khitab al-haraka al-islamiyya al-'urduniyya" [Citizenship and visions of a state in the discourse of the Jordanian Islamic movement], Al Arabiya Institute for Studies, December 2013.

<sup>34</sup> "Ubidat yakshif 'an ru'yat al-jabha al-wataniyyah lil 'islah" [Obeidat reveals the vision of the National Front for Reform], *Khaberni*, 21 May 2011, <<http://www.khaberni.com/more.php?newsid=55050&catid=1>>.

<sup>35</sup> Zaki Bani Ersheid, "Furas harakat al-islam as-siyasi al-mustaqbaliyyah fi daw' al-waqi' al-'arabi al-islami [Future opportunities for political Islam in light of the realities of Arab reform]," paper presented at the Middle East Studies Centre conference "Political Islam Movements: Challenges and Opportunities," Amman, Jordan, November 2013.

deviation from the overall strategy of the MB.<sup>36</sup> When calls for reform gained momentum in Jordan in 2011, however, the MB adopted the call for constitutional reform. But later, with Gharaibeh's launch of the Zamzam reform initiative and the subsequent internal crises within the MB, calls for a constitutional monarchy were cast aside by both the MB and Gharaibeh himself. Historically, the MB in Jordan has always sought to maintain good relations with the monarchy; the tactic of embracing the call for constitutional monarchy while protests were at their peak and abandoning it later on is therefore not surprising.

Aside from the call for constitutional monarchy, MB members stress that this shift in discourse toward a civil state and political pluralism is the most important manifestation of reform within the movement today.<sup>37</sup> This reorientation of discourse has also resulted in the MB adopting a more welcoming approach toward other opposition actors in Jordan.<sup>38</sup> While this led temporarily to better alliances, manifested in joint protests and shared platforms under the umbrella of the Higher Coordination Committee of Jordanian Opposition Parties, subsequent disagreements over the situation in Syria have significantly weakened this alliance. In mid-2013, the IAF froze its membership in the Higher Coordination Committee, thus discrediting the MB's proclaimed commitment to plural politics.<sup>39</sup>

### The Gap between the Old Guard and Youth Members

Differences between young members and the old guard occasionally emerge within Jordan's MB. Yet, the movement's ability to attract and include young members is likely to be

important to the MB's ability to remain a credible opposition voice in Jordan, especially given the dominance of youth in Jordanian society and their rising expectations in terms of employment and good governance.

Tensions first rose following the success of protests in Egypt. It took effort and wisdom from MB leaders to control the youth and clarify that what happened in Tunisia and Egypt could not be attempted and would not be appropriate in Jordan.<sup>40</sup> In its effort to bridge the generational gap, the MB started a project called "Political Memoirs." This initiative takes the form of events designed for youth where members of the MB old guard share their experiences and challenges. It is hoped that these meetings will help young members appreciate the experiences and acquired wisdom of MB leaders. The talks will be published as a book for future generations to understand the contributions of the MB in Jordan and its historical achievements.<sup>41</sup>

In September 2014, the MB held its first Student and Youth Congress, which aimed to present the vision of MB youth for internal structural reforms within the MB and their suggestions for developing the MB's role in Jordanian society. Discussions in the conferences addressed structural changes to allow for a more proactive role for youth members, like allowing youth membership in the Consultative Council and the Executive Council, and reducing the required minimum age for elected candidates and for voting in these councils. Papers at the congress also discussed financial rearrangements to help the MB support itself and suggestions to strengthen the MB's online media presence and strategy, as well as the need to enhance partnerships with new youth movements in Jordan.<sup>42</sup> These

<sup>36</sup> Mbaydeen, "Al-muwatanah wa tasawurat al-dawla."

<sup>37</sup> Tahboub, interview; Qdah, interview.

<sup>38</sup> Qdah, interview.

<sup>39</sup> The Higher Coordination Committee is facing serious challenges due to the repressive environment in Jordan. Abu Olbeh, interview.

<sup>40</sup> Tahboub, interview.

<sup>41</sup> Qdah, interview.

<sup>42</sup> "Ilan al-bayan al-khitami li mu'tamar shabab al-ikhwan" [Announcing the concluding statement of the Muslim Brotherhood Youth Congress], *Roya News*, 28 September 2014, <<http://royanews.tv/articles/%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86>>.

efforts are designed to bridge the gap between young and old members.

In a paper presented at the Conference for Reforming the MB Movement in Irbid on May 7, 2014, MB member Nabil Kofahi highlighted three points that clarify the membership crisis within the movement: the percentage of youth members in the MB is declining, leaving the average age of members above 40 years; only 10 percent of new members are actively involved in the movement; and overall MB membership is declining.<sup>43</sup> In order to attract new members and encourage their participation, the MB should adopt innovative recruiting strategies and implement programs aimed at addressing the concerns of Jordanian youth, including a new style of communication that uses modern technology and moves beyond the traditional rhetorical speeches that have long characterized MB public events. Most importantly, the MB must allow emerging young members to assume leadership positions within the movement.<sup>44</sup>

The current organizational structure of the MB, however, remains restrictive. Major decisions, initiatives, and projects are centrally controlled. Abu Ruman notes that “there is an accumulation problem in the MB: the mass membership of lawyers, doctors, engineers, and other professionals are not allowed to design their own initiatives or projects on local levels. All such efforts need to go through the center. This leads to a huge bureaucracy that eventually restricts members.”<sup>45</sup> Apart from launching independent educational and charity initiatives, which fall within the traditional realm of MB activities, the organizational structure prevents MB members from actively engaging with other social and political movements. This contradicts the discourse of plurality that the MB is trying to adopt.

With the current crisis, however, the voice of MB youth has been heard. In March 2015,

dozens of MB youth signed a statement titled “The Third Path,” detailing their vision to resolve the current crisis. They suggested that both the current general overseer and Thnaibat step down, and the formation of a transitional leadership to manage the crisis. The statement highlights new levels of dissatisfaction among MB youth and their opposition to both leaders. This is one of the few times when dissent and an independent youth voice has been heard within the MB in Jordan. It remains to be seen whether the current crisis will provide a political opportunity for MB youth to secure a definite role and voice for themselves in the organizational structure of the movement.

#### Pandora’s Box for the MB in Jordan

The unresolved tension between East Bankers and Palestinian-Jordanians continues to be the main fault line in Jordanian society today. This tension runs deep within the MB as well, even if the movement has long claimed to transcend the identity divide and avoids using the label “Palestinian” for its members.<sup>46</sup> The bulk of MB members are of Palestinian origin, contributing to the wide perception that the MB prioritizes Palestinian interests over Jordanian ones. Unsurprisingly, MB electoral strongholds have historically been in areas of high Palestinian concentration, like Zarqa and east Amman.

The Palestinian/East Banker identity fault line is broadly reproduced within the MB, with members usually classified by outside observers as “hawks” or “doves.” Historically, the hawks have generally been of Palestinian origin and have advocated a pro-Palestinian agenda rather than focusing on Jordanian national concerns, adopting hardline stances toward the government and other political parties. The doves are generally East Bankers, prioritizing local political and economic concerns while being more accommodating toward the government and other parties. According to Kofahi, this division still stands today.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Shaker al-Jowhari, “Haraka tad’u li ta’sis tanzim ikhwan muslimin ’urduni jaded” [A movement calls to establish a new Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood entity], Ma’an News, 9 May 2014, <<http://www.maannews.net/arb/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=696120>>.

<sup>44</sup> Qdah, interview; Kofahi, interview.

<sup>45</sup> Abu Ruman, interview.

<sup>46</sup> Robinson, “Defensive Democratization in Jordan,” 400.

<sup>47</sup> Kofahi, interview.

Recent reform initiatives, such as the declaration of the National Initiative for Building (more widely known as the Zamzam initiative), have brought tensions between these two factions to the fore. The initiative was announced in September 2012 by a group of doves of Jordanian descent with the aim of working toward a transition to democracy with broad national consensus, while addressing criticisms of the MB for an alleged failure to promote Jordanian national interests.<sup>48</sup> Some even describe Zamzam as an attempt to “Jordanize” the MB.<sup>49</sup> The MB, however, rejected the initiative, brought its founders before the organization’s internal court system, and expelled them in April 2014.<sup>50</sup>

Dovish and hawkish MB members interviewed for this paper have described the founders of Zamzam as “brothers”; as such, like all members, they are entitled to their opinions and will be respected for their contributions. According to Abu Mahfouth, for example, freedom is an important principle within the MB; members are free to make their own choices as the MB is a voluntary preaching movement with optional membership.<sup>51</sup> This statement, however, is in stark contrast with the limiting organizational structure of the MB, which fails to empower individual members to contribute to the MB’s strength, dynamism, and cooperation with other political and social actors in Jordan.

A second call for reform came during a conference that was held in May 2014, two years after the launch of Zamzam. The conference called for replacing the current hawkish leadership, most notably Hammam Saeed, the general overseer, and Zaki Bani Ersheid, his deputy. The MB dismissed the conference stating that it was held outside its umbrella and the organizers should have

operated from within the MB structures—an indication, perhaps, that the internal crisis is intensifying.<sup>52</sup>

When asked about divisions within the MB, Kofahi, a reformist, said there are two major currents within the MB. In his view, despite the media’s classification of doves and hawks, it is more accurate to talk of reformists and hardliners with the hardliners divided into traditionalists and those with links to Hamas. In contrast, Abu Mahfouth, a hardliner, claims that while there are differences of opinion within the movement, there are no distinct divisions and “the MB is stronger than any time before.”<sup>53</sup>

If internal reform initiatives are continuously blocked, or only partially implemented, the identity fault line between East Bankers and Palestinians will continue to dominate the movement. The leadership’s rigid stance against reform has alienated members and allowed the movement to be affected by the broader tensions afflicting Jordanian society. Serious internal reforms would allow members to develop the MB’s vision for economic and political reform in Jordan. It is within this process that new issue-based fault lines between MB members can emerge to eclipse those based on identity.

#### “REAL AND GENUINE” REFORM: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The reforms undertaken by the MB in Jordan since 2012 held a significant amount of promise, but they were not part of a comprehensive reform program. The initiatives remained small in scale and did not portend any major or bold transformation. Changes in the organizational structure of the MB have been introduced and women’s participation has been improved, but

<sup>48</sup> Mohamad Majali as quoted in Tamer al-Smadi, “Zamzam takshif inqisamat ikhwan al-urdun” [Zamzam reveals divisions in Jordan’s Muslim Brotherhood], *AlHayat*, 4 December 2012, <<http://alhayat.com/Details/459153>>.

<sup>49</sup> Osama Al Sharif, “Zamzam Rattles Jordan’s Muslim Brothers,” *Al Monitor*, 6 October 2013, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/10/zamzam-jordan-brotherhood-sharif.html>>.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor Luck, “Muslim Brotherhood Expels Three Over ‘Zamzam’ Initiative,” *Jordan Times*, 21 April 2014, <<http://jordantimes.com/muslim-brotherhood-expels-three-over-zamzam-initiative>>.

<sup>51</sup> Abu Mahfouth, interview.

<sup>52</sup> Abdul Rahman Abu Sneh, “Ba’d zamzam ... al-sharkh al-thani fi jidar al-ikhwan” [After ‘Zamzam’: the second crack in the Brotherhood], *Al-Akhbar*, 2 June, 2014, <<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/207655>>.

<sup>53</sup> Abu Mahfouth, interview.

these measures fall short of clearly separating the religious movement from the political party and including women in all structures and decision-making bodies. Likewise, ongoing efforts to bridge the gap between the movement's generations are no substitute for a serious plan to address the associated tensions. Meanwhile, attempts at reorienting the Jordanian MB's discourse toward concepts of a civil state and plural governance are again underway, but they do not yet form a well-articulated ideological program.

The failure to follow through on reforms has increased the frustration and alienation of both senior and youth members. Over the past two years, the media has continuously reported about MB members' frustration over the resistance of the current general overseer to implementing reforms or even recognizing the urgent need for them. An inability to bring about reform through the MB's internal structure has convinced some members, it seems, to pursue change through legal and structural means outside the MB's umbrella.

In light of such considerations, there are four aspects of reform that the MB and the IAF ought to consider. Such reforms can help the MB to overcome its current crisis, empower its members, maintain its relevance in Jordanian politics, and by extension contribute to the stability and development of the country. The MB remains a moderate and pragmatic Islamic force in Jordan; as such, an active MB is not a threat, but rather an asset to the country's stability.

#### On Organizational Structure:

As mentioned, the relationship between the IAF and the MB has yet to be addressed. Abu Ruman notes that the clear separation between Morocco's Justice and Development Party (PJM) and its mother organization, the Movement for Reform and Unity, offers Jordan's MB important insights.<sup>54</sup> The PJM focuses on political and parliamentary concerns, while

the movement is an independent civil society organization focused on preaching. The PJM is more pragmatic and open to the monarchy while the movement adopts strict ideological positions and can be more critical.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, the IAF should gain the upper hand on political questions, while the MB prioritizes its more religious, preaching role.

The MB and IAF can certainly aim to maintain a strategic partnership, as is the case with the PJM and its mother organization in Morocco. While ensuring a complementary relationship between the IAF and MB, such a partnership should also ensure total independence in decision-making processes and allow for a complete separation in areas of work. The MB movement could limit its work to preaching and social services, while the IAF develops its political agenda and alliances based on its political role and vision. As the MB keeps a distance from the party's political work and maintains its preaching and social role, it will cultivate its social base without exposing itself to the political challenges facing the party. Such a division of responsibilities should be based on Islam-oriented ideological and political reasoning, and must be supported by binding organizational rules and regulations. The separation of roles, the issue of overlapping positions within the MB and IAF, and decision-making independence of the IAF are all structural issues to be resolved. The current split over the MB's legal status could present an opportunity to restructure the movement and its relationship with its political party.

The MB should also address two important gaps in its organizational structure. First, the MB must allow for stronger female participation and involvement. Just as it encourages wider female participation in protests and rallies, the MB should also seek to increase its female membership. Second, the MB should restructure its system of units and families, which is based on MB founder Hassan al-Banna's original organizational structure from the 1920s, to decentralized units or offices that

<sup>54</sup> Abu Ruman, interview.

<sup>55</sup> See Julie E. Pruzan-Jørgensen, "The Islamist Movement in Morocco: Main Actors and Regime Responses," Report, Danish Institute for International Studies, April 2010, 11-14.

can cooperate with other civil society entities independently. This would help the MB address modern needs and enable its members to engage more actively in local and national development initiatives. Abu Ruman suggests a shift from the current strict organizational structure to a network style of operations.<sup>56</sup> This can empower individual members and allow them to connect with audiences through local, decentralized initiatives without risking disciplinary action. This restructuring effort needs to build on suggestions from MB members so it can contribute to their role as active citizens. Pluralism should start from within the MB before it is applied externally to its relations with other actors. This would provide the MB in Jordan with the political experience and skill of working on joint programs and agendas with different political partners; it would also allow the MB to develop clarity on its non-negotiable ideological positions and its negotiable political interests and policy options.

#### On Political Discourse:

The MB's ongoing revisions of its political discourse pertaining to pluralism and a civil state remain largely unknown to the Jordanian public. The MB must consider its need to attract young and articulate members that are able to engage audiences and groom voices that are capable of driving and modernizing the movement's intellectual debate. It is also worth noting that the movement needs to diversify its media discourse and overall communication style. The leadership of the MB employs an outdated discourse and a conventional preaching style that fails to capture the imagination of young audiences. Investing in new leaders and public faces can help the movement reconnect with younger supporters. Style can be just as important as substance when it comes to developing an effective communication strategy.

On another level, this emerging discourse on pluralism and the civil state should also manifest itself through strong new alliances.

The restrictive political environment in Jordan and the current regional pressure on the MB should prompt the MB leadership and youth members to seek new alliances with civil society actors, protest movements, and political parties open to pluralism and partnerships.

Internally, the recent crises and the current leadership's lack of response to repeated public criticism raise questions about the validity of the MB's discourse on pluralism. Pluralism needs to start within the movement as a demonstration of its political leadership style. The way the MB is managing the current crisis with Thnaibat and his supporters and its failure to manage the earlier one with Zamzam's leadership raise serious doubts about the MB's commitment to pluralism in the larger Jordanian political context.

#### On Public Identity:

In order to assert its relevance and its commitment to Jordanian national priorities, the MB should foster robust and public intellectual debates between its members. Such debates could help the movement elaborate on a distinct political vision and platform, its religious and political roles as a movement, as well as its relations with other political actors in Jordan. As a result, this would lead to the rise of distinct issue-oriented groupings within the MB. Such policy-oriented divides will cut through the Palestinian hawks/East Banker doves divide, and help the MB move away from identity binaries.

The MB should also articulate concrete policy proposals. For example, while the MB rejects the current election law, it has failed to present recommendations for a new law that meets the aspirations of political parties and addresses the concerns of the government. The MB also opposes Jordan's successive economic policies, but has not, over the years, presented an alternative policy or suggested draft laws to counter the country's corruption and investment challenges. The MB should establish internal specialized committees

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

responsible for drafting policies. These should represent the MB's vision for reform, and could help the movement become a constructive voice within the debate over reform in Jordan.

#### On Electoral Issues:

The election law remains a major point of contention today. All opposition parties have demanded changing the single vote system enacted in 1993. These calls remain unanswered except for the 2013 amendment that reserved 27 parliamentary seats (18 percent) for a unified national list. The current election law does not meet the reform aspirations voiced by protestors, and has hardened Jordan's political standoff. Analysts point out that neither the king nor the United States are interested in constitutional reforms that will diminish his powers.<sup>57</sup> An election law that reinstates the block vote electoral system that was used in Jordan from 1989 to 1992 would reduce the political tension between the palace on one hand, and the opposition and the disenchanted public on the other, without diminishing the monarch's powers.

#### CONCLUSION

Calls for MB reforms in Jordan have emerged over the last four years from the movement's own members. The major concerns raised pertain to the need for reforming the MB's organizational structure and approach, and the need for better

engaging with its members. This has led to fierce debates, disagreements, and crises since 2012. These calls and the resulting reforms have been influenced by regional developments in Egypt and Syria, and their impact on the political environment in Jordan. Although the MB is in the process of reforming itself, there remain a number of unresolved issues that should be addressed through more robust efforts. The suggested areas of reform relate to the relationship between the MB as a movement and the IAF as a party; empowerment of its individual members; active dissemination and intellectual engagement of its discourse on plural politics; introducing new leaders and styles of communication; and engaging in policy debates that can enable the MB to transcend the East Banker/Palestinian identity fault line. These areas of reform are the keys to the MB's future relevance in Jordanian politics, its ability to contribute to Jordan's stability, and its retention of popular support. The Jordanian government, on the other hand, must work toward empowering political parties through an election law that allows for a more representative parliament.

Such restructuring and reform efforts would help strengthen the MB, transforming it into an asset to Jordanian stability. The MB respects and adheres to the regime's red lines and is able to work alongside the government in its efforts to counter the rising local and regional radical threats.

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<sup>57</sup> Robert Satloff and David Schenker, "Political Instability in Jordan," Contingency Planning Memorandum No. 19, Council on Foreign Relations, May 2013.

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