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**"THEY CANNOT STOP OUR TONGUES:"  
ISLAMIC ACTIVISM IN JORDAN**

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In memory of

Maurice H. (Marcie) Blinken

1900-1986

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## ***AUTHOR'S NOTE***

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Field research for this paper was undertaken during two trips to Jordan. In the summer of 1985, I participated in an Arabic language program sponsored jointly by the University of Virginia and Yarmouk University. I traveled again to Jordan in July 1986, visiting Amman and Irbid.

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## PREFACE

Virtually all diplomatic frameworks for settling the Arab-Israeli conflict envision a central role for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. To date, however, Jordan has been unwilling to enter into direct negotiations with Israel.

Lacking in Palestinian, Arab and international support, the King was thought to be holding back because of his vulnerability in the face of external opposition. Accordingly, diplomats and statesmen have worked diligently to meet Jordan's conditions for engaging in peace talks. What they have tended to overlook, however, are the internal factors which constrain King Hussein.

The domestic scene has not remained static. Over the past decade, forces have been at work inside the Kingdom which may sorely undercut the internal stability King Hussein needs as a prerequisite for entering negotiations.

In this study, Robert B. Satloff presents the first scholarly analysis of the most ominous of these developments - the rapid expansion of an Islamic activist movement inside Jordan. Against the backdrop of a severe economic recession and stringent limits on political expression, Mr. Satloff argues that Islamic activism could produce the first mass opposition movement in Jordan since the 1970-1971 Jordanian civil war.

According to Mr. Satloff, Islamic activists do not yet pose a direct threat to Hashemite rule. But given the activists' virulent antipathy to peace with Israel, their growing numbers limit Hussein's room for political maneuver and add a new dimension to efforts to solicit Jordan's participation in the peace process.

The Washington Institute sponsored this study as part of its ongoing effort to provide the Washington based policymaking community with timely, expert analysis of current Middle East issues. It forms part of The Institute's wider purpose: to promote a better understanding of American interests in the Middle East and the means by which those interests can be promoted.

This Policy Paper is dedicated to the memory of Maurice H. (Marcie) Blinken, who supported the Institute from its inception and took a keen interest in its research and publications.

Barbi Weinberg  
President  
November 1986



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Islamic activism has emerged as one of the most dangerous and destabilizing forces inside Jordan today. The growth of the activist movement has come largely at the expense of a decades-old symbiotic relationship between the Hashemite ruling family and the traditional religious establishment.

Several external factors rankled domestic Islamic sentiment and contributed to the growth of Islamic activism, including:

- \* Jordan's lukewarm opposition to Anwar Sadat's peace initiative in 1977;
- \* King Hussein's personal support of the Shah of Iran in 1978;
- \* Jordan's staunch backing of Saddam Hussein's campaign against Khomeini's Iran since 1980;
- \* Jordan's use of the Muslim Brotherhood as a tool in the ongoing political contest with Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad.

Domestically, the collapse of the oil market provided a significant boost to the Islamic movement, especially among Jordanian youth. Islamic groups have been the prime beneficiaries of the anger and frustration of even highly educated Jordanians, whose expectations of rising social and economic status are left unfulfilled in today's climate of austerity, recession and mass unemployment.

The Islamic activist movement has expanded throughout the Kingdom. Islamic organizations are now entrenched at both major Jordanian universities and popular sympathy for the movement appears strong in metropolitan areas as well as in Palestinian refugee camps.

As the challenge has grown, the Jordanian regime's response has changed from cooptation to confrontation. At first, the Crown heightened the profile of its Islamic legitimacy and tried to coopt the popular tide of religious sentiment. But cooptation often provoked more opposition, so in 1985 Hussein changed tack and opted to confront the activists directly.

Given the speed with which it grew, the Islamic activist movement must be viewed as one of the most important and portentous developments inside Jordan today. The activists, however, still lack the strength to confront the regime directly or pose a serious threat to Hashemite rule. Yet, as the events in Irbid in recent months show, the Islamic movement has moved to the center of Jordanian politics.

Because of the Islamic activists' virulent antipathy toward accommodation with Israel, their new centrality in Jordanian politics further limits the Kingdom's room for maneuver on the peace process.



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## L INTRODUCTION

In a small, austere office in a building next to the Islamic Hospital, the shoeless leader of Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood brands Hafiz al-Asad an "American spy" and bemoans the puppeteer-like power of the resident U.S. Ambassador. From behind a desk in the chamber of the Lower House of Parliament, a newly elected legislator implores his colleagues to ban all commerce in alcohol involving Muslims and demands the imposition of *Shari'a* law. Across the street from Amman's largest church looms the colorful dome and imposing minaret of the capital city's new, multimillion dollar central mosque. The "new Islam" has arrived in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The "new Islam" is the Islam of challenge and confrontation. The charges of the Brotherhood leader represent the new stirrings of outspokenness within a movement that had for 20 years accepted the government's offer of relative freedom in return for political complacency. The parliamentarian's bold demands are just the first wave of a potentially massive tide that has already swept through Jordan's colleges and universities on its way to redefining the Kingdom's political debate. And Amman's majestic new mosque symbolizes the defensive actions of a regime that has begun to fear the inadequacy of its longstanding claim of religious legitimacy. In short, the threats and reverberations of "Islamic activism"<sup>1</sup> are coalescing into one of the most dangerous, and least studied, areas of instability in Jordan today.

Of course, Islam has always held a central role in Jordan's political culture. At the top of the social order sits the King, Hussein bin Talal, scion of the Hashemite family that traces its lineage to the Prophet Muhammad. Fealty to the King has always been bound up with his role as the Guardian of the *Haram al-Sharif*, the Holy Places in Jerusalem. Generous patronage of mosques and other religious institutions has strengthened the legitimacy the Hashemite royal family derives from Islam.

In many ways, Islam has helped fill the void of Jordanian nationalism. Its population split between bedouin tribesmen and the artisans and

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<sup>1</sup> "Islamic activism" is my preferred terminology for that effort to define and order personal behavior and political expression under the rubric of Islam. "Islamic activists" may differ amongst themselves as to the means they employ and the tactical goals they seek. Those differences, however, do not blur the very sharp distinctions between Islamic activists and traditionalist, conservative Muslims.

merchants from west of the Jordan river, Jordan lacked a ready foundation for national cohesion. Moreover, the conservative, essentially pro-Western monarchy was, to say the least, not well-suited to adopt the Arab nationalist platform of the 1950s and 1960s. So the Hashemites clung to Islam, despite their flight from the Arabian peninsula and their loss of the two holiest sites of Islam to the al-Saud family in the early decades of this century.

Curiously, the Israeli capture of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967 strengthened, not weakened, the religious significance of Hashemite rule. Though he and his forebears are responsible for "losing" Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, Hussein has benefited from playing the role of *mujahid* - struggler in the name of Islam. Asked, for example, whether he would break the deadlock in the Arab-Israeli peace process by traveling to Jerusalem like Anwar Sadat, he responded: "Jerusalem has a very special place in my heart...as the last Arab and Muslim ruler to have had the responsibility of securing the rights of Muslims and Christians in the Holy City...I am not about to be the first under any circumstances to legitimize Israeli annexation by going there." Syria's Hafiz al-Asad has boasted that "Damascus is the heart of Arabism and Islam," but Hussein adamantly underscores the primacy of Jerusalem - a city, never Jordan's capital, lost to Israel nearly two decades ago.

The Hashemites' reliance upon the legitimizing power of Islam enabled them to reach a political accommodation with religious groups that eluded Arab nationalist regimes in Egypt and Syria. Prior to Hussein's forceful assertion of the royal prerogative in 1957, the Muslim Brotherhood (along with the more radical Islamic Liberation [*Tahrir*] Party) actively participated in Jordan's often tumultuous political life. Because the Brotherhood drew its inspiration and leadership from the movement's headquarters in Egypt, local chapters periodically clashed with the Jordanian government. In the 1950s, for example, Islamic activists, in tactical alliance with leftist parties, argued for Jordan's disengagement from Britain, just as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood hailed Abdul Nasser's demands for the evacuation of British forces from the Suez Canal. When organized parties were still an important part of Jordan's politics, Muslim Brethren competed and won seats in parliamentary elections. Typically, their platform called for the replacement of Jordan's Western-based constitution with one based solely on the Qur'an.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Raphael Pata'i, ed., *Jordan: Country Survey Series*, (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1957), p. 71.

Despite their anti-government activity, the Muslim Brothers never sought to exploit Jordan's turbulent domestic situation in search of revolutionary change. Rather, they always preferred the more moderate route of evolutionary reformation by working within the Kingdom's political system. Their disdain for radicalism was symbolized by their siding with the King against leftist nationalists during the internal crises of 1957-1958. That fidelity was rewarded with an exemption from the otherwise across-the-board ban on organized political activity. Since then, Islamic activists in general, and Muslim Brothers in particular, have maintained cordial relations with the monarchy and enjoyed rights of political expression denied to other groups.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood is the closest approximation Jordan can claim to a political party; parties themselves were banned more than 20 years ago. The Hashemites<sup>1</sup> traditional "Islamic policy" has met with remarkable success. Except for a lone plot against the regime by the now-outlawed Islamic Liberation Party, uncovered by intelligence agents in 1969, Hussein has had little worry of security threats emanating from religious circles.

During the past decade, however, that symbiotic relationship between the State and Islam has deteriorated sharply. In terms of both personal piety and organizational growth, Islam has acquired a hitherto unknown sense of vibrancy and vitality. Not only is Islam no longer singularly associated with the Hashemite claim of prophetic lineage and defense of Jerusalem, but Islam may, in fact, be flourishing in opposition to it.

There are many components to the decline of the traditional accommodation and the growth of a confrontational Islamic activism: foreign and domestic, political and economic. Jordan's religious surge cannot be viewed in isolation from the activism that has swept through the Muslim world in the past decade; nor can the Jordanian case be understood without looking at Jordan's role in traditional inter-Arab political rivalries that, at first glance, have little to do with Islam at all. Similarly, the future course of religious activism depends as much on the gloomy forecasts of the Kingdom's economy as on the prospects for formalizing the state of tacit peace with Israel. It is the purpose of this paper to examine the role of these components in the dynamic relationship between the State and Islam in Jordan today, and, in doing so, to try to determine what impact Islamic activism is likely to have on the American-sponsored peace process.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Peter Gubser, *Jordan: Crossroads of Middle Eastern Events*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), p. 111.

## II. REGIONAL POLITICS AND THE INCITEMENT OF ISLAMIC OPPOSITION

Not until the 1970s did the peculiarly Islamic dimension of Mideast politics play a significant role in Jordan's interaction with other Middle Eastern states.<sup>4</sup> Islam was rarely an issue because it had always seemed to complement, not confound, the public policies adopted by the King. But with Sadat's peace initiative and the Khomeini revolution, Jordan found itself confronted with policy dilemmas exacerbated by their Islamic character.

In Iran, a mass movement led by Islamic clerics posed a mortal threat to a regime that, like Jordan's, was aligned fundamentally with the West. Moreover, in Hussein's eyes, the Islamic Republic's determined prosecution of its war against Arab Iraq laid the threat of religious revolution on his own doorstep. Egypt, on the other hand, spawned a devout Muslim statesman who journeyed to Jerusalem and opened up opportunities for a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict that the Hashemites had sought for decades. Yet Hussein realized he had to tread a cautious line lest he too, like Sadat, gamble with his Islamic credentials and find himself the victim of a fanatical Islamic assassin's bullet. In the end, Hussein adopted policies on both these issues that, perhaps inadvertently, rankled Islamic sentiment inside Jordan and helped provoke Jordan's own movement of Islamic activism.

### *IRAN*

Hussein's backing of the Shah was the first target of Islamic-based dissatisfaction with government policy. Throughout 1978, Jordan was one of the Shah's staunchest defenders; the King himself visited Tehran three times that year to bolster the crumbling Pahlavi regime. At home, many took exception to what was viewed as support for an illegitimate, anti-Islamic ruler against a legitimate Islamic revolution. In February 1979, for example, even the state-supervised Jordanian press reprinted a message from *Ikhwan* (Muslim Brotherhood) leader Muhammad Abd-al-Rahman al-Khalifa to

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4 Residual animosity between the Hashemites and the Saudis did linger long after settlement of their dispute over the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina and still exists today. But especially since the mid-1950s, their mutual interest in the survival of conservative monarchies in an increasingly radicalized region greatly overshadowed their differences.

Iranian Prime Minister Shapur Bakhtiar asking him not to obstruct the establishment of an Islamic government. Later that month, the city of Salt was the site of several small but significant demonstrations in support of Khomeini.

When Iraq sought to take advantage of Tehran's revolutionary disarray and invaded Iranian territory in September 1980, the internal Jordanian tension over the King's unflinching opposition to the Khomeini regime worsened. Two weeks after the attack, Hussein appeared on television to explain his support for Iraq's President Saddam Hussein. At first he argued for aligning with Iraq on security grounds, labeling his eastern neighbor the Kingdom's "strategic depth." But Hussein also tried to rationalize support for Iraq's invasion as the "beginning of victory in Palestine," as though Khomeini's anti-Zionist credentials were inferior to Saddam Hussein's. The inconsistency in Hussein's Islamic policy was glaring and popular opposition to Jordan's support for Iraq in the Gulf war became widespread. In a November 1980 interview with the Arabic magazine *al-Hawadith*, even the King conceded that "there exists in Jordan...an emotional gap, meaning that the Jordanian people are not in sympathy with the war because Iran is an Islamic state."<sup>5</sup> As The Manchester *Guardian* reported a few weeks earlier,

[Hussein] has never been so out of tune with his people as he is today. The great majority see the Gulf War as Saddam's personal adventure and Hussein's intervention on his side as an adventure hardly less perplexing and disturbing.<sup>6</sup>

Within a week of the King's televised address, several mosque preachers were arrested for championing Iran's Islamic republic in their Friday sermons. In a speech broadcast on the Prophet's Birthday in January 1982, the King further accentuated the Islamic aspect of the Gulf war. Throughout the previous 18 months, Jordan's alliance with Iraq was primarily portrayed as a military necessity. By 1982, however, the King began to argue forthrightly for the *Islamization* of the war. In the January speech, Hussein challenged the Khomeini regime directly by distinguishing between enlightened and fanatical Islam.

Hussein was quick to translate his polemical assault into military terms. In late January 1982, he announced the formation of the volunteer "Yarmouk Brigade" to join Iraqi soldiers in their battle against Iran, purposefully choosing the name "Yarmouk" to evoke images of the 7th-

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<sup>5</sup> Foreign Broadcast Information Service, November 7, 1980.

<sup>6</sup> The Manchester *Guardian*, October 10, 1980.

century battle between Arabian Muslim rebels and the Byzantine empire. At the same time, the King called for "an Arabization of the war against the idolatrous Persians."<sup>7</sup> In fact, though, it was Islamization - not just Arabization - that formed the basis of Hussein's charge, for the King went beyond framing the Gulf War solely in ethnic terms. He claimed for himself and his Iraqi allies the mantle of Muhammad and the early righteous companions; Iran was branded with the mark of infidel.

Since 1982, the Gulf War has dragged on and Tehran has refused armistice offers that fail to include the resignation of Saddam Hussein. Khomeini's revolution itself has come under greater scrutiny as stories of executions, abuses and puritanical obsessions have become daily copy in the Arab press. As a result, the Islamic Republic has indeed lost some of the luster that seemed to flow from the almost supernatural force that overthrew the apostate Shah and replaced him with the Ayatollah. But, despite the tempering of public adulation of Khomeini, there remains in Jordan a genuine respect for the revolution's goal of re-orienting society away from the West and toward Islam. Especially in the revolution's early years, public opinion in Jordan did not focus on the Shi'ite aspect of Khomeinism. Rather, most Jordanians admired the revolutionaries simply for asserting themselves within an Islamic framework. By challenging Khomeini on religious as well as ethnic grounds, therefore, Hussein contributed unwittingly to the escalation of Islamic politics inside the Kingdom.

### ***EGYPT AND THE PEACE PROCESS***

From the moment Hussein labeled Anwar Sadat's mission to Jerusalem as "courageous" and his Knesset speech as "excellent," the goodwill he had built up with his Islamic constituents vis-a-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict began to dissipate. Compared with most leaders in the Arab world, Hussein's response to the Jerusalem initiative and the initial Egyptian-Israeli political talks was openly supportive of Sadat.

In the months leading up to the Begin-Sadat summit retreat at Camp David, Jordan found itself both delighted and frightened - delighted that it, and not the PLO, was the target of Egyptian and American efforts to expand the peace process to include other Arab parties; frightened that it might be swept into a process of negotiation and compromise that left Jordan without its minimum territorial gains from Israel. Throughout that period, Jordan inched closer to openly joining the peace process, only to decline when it

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, January 28, 1982.

realized that no assurance of a satisfactory final result would be forthcoming. In the end, Jordan joined the majority of Arab states at the 1979 Baghdad summit meeting in condemning the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty and in ostracizing Egypt from the Arab world. Meanwhile, inside the Kingdom, throngs of students held violent demonstrations against the treaty, directing their anger against the regime for its relations with the United States and against Hussein's flirtation with negotiations throughout the previous year. In Amman, the government was compelled to deploy police and internal security forces to quell the demonstrations.<sup>8</sup>

An Amman meeting of the General Islamic Conference of Jerusalem, convened one week after the March 1979 demonstrations, pointed to the growing complexity of relations between State and Popular Islam. Chaired by Kamil ash-Sharif, Minister of Islamic Affairs and *Ikhwan* supporter, the Congress approved two resolutions. First, it denounced the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty as a "stab to the Arab and Islamic nations" and endorsed Jordan's stance as a leader of Arab rejection to it. Its second resolution, however, "praised the stand of the Islamic Iranian revolution and its support for the Arab cause" - in particular, its adamant rejection of a negotiated settlement with Israel. By criticizing Sadat and praising Khomeini, one of Jordan's most influential religious bodies joined with the King on only one of the issues of prime relevance to Islamic activists.

Despite the banishment of Egypt from official diplomatic circles that followed the Baghdad summit, Jordan never felt comfortable in league with the "Rejectionist Front" states. In his summit address, Hussein criticized "the mentality of outbidding, incriminations and emotional and verbal reactions" that marked most Arab leaders' positions toward Egypt. Government statements and local media preferred to emphasize the necessity of joint Arab action rather than the self-satisfying urge to excoriate Cairo for breaking Arab ranks. Jordan complied with most of the summit's resolutions against Egypt, but ties with Cairo were never fully cut. Along with most Arab states, Jordan maintained a consulate in Cairo (in cooperation with Sudan), and both the Jordanian and Egyptian national airlines continued flights between the two countries. Moreover, the large-scale influx of unskilled Egyptian workers into Jordan's labor force was uninterrupted.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Among those demonstrations was a mass sit-in by women at an Amman mosque.

<sup>9</sup> Colin Legum, Haim Shaked, Daniel Dishon, eds., *Middle East Contemporary Survey [MECSH 1978-79]*, vol. III (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980), p. 642-643.

Over time, and especially following Sadat's October 1981 assassination, Jordanian-Egyptian relations lost their clandestine character. President Husni Mubarak's less iconoclastic leadership, his eschewal of Camp David autonomy talks in favor of Hussein's preferred route of the international conference and the blossoming of the Cairo-Amman-Baghdad axis paved the way for Hussein's restoration of full diplomatic relations with Egypt in September 1984. Though virtually all Arab states have inched their way back into some sort of relationship with Egypt, Hussein remains the only leader of a confrontation state to return his ambassador to a Cairo still loyal to Camp David. That symbolic step confirmed to many that Hussein had reconciled himself to a public accommodation with Egypt, separate peace and all.

### ***DOMESTIC REVERBERATIONS***

In retrospect, the events of February-March 1979 - rallies, demonstrations and riots in sympathy with the Iranian revolutionaries and in opposition to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty - had little direct impact on Jordanian society. There were no hordes of students and veiled women marching through the streets chanting "Death to the King," no vicious accounts of police brutality, no charismatic leaders to energize the opposition. Against the backdrop of the revolution in Iran, Islamic activism in Jordan was manifesting itself on a very low level.

But given Jordan's particular historical tradition and the relative intensity of the country's embryonic Islamic surge, those two months constituted a watershed period in the development of Jordanian domestic politics. In contrast to both Iran and Egypt, Jordan in the late 1970s was just beginning to experience a movement toward Islam. Only in 1978 did press reports begin to discuss the "new concern...about the recent Islamic revival movement."<sup>10</sup> Various sources started hinting at what have come to be the tell-tale signs of "Islamicness" - men growing beards, women wearing conservative dress, and stricter adherence to Ramadan prohibitions.<sup>11</sup>

During this period Jordan experienced great economic expansion. Though not blessed with oil reserves of its own, Jordan's economy benefited

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<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, September 14, 1978.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Paul A. Jureidini and R.D. McLaurin, *Jordan: The Impact of Social Change on the Role of the Tribes*, The Washington Papers Number 108 (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies with Praeger Publishers, 1984), p. 89.

from the petroleum revolution almost as much as did the economies of the Persian Gulf states. Jordan's boom was fueled by the flow of remittance income from Jordanians working in oil-exporting Arab states, grants from Arab benefactors to subsidize Jordan's "steadfastness" against Israel, increased exports to those nouveau riche countries, and the transfer of commercial and financial concerns from war-torn Beirut to the relatively liberal economic climate of Amman. With that newfound wealth came a quickening of the pace of modernization and the spread of consumerism. Western fashion, taste, art and entertainment all became important Jordanian imports. In those years, when times were good, Islamic activism spread as a response to the shallowness of this Western invasion and as a plea for the return of the simplicity and tradition of the old ways. With strong popular sympathy for the Islamic revolutionaries in Iran, many Jordanians began seeking out Islamic answers to problems that nationalist and pan-Arab formulas could not solve.

The Hashemite regime clearly perceived this mood shift toward Islam and sought to place itself at the helm. Newspapers and magazines increased their reportage of religious issues; radio and television boosted their level of religious programming. Coverage accented the personal piety of both Hussein and his brother, Crown Prince Hassan, focusing on their regimen of prayer and patronage of religious institutions. In 1979, the government introduced a plan to encourage payment of the *zdkat* tax, exempting all those who paid this religious levy during the month of Ramadan from 25 percent of their regular income tax. Moreover, the palace ordered a crackdown on some of the more flagrant violations of the Ramadan laws, directing provincial governors to close bars and night clubs and to order at least token arrests for eating, drinking and smoking during proscribed periods. In short, the state was quick to sense the growing Islamic sentiment and to escalate its own level of Islamic activity.

Islamic politics assumes greater significance, therefore, when viewed in light of the peculiar velocity with which Jordan experienced the Islamic phenomenon. In less than two years, the level of Islamic activity expanded from the relative irrelevance of beard-growing to public protests provoking state intervention. Viewed in a vacuum, the events of February-March 1979 were minor. But in a larger context, they signalled a swift transition in the level of Islamic activity from the predominantly personal to the overtly political spheres.

### III. GROWTH AND EXPANSION OF THE ISLAMIC ACTIVIST MOVEMENT

The Muslim Brotherhood provided the lightning-rod for the surge in Islamic activism. At the same time, though, the Brotherhood and the government maintained their peculiar client-patron relationship. The development of that connection highlights the complexity of Islamic politics in Jordan.

For more than twenty years, the *Ikhwan* has operated as the only legally recognized political organization in the Kingdom. Its leader is Muhammad Abd-al-Rahman al-Khalifa, a disciple of Egyptian *Ikhwan* founder Hasan al-Banna. Although the Jordanian branch originated as an offshoot of the mass opposition movement in Egypt, its political fortune has always been tied closely to the Crown. Throughout Hussein's most desperate crises - in 1957, 1967 and 1970 - the Brotherhood has consistently defended the King.<sup>12</sup>

#### *JORDAN, SYRIA AND THE IKHWAN*

In recent years, the price of the *Ikhwan's* relative freedom has been to act as Hussein's agent in his long-running feud with Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad. While the *Ikhwan* may on its own seek to disrupt the Damascus regime through assisting its fellow brethren in Syria,<sup>13</sup> Hussein clearly dictates what it can and cannot do. For example, following the murder of cadets at the Aleppo Military Academy in June 1979, Asad blamed the Brotherhood and executed fifteen of its members. In response, Khalifa launched a propaganda campaign against the Alawite regime and boosted the level of support to Jordan-based camps training Syrian *Ikhwan* members for missions against Damascus. Three months later, these efforts were

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<sup>12</sup> Gubser, *op cit*

<sup>13</sup> In Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood is the largest, best organized and most effective opposition group to Asad's regime. While the Brotherhood may agitate against Muslim rulers in various countries (Egypt and Jordan, for example), *Ikhwan* antipathy toward Asad is particularly virulent because of his adherence to the Alawite heresy of Shi'i Islam. Alawites, also known as Nusayris, comprise about 10 percent of Syria's population and are concentrated in the country's northwest region. For centuries they have filled the role of Syria's underclass. The Alawite religion deifies Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, and incorporates many Christian characteristics. Although the Alawites claim to be good Muslims, most Muslims - especially Syria's Sunni majority - consider them heretics. Most of the men Asad has appointed to positions of power in Damascus are Alawites.

halted, most likely on orders from Hussein. In a February 1980 interview with *Le Monde*, Khalifa expressed satisfaction with the Brotherhood's tethered connection with the throne: "We understand our government...We have accepted these constraints with a good face in order not to create internal dissension."<sup>14</sup>

Khalifa's statements came just weeks after the Brotherhood vigorously pursued allegations of sexual misconduct brought against high-ranking Jordanian officials. According to various published reports, at least two government ministers - including Interior Minister Suleiman Arar - were forced to resign after *Ikhzvan* leaders presented Hussein with evidence of their guilt.<sup>15</sup>

A second instance of the use of the Brotherhood as a pawn in the festering Syrian-Jordanian conflict came to light in the summer of 1980. Hussein warned Iraq's Saddam Hussein of a Syrian assassination plot in August, leading to a raid on the Syrian embassy in Baghdad and a series of retributive executions. Asad retaliated against the King by threatening direct military intervention unless Jordanian-backed *Ikhwan* activities against his regime were checked. To avoid open conflict with Damascus, the King reportedly curtailed Brotherhood activities and ordered the re-appointment of two ministers known for their *anXi-Ikhwan* attitudes, one of whom was Arar. Two months later, however, Hussein made the next move in his clash with Asad, executing two Syrians dispatched to Jordan to assassinate an exiled *Ikhwan* leader.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the two countries moved close to war over the issue of military training camps the Jordanian *Ikhwan* was providing for its Syrian allies operating against the Alawite regime. Hussein adamantly refused to acknowledge the existence of such camps and rejected Syrian requests for the extradition of about 200 Syrian exiles that the Damascus regime claimed were responsible for a series of assassinations and bomb explosions. As Asad said:

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<sup>14</sup> *LeMnde*, February 26, 1980.

<sup>15</sup> Government ministers were allegedly involved in "staging sex orgies with young girls (including high school pupils) at villas rented in exclusive parts of Amman" and with "extending their protection to a chain of brothels established over the past two years in the capital to cater for foreign dignitaries from Arab countries." See *Foreign Report*, November 21, 1979 and *India Today*, December 16-31, 1979. *Le Monde*, which named Arar as one of the accused, referred to the affair simply as a "morals scandal." *Le Monde*, December 21, 1979.

<sup>16</sup> See *Le Monde*, December 21, 1979; *Quarterly Economic Review of Syria, Jordan* (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, Ltd., second quarter, 1980); *Middle East Intelligence Survey*, vol. III, no. 16, November 16-30, 1980.

The dens from which plotting against Syria sprang and from which the sabotage acts were carried out in Syria remained in Jordan, in Amman and other cities ... I want to say that the Jordanian role has led to the treacherous murder of hundreds of people from all sectors of die Syrian population...<sup>1\*7</sup>

Syrian rhetoric was backed up by the deployment of forces along the Jordan-Syria border while a handful of Arab heads of state convened in Amman for a truncated version of an Arab summit meeting.

After several tense days in December 1980, Saudi and American mediators persuaded Damascus and Amman to withdraw their troops. It is generally understood that one of the conditions for defusing the crisis was Hussein's promise to limit anti-Syrian *Ikhwan* activity inside the Kingdom. But other than stepping up surveillance of Brotherhood operations, Hussein did not restrict the *Ikhwan'' s* freedom of action.<sup>18</sup> At the time, Khalifa declared:

Asad and his gang are not Muslims - they are Alawites, and we are not afraid of them...What can Asad do to us? He cannot kill all of us. If he kills me, I have seven children and twelve grandchildren. They will avenge my death.<sup>19</sup>

During the 18-month Syrian-Jordanian test of wills, Jordan's *Ikhwan* underwent profound change. Showcased by the government as its unofficial vanguard against a Syrian regime universally decried for its "un-Islamic" qualities, the Brotherhood gained new vitality. Though it was used as a tool of bilateral affairs, the *Ikhwan's* central role in shaping relations between the two countries appears to have emboldened it.

An aura of cautious but deliberate rebelliousness began to manifest itself in the statements of even the Brotherhood's top leadership, those most closely tied to the government. In February 1980, for example, Khalifa had minimized the significance of Jordan's nascent Islamic activist movement and praised the broadmindedness of Hashemite rule:

In Jordan, nobody worries about the Islamic movement...The Jordanian leaders are more wise than others...<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Foreign Broadcast Information Service, December 8, 1980.

<sup>18</sup> See New York *Times*, December 8, 1980; *Middle East Intelligence Survey*, *op. cit.*; for an account of the government's officials response, see *MECS*, vol. V, p. 650-651.

<sup>19</sup> New York *Times*, December 1, 1980.

<sup>20</sup> *Le Monde*, February 26, 1980.

Just ten months later, though, his remarks bordered on an open challenge to the King:

This is an Islamic government, but it is not wholly Islamic. We would like to see the teachings of the Qur'an followed much more closely. The government can stop us publishing, but they cannot stop our tongues. If they try to close our offices, we would go to the mosques. They cannot shut those.<sup>21</sup>

Playing a central role in Jordanian-Syrian brinkmanship apparently emboldened the Brotherhood. To Hussein, the *Ikhwan* was a tool in his contest with Asad. But to the Brotherhood and to the growing activist segment of the populace, the *Ikhwan* had become the legitimate instrument of Islamic advocacy.

The gulf between these two interpretations of the Brotherhood's role had far-reaching ramifications. While Hussein and the *Ikhwan* might have shared some tactical goals against Syria (e.g., disrupting the Alawite regime), they differed fundamentally on basic strategic issues (e.g., the place of Islamic politics inside the Kingdom). Adeed Dawisha stated succinctly the "Catch-22" of Hussein's Syrian policy:

The destabilizing influence of Iran's government on secularist and modernist regimes like those in Jordan can hardly fill the Hashemite monarch with confidence at the thought of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood gaining power in neighboring Syria.<sup>22</sup>

#### *EARLY COUNTERMOVES BY THE REGIME*

Hussein's long-term interests could not be served by fueling Islamic opposition in Syria and he tried to fashion a response to the growth of an Islamic activist movement for whose creation he shared at least partial responsibility. Handcuffed by the legitimacy he inadvertently conferred upon the *Ikhwan* through his Syrian policy, the King could not challenge the traditional leadership directly. Instead, he pursued a policy aimed at minimizing the scope of popular Islamic activity.

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<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, London, December 8, 1980.

<sup>22</sup> Adeed Dawisha, "Much Smoke, Little Fire,"<sup>11</sup> *Middle East International*, no. 144, February 27, 1981.

The regime tried to restrict the expanding influence of the activists by placing structural barriers in their way. In 1980, for example, the Jordanian cabinet established a new higher education authority headed by the rector of Yarmouk University. Some observers suggested that the authority was "a way of checking that the Muslim Brotherhood does not get too much of a hold on the campuses - as it has been threatening to do in Amman."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Islamic activists won approval from Jordan University to hold prayers in specially-designated "prayer halls" away from the central university mosque. In practice, the new set-up facilitated surveillance of group activities.

Hussein also attempted to assert control of Islamic activists through government appointments. As a result of two cabinet reorganizations between January 1984 and April 1985, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs was transferred from the hands of a longtime *Ikhwan* supporter, Kamil Sharif, to a pillar of the old-line traditional religious elite, Dr. Abd-al-Aziz al-Khayyat. Khayyat represented that end of the spectrum of Jordanian clerics that had long accepted its relationship with the Hashemites. His appointment was clearly a signal that conservatism, not activism, was the only acceptable role for religion in Jordanian political culture. Khayyat was appointed to his position at least partly to exercise stricter control over the appointment of mosque preachers and religious establishment (*awqaf*) administrators, positions which had been filled with growing numbers of Islamic activists in recent years.<sup>24</sup>

### *ELECTORAL SUCCESS*

But if Hussein believed that the growing tide of Islamic activism could be stemmed by minor structural changes and a renewed effort to emphasize the regime's Islamic credentials, the success of Islamic activist candidates in the March 1984 parliamentary elections forced him to re-examine his strategy. Earlier that year, Hussein had moved toward the long-promised re-establishment of parliamentary life in Jordan by calling for an election to fill eight vacant seats in the House of Representatives. Although no organized campaigning was permitted and political parties remained banned, more than 100 individuals competed in the eight election races.

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<sup>23</sup> *Quarterly Economic Review of Syria, Jordan*, first quarter, 1980.

<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in recent years, the government moved to exercise greater control over personnel in the Ministry of Education, in which a bloc of Islamic activists has become a strong and influential bureaucratic interest group.

Islamic activists, including at least two *Ikhwan* members, were winners of three of the six seats reserved for Muslims; the two other seats were reserved for Christians. Jordanian officials quickly dismissed the significance of the Islamic activists' electoral support, preferring to attribute their victories "more to structural than ideological factors."<sup>1</sup> For example, one election official said that because of the high number of candidates,

...the middle class moderates took votes away from one another. Those who had a strong religious commitment tended to vote in a block, which, because of the diffuse vote, appeared stronger than it actually was.<sup>25</sup>

Others cited the absence of runoff elections, pointing toward the unconvincing victory of one religious activist in Amman who won the winner-take-all vote while receiving only 18,000 out of 108,000 votes in his district.

Nevertheless, three issues could not be overlooked. First, the seats won by the Islamic activists spanned the geographic length of the country, from Irbid in the north, to Amman in the center, to Tafileh in the south. Popular support for Islamic activism could not be considered a phenomenon limited to the densely populated capital/metropolitan area. Second, the haste with which election officials tried to dismiss the final tally indicated their displeasure and probable surprise. The election results were obviously not welcome news. Third, regardless of all the structural arguments, Islamic activists rather than middle class liberals worked within the stringent electoral laws to gain victories. Elections enhancing the position of the Islamic activists - just weeks after Sharif's removal from the Islamic affairs ministry - were clearly not what the government had bargained for.

In parliament, the Islamic activists formed the most vocal opposition to the King's government. They criticized the prime minister's handling of basic national issues and moved for no-confidence votes on several occasions. Despite limited support from other lawmakers for these and other parliamentary gambits, they persisted in an effort to rally public opinion to their cause. Parliamentary debate receives wide and relatively uncensored press coverage in the Kingdom, which the activists have sought to use to their best advantage. By early 1986, 33 of parliament's 60 members were persuaded to call on the government to introduce the Qur'anic *zakat* tax and 22 backed the Islamic activists' demand for a total ban on the manufacture, sale and distribution of alcohol by Muslims.

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<sup>25</sup> *New York Times*, March 14, 1984.

## *COUNTERMEASURES, PHASE II*

In April 1985, the King moved again. After 15 months in office, Ahmad Obeidat, former chief of internal security, was replaced by two-time prime minister and long-time friend of Hussein's, Zaid al-Rifa'i. While most observers ascribed this change to the King's desire to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy, Islamic issues may have also played an important role. Reports at the time noted the King's displeasure with Obeidat's "lack of confrontationalist policies [toward] the Islamic fundamentalist groups" and pointed to the fact that some government ministers were even allowed to give "public sermons in mosques indicating their preference for the establishment of Islamic rule in the country."<sup>26</sup>

Since taking office, the secular, Harvard-educated Rifa'i has not shied away from confronting the Islamic activists. In one parliamentary debate on the government budget proposal, he dedicated a hearty chunk of his speech to an attack on the maverick leader of the religious bloc, Member of Parliament Laith Shubeilat.

The government greatly regrets the words and methods used by the Honorable Representative Laith Shubeilat...His reservations are a violation of truth and reality, and his indiscriminate accusations against the government not only prejudice the government but your noble chamber as a whole.<sup>2\*7</sup>

In addition to confronting the Islamic activists inside parliament, the Rifa'i government has tried to circumvent the activists' popular support by rewriting Jordan's election law. In March 1986, a parliamentary majority approved detailed legislation overhauling the Kingdom's outdated electoral code. While the intent of the new law was largely to satisfy some of the demands of Jordanian liberals by expanding parliament's size and enfranchising residents of Palestinian refugee camps, the legislation was crafted to limit the chances for Islamic activists to succeed at the polls. First, increasing registration fees for parliamentary candidates to JD 500 — more than \$1,200 - was expected to dissuade the activists from fielding challengers in each district. Second, the government created for itself a potential safety-valve against anti-government activists by banning candidacies of persons belonging to "any illegal or other party which has aims, objectives and principles that clash with the Jordanian Constitution"

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<sup>26</sup> *Middle East International*, April 19, 1985.

<sup>2\*7</sup> Foreign Broadcast Information Service, December 18, 1985.

(Article 17). Third, and most importantly, the new law redrew election districts, effectively diluting the activists<sup>1</sup> electoral strength. In short, the new electoral system has constructed a series of structural barriers to prevent an overwhelming *Ikhwani* success at the polls.

A more direct approach to the problem of the Islamic activists was inaugurated in Fall 1985, when Rifa'i clamped down on the *Ikhwan* as the price for better relations with Syria. Although the rapprochement was dictated by external events, it provided an opportunity and justification for Rifa'i's moves against the activists.

Prime ministerial meetings between Rifa'i and his Syrian counterpart, Abd-al-Ra'uf al-Qasm led to a series of summit meetings between heads of state, highlighting the attempt to patch up differences between the two quarrelsome neighbors.<sup>28</sup> Immediately after the second Saudi-mediated meeting between Rifa'i and Qasm in October 1985, the Gulf press reported that Rifa'i had agreed to a Syrian request to deport opponents of the Damascus regime resident in Jordan.<sup>29</sup> That concession meshed with Syrian statements emphasizing the improvement in bilateral relations with Jordan. Muslim Brethren - on both sides of the frontier - appeared to have become pawns once again in the political chess game between Hussein and Asad. Rifa'i's key role in facilitating the move toward reconciliation was underscored when Asad dispatched a personal emissary to Amman that month to attend the funeral of Rifa'i's uncle, former prime minister Abd-al-Mune'em al-Rifa'i. Isa Na'ib, Asad's envoy and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, was the first high-ranking Syrian official to visit Jordan in five years.

While Rifa'i played troubleshooter in the contest with the Islamic activists, the royal family was free to take the high road on Islamic issues. Throughout 1985, the Crown placed a renewed emphasis on religious topics, foremost among which was the special Hashemite attachment to Jerusalem. On numerous occasions the King reaffirmed his commitment to regaining the Islamic holy places lost in the 1967 war. At the August 1985 Arab

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<sup>28</sup> The Jordanian and Syrian prime ministers met under Saudi auspices in September and October 1985; in November, Rifa'i traveled to Damascus to see Asad and in early December, Qasm traveled to Amman to talk with Hussein. Hussein and Asad met in Damascus at the end of December. The two heads of state exchanged visits to Amman and Damascus in a flurry of diplomatic activity in May 1986.

<sup>29</sup> See Foreign Broadcast Information Service, October 22, 1985; November 13, 1985; and November 18, 1985.

**Summit in Casablanca, for example, he spoke at great length on the religious aspect of the Palestine issue:**

**The talk about Palestine necessarily means talk about the holiest of the holy places. All of us know the acts to which the holy mosque has been exposed. All of us know what this means if it continues.<sup>30</sup>**

**At the same time, Hussein began to speak ominously about the spectre of radical Islam spreading throughout the Middle East, bringing down states like Jordan in its wake. In a January 1985 interview, the King said that the dangers posed by Iran and "radical Islamic fundamentalism" were not limited to the possible destruction of Iraq, but rather included "greater fragmentation and greater tragedies [throughout the entire region] than what we have seen in Lebanon already."<sup>31</sup> According to his brother, Crown Prince Hassan,**

**...one of the major aspects of concern is the possibility that the present situation [in the Arab-Israeli dispute] will lead to a primitive war between extreme confessional groups that actually threatens the fabric of our societies...[T]he grim possibility facing the Middle Eastern countries at present is that of sliding into a prolonged, fierce and all-destroying war.<sup>32</sup>**

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<sup>30</sup> Foreign Broadcast Information Service, August 8, 1985.

<sup>31</sup> Foreign Broadcast Information Service, January 29, 1985.

<sup>32</sup> Foreign Broadcast Information Service, January 18, 1985.

#### IV. THE KING CRACKS DOWN

In November 1985, the King made an abrupt turnaround in policy toward the Muslim Brotherhood and personally entered the domestic battle over Islamic politics for the first time. Until then, the King's statements on the Islamic implications of policy decisions had been confined to issues of foreign affairs (support for the Shah, alliance with Iraq, re-establishment of relations with Egypt), with no reference to the effect those policies may have had in provoking Islamic-based discontent inside the kingdom. But now, Hussein began to meet the growing internal Islamic challenge head-on.

Jordan's policy of seeking better relations with Syria offered the King a prime opportunity to crack down on the Islamic activists. In his November 2 speech opening the parliament, the King lashed out at militant mosque preachers and called on the lawmakers to pass regulations banning "uncontrolled, exaggerated preaching and the deviation from the method of effective, objective preaching."

One week later, Hussein took the unprecedented step of offering Syria a public apology for underground opposition activity against the Syrian government conducted by the Muslim Brotherhood from Jordanian territory. In fact, Hussein's declaration fulfilled one of the demands Asad had issued during the tense border confrontation five years earlier.<sup>33</sup> The extent of Hussein's recantation of past statements regarding the Jordanian *Ikhwan* is quite remarkable. The following excerpts from the King's remarks are quoted from a front-page *Jordan Times* story headlined "King: Subversive elements plotted and caused Jordanian-Syrian rift:"

But all of a sudden we discovered the truth about the whole affair and we realized what was happening. It emerged that some groups which have had to do with the bloody events in Syria were actually living in Jordan, hiding behind religious groups and pretending to be adhering to religion. This group has been connected with international organizations based in foreign and Arab and Islamic capitals hatching plots against the Arabs. The group's members were in reality outlaws committing crimes and sowing seeds of dissension among people.

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<sup>33</sup> New York *Times*, December 3, 1980.

**I hereby announce that I was quite deceived along with a large section of the Jordanian people by this criminal group. I am pained by what had happened because I am not in the habit of denying the truth or condoning deception.**

**I warn all citizens against the evil designs of this rotten group and urge all citizens to prevent them from implementing their evil plans that aim at causing divisions among Arab ranks and sowing seeds of dissension in our midst through concealing themselves behind religious pretenses and through using our religion to achieve their goals.**

**I am confident that the vigilant Jordanian family is capable of exposing the evildoers, deceivers and conjurors and preventing them from achieving their goals.**

**I warn this group which went astray and which abused our trust that it has no room amongst us any more. We cannot harbor conspirators or deceivers or those who mean to do harm to our nation and we will not allow anybody to sow seeds of dissension between Jordan and any other Arab country. Anyone who causes harm to our brothers is an enemy of ours.<sup>34</sup>**

Rifa'i was almost certainly the principal motivator behind the King's extraordinary shift in policy. Hussein's statements were not written in the form of an apology directed to Asad or as a royal proclamation; rather, they were conceived as a policy directive addressed directly to the Prime Minister. Within days, foreign radio reports noted that Jordanian security forces, acting under orders from Rifa'i (who also serves as defense minister), had rounded up and extradited to Damascus hundreds of *Ikhwan* members active in the Syrian opposition. Soon thereafter, Rifa'i's cabinet approved a proposed law prohibiting mosque preachers from discussing political issues in their sermons and requiring them to submit drafts of sermons to government authorities prior to their delivery. Parliament approved the measure several weeks later, but only after pro-government sponsors and *Ikhwan* MPs agreed to a compromise in which the government dropped its insistence on the obligatory licensing of preachers.

Just after Hussein's parliamentary State-of-the-Kingdom address, Jordan's House of Representatives was the setting for a highly publicized attempt by the Islamic opposition to discredit the government-endorsed Speaker of the

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<sup>34</sup> *Jordan Times*, November 11, 1985.

**House. In a rare display of defiance, nearly one-quarter of the house members abstained in a vote to re-appoint Akif al-Fayiz to his speaker's post. (Fayiz had no opponent.) That same day, Laith Shubeilat, the militant Islamic activist and member of parliament, announced he would place his own name in nomination for House Speaker when Fayiz's term expired, thereby ensuring a direct parliamentary confrontation.**

## V. YARMOUK AND IRBID: 'NIPPED IN THE BUD'<sup>1</sup>

Hussein's twin declarations - his call for legislation against militant preachers and his apology for anti-Syrian *Ikhwan* activity - underscored the magnitude of the Islamic problem facing the regime- Just five years before, the King had used the *Ikhwan* as a pawn in a gamble of military brinkmanship with Asad that nearly resulted in war. Islamic activists were, at worst, a nuisance. By 1986, in a complete turnabout from long-standing policy, the King was attacking them directly - both rhetorically and substantively. They had become much more than a nuisance.

Islamic issues have now moved to the center stage of Jordanian politics. In just seven years, the level of religious activism intensified from beard-growing and Ramadan-fasting to a level of overt opposition to government policies. Inside parliament, the activists have grown bolder each day; outside, tension has increased in the mosques and at the universities. Hussein's apology to Asad only highlighted the conflict of strategic goals guiding the King and the *Ikhwan* in their respective policies toward Syria in recent years. In short, the time-honored patron-client relationship between the King and the *Ikhwan* has begun to break down.

Events in the northern provincial capital of Irbid in the late spring and early summer of 1986 were the most telling symbols of the creeping disintegration of that relationship.<sup>35</sup> In May 1986, students at Yarmouk University, Jordan's premier science and technological institute, launched a series of protests and demonstrations. They cited a number of grievances, ranging from intramural issues, such as the lack of student participation in university governance and high laboratory fees, to more political issues, such as tacit Jordanian support for the U.S. air strikes against Libya. Although small-scale demonstrations at Yarmouk had occurred periodically over the previous two years, what set the May events apart was both the provocative role played by Islamic activists and the heavy-handed response of government authorities.

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<sup>35</sup> For a more detailed account of the events in Irbid in May/June 1986, see my "Irbid: Raising the Stakes in Jordan," forthcoming in *Middle East Insight*, vol. 5, no. 1, January/February 1987. For the government's official version of events at Yarmouk, see Foreign Broadcast Information Service, May 15, 1986; for references to a higher death toll, see *Washington Post*, May 21, 1986; for additional reporting, see *The Middle East*, July 1986 and *Middle East International*, May 30, 1986. My account is also based on interviews conducted in Irbid, July 1986

In three days in May, a small-scale "warning strike"<sup>11</sup> by a few dozen engineering students turned into a massive demonstration with 3,000 participants - nearly 20 percent of the university's student body. Classrooms were occupied and semester examinations were disrupted. At first, the students' demands focused on lowering enrollment fees and reinstating formerly expelled classmates, but the contest soon transcended purely university issues. By maintaining the protest against the express wishes of the university administration, the students were issuing a direct challenge to the university's authority and were implicitly challenging the Kingdom's martial law restrictions of assembly and freedom of speech. As such, the Yarmouk demonstrations soon acquired an overtly political character.

Though Islamic activists were not among the original organizers of the demonstrations, they played a pivotal role once the protests were underway. They were among the key provocateurs in expanding the protest, rejecting concessions and, in the end, resorting to violence. One proof of the activists' role in the Yarmouk incident was University President Adnan Badran's choice of negotiators in search of a peaceful solution to the crisis - Member of Parliament Ahmad Kohafi, a member of the Muslim Brothers, and Irbid Mayor Abd-al-Razzaq al-Tubeishat, who was known to sympathize with the Islamic activists.

At Yarmouk, social frustration assumed an overtly political character. Islamic activists, who had been successfully building their influence at the university for several years, transformed the frustrated anger of hundreds of future engineer with little prospect of employment into unprecedented political action. With the prodding of the core group of activists, those engineers (as well as chemists, physicists and business majors) finally vented their frustrations.

What the students did not expect was that the administration - and, by extension, the government - would react so vengefully. While talks between students and mediators continued, Badran prepared a second option in the event that a negotiated settlement of the confrontation could not be reached. He issued a request for a locally based contingent of Jordan's General Security Forces to take up positions on a hillside about a kilometer from Yarmouk's fences. Although a compromise settlement of the students' demands was well within the negotiators grasp, discussions finally broke off on May 14. As tensions rose, the students learned of the deployment of Jordanian troops and many began to vandalize university property and hurl stones and empty bottles at policemen near the university gate. Hundreds sought refuge in a women's dormitory near the economics building,

believing that was the one place on campus that soldiers would not dare enter forcibly. They were wrong.

Just after midnight, about 75 troops entered the campus and surrounded the dormitory building. Armed with night sticks and riot gear, the soldiers were ordered to root out the protesters. After tear gas canisters were fired into the building, soldiers fought the students in hand-to-hand combat. During the subsequent room-to-room search of the dormitories, soldiers beat and clubbed students - male and female alike. According to the Jordanian government, three students — two women and one man — died of asphyxiation; unconfirmed sources placed the number of dead at double that figure. Dozens of students and 18 General Security Forces soldiers were injured in the fighting. About 800 students were taken into custody, and the university was shut tight. The entire operation lasted 90 minutes.

Later that day, the Interior Ministry released a statement affirming that "no individual or faction will be permitted to tamper with the Kingdom's security and stability or to expose its institutions and accomplishments to sabotage and harm. The most severe measures will be taken against anyone who tries to tamper with the security of the homeland and the safety of the citizens."

In the effort to restrict the political after-effects of such a heavy-handed approach to student disobedience, King Hussein ordered the immediate release of nearly all the detained students and asked Yarmouk President Badran to open the university and reschedule end-of-semester examinations for the next week. He also appointed a high-level ministerial committee to investigate what went wrong.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, the government tried to divert attention elsewhere. The Yarmouk riots were blamed on the outlawed Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Jordanian Communist Party; leaders of the two groups, including nearly the entire Communist Party politburo, were rounded up and arrested.<sup>37</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the riots, official statements also hinted at the role of Muslim political activists and on that score, they were much closer to the mark.<sup>38</sup> But because of the complicated and tense relationship between the religious establishment and the Crown, the government did not

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<sup>36</sup> Foreign Broadcast Information Service, May 19, 1986.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* | *New York Times*, May 21, 1986.

<sup>38</sup> In describing the agitators at Yarmouk, the government spokesman used language remarkably similar to that used by Hussein in his letter to Rifa'i condemning Islamic activists five months earlier.

at first emphasize the Islamic angle of the Yarmouk protests and only a handful of Islamic activist leaders were detained\*

However, with a parliamentary by-election in Irbid scheduled one month later, the Islamic angle of the Yarmouk affair continued to haunt the regime. In the 1984 elections, an Islamic activist candidate had won in Irbid and another, Abd-al-Majid Nuseir, was heavily favored to win this time around. But in the wake of the riots, the regime had decided that it would no longer sit idly by while Islamic activists used electoral means to expand their own influence and bolster the strength of their movement. Translated into policy, that meant that Nuseir would not be permitted to win the by-election. Interior Minister Mahmud Kayid took the highly unusual step of personally asking Nuseir to withdraw his name from the ballot. Nuseir, who was later dismissed from his post as mathematics professor at Yarmouk, refused and vowed instead to continue his election battle against pro-government candidate Jamal Obeidat, nephew of the former prime minister and mukhabarat chief. When this effort to intimidate the candidate failed, the government opted to intimidate the electorate. Throughout June, Irbid was teeming with mukhabarat agents; on election day, the town was flooded by them. In the end, intimidation worked so well that less than 20 percent of the eligible voters actually cast ballots. Perhaps it worked too well, because Nuseir was defeated by a margin of more than two to one - 22,366 v. 10,230.<sup>39</sup>

In early July 1986, attention reverted back to the Yarmouk affair, when the ministerial investigating committee delivered its findings in a report that has still not been made public. Soon thereafter, in a move to spread responsibility for Yarmouk as widely as possible, Rifa'i ordered the removal of Yarmouk President Badran, six university administrators and 15 professors. Hussein offered his own account of the Yarmouk riots at a hastily convened press conference later that month. For the first time, he specifically labeled the culprits behind the Yarmouk uprising and the effort to tamper with the Irbid by-election as elements of an "unholy alliance"<sup>11</sup> of Communists, Arafat's Fatah and "fundamentalist Muslims."<sup>40</sup>

That such an "alliance" exists between these groups in Jordan is highly unlikely. Neither Communists nor Arafatists fare well with Jordan's Islamic activists. To the activists, the Communists have lost their soul while the Arafatists have lost their backbone to stand up to creeping accommodation with Israel. Like Rifa'i before him, Hussein was spreading

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<sup>39</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, June 23, 1986.

<sup>40</sup> *Washington Post*, July 16, 1986.

the blame as widely as possible. But this was the first occasion on which Hussein not only sanctioned military action against Islamic activists but also directly implicated them in anti-regime activity. By linking the activists with the Communists and the Arafatists, Hussein had clearly placed them in league with traditional opponents of his regime. His statements and his government's actions indicated that the regime had moved toward viewing certain aspects of the Islamic activist movement as rebellious and that the regime would resort to repression to quash it. Although his ministers publicly talked in terms of pursuing peaceful dialogue with Islamic activists, government policy was more accurately summed up in the words of one high-ranking official who said privately: "We're nipping this in the bud."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Author's interview, Amman, July 1986.

## VI. THE ISLAMIC ACTIVIST MOVEMENT: PROGNOSIS AND PROSPECTS

Islamic activism (in the organizational form of the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated groups<sup>42</sup>) has grown into the largest popular movement in Jordan. This essay has focused on two of the fundamental factors that contributed to the activist phenomenon - the role of regional politics and the escalation of domestic confrontation between the regime and the activists. Events in the Arab and Muslim worlds and Jordanian foreign policy decisions in response to them touched a chord inside that segment of Jordan's population for which religious affiliation is of special significance. Most importantly, the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Islamic opposition in Syria, though surely of different religious origin and character, were pivotal in sensitizing the populace to how religion translates into political activity. Similarly, the cycle of action-reaction that marked the relationship of Islamic activists to the regime was essential for the movement's growth. Through its various efforts to coopt the activists and to crush them, the Hashemite regime accorded the activists political weight and significance that, in the end, left them battered but undeterred.

Islamic activism has also been bound up with two other trends that have provided the framework for the growth of the movement. First, the wide, pendulum-like swings in Jordan's economic fortune exacerbated latent social and political tensions and created a ready stream of discontent from which Islamic activism drank voraciously. As Jordan's economy declined in recent years, the *Ikhwan* grew. For many, the demonic character of Western influence on Jordanian society was strongly confirmed by the sudden disappearance of the Kingdom's foreign revenue sources and the spread of a debilitating economic recession. After 1981, the oil boom began

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42 Not all political Islamic sentiment is channeled through the Muslim Brotherhood. A corollary to the growth of the Brotherhood was the spawning of several small, underground Islamic groups. Many of these organizations endorsed more radical positions than the Brotherhood's long-term client-patron relationship with the state could allow. In 1981, *Le Monde* reported that Islamic activist students were split among a handful of organizations, including an extremist, predominantly Palestinian wing of the Brotherhood, the re-incarnated, anti-regime Islamic Liberation Party and a tiny group calling itself *Takfir wa-Hijra*, modeled after the Egyptian organization of that name. Because of the paucity of reliable information, it is impossible to gauge precisely the size and influence of any of these groups. But if the mainstream Brotherhood should cease to serve as a useful outlet for Islamic activists - as a result of regime cooptation or government crackdown - then radical Islamic groups will most likely assume greater significance.

to level off, and by 1985, the situation had become acute. Grants from friendly Arab states and workers<sup>1</sup> remittances have been in steep decline, and when oil prices plummeted 50 percent in just one year (April 1985-April 1986), Jordan's economy found itself nearing dire straits.<sup>43</sup>

Probably the most significant impact of the turnaround in oil prices has been its effect on the Jordanian psyche. The expectations generated by easy money were now unfulfilled, as the tens of thousands of young Jordanians who had counted on continued prosperity faced a future of unemployment or underemployment, anger and frustration.

One-third of all Jordanians are students, yet neither the Jordanian economy nor the faltering economies of the Gulf states can today provide the jobs that these students were taught to expect. There are about 350,000 Jordanian nationals living with their dependents and working outside the Kingdom; thousands are returning home each year. Tens of thousands more Jordanians are students at universities and community colleges in the Kingdom and overseas. Jordan already lacks adequate job openings for the majority of job seekers, and the problem is likely to worsen in the near future. In 1985, Secretary of State George Shultz offered testimony before Congress in which he stated that, given current trends, Jordan may face a structural unemployment rate of 30 percent in five years. Many of the jobless and the underemployed - especially those trained in the highly prestigious fields of engineering, architecture and natural sciences - are turning toward Islam. Many Islamic activists, who declared their independence from the regime, so to speak, over the issue of Jordanian support for Iraq in the Gulf War, have begun to find their antipathy for the Hashemite regime solidified by their deteriorating economic condition.

The second trend from which Islamic activism has reaped benefits is a willingness among Jordan's Palestinian population to view the crusade for national rights within an Islamic perspective. To a significant degree, Palestinian nationalism has been subsumed within the Islamic movement; Palestinian youth now comprise an important element of the activists' new vanguard. Many Palestinian *Ikhwanis* dismiss much of the nationalist and socialist rhetoric of the old-line Palestinian groups, preferring to view the Palestinian issue within a more comprehensive, Islamic framework. It is difficult to quantify or to chronicle the history of the growth of

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<sup>43</sup> Recent statistics indicating a rise in remittance income in 1986 should not necessarily be viewed as the light at the end of the oil-bust tunnel. Increased remittances may, in fact, reflect the final departure of accumulated savings from expatriate workers in the Gulf rather than an upsurge in Gulf employment or Gulf wage rates.

Palestinianism within the Islamic movement. The movement away from secular nationalism to religious nationalism has been evolutionary and it is by no means total. But it is not difficult to observe the effects of this trend among college-age Jordanians.

Nationalist and Palestinian-oriented organizations, which have traditionally been the dominant student groups, have lost much of their popular support to the Islamic activists. This is partly due to the structural impediments to organizing traditional Palestinian nationalist groups; in contrast to religious societies, the Hashemites view virtually all Palestinian nationalist organizations as enemies of the regime. But this phenomenon is also the product of a belief among many Palestinians that they are not forsaking their national aspirations by vowing allegiance to Islamic organizations; on the contrary, many simply believe that these groups offer a more effective way to reach their goals than do radical nationalist groups.

Islamic groups are the most powerful student organizations on the campuses of Jordan's two main universities, Jordan University in Amman and Yarmouk University in Irbid.<sup>44</sup> Few college students are able to find middle ground between the two movements - one is either with the *Ikhwanis* or against them. They control student electoral politics and oversee campus social activities, making sure they comply with traditional codes of behavior. At Yarmouk, for example, a cell-based organization of educational, activist and support groups has been established for both male and female students. Campus *Ikhwan* leaders lobby hard to convince female students to forego make-up and designer clothes for long skirts and headcoverings. Networks of Islamic activists - supportive of the *Ikhwan's* goals but not themselves official members - have spread out to the neighboring communities, while a loosely organized oversight committee coordinates activities between the two universities on a national level.

Viewed against the background of the growing Islamic activist movement, the events in Irbid are particularly significant. They suggest that Islamic activism has moved from the periphery to the center of Jordanian politics and that the regime has grown increasingly preoccupied with combatting the activist movement. Government information organs tried to rationalize the need for strong military measures by labeling the provocateurs Communists, but few believed that the handful of Communists at Yarmouk were possibly powerful enough to organize protests of thousands

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<sup>44</sup> Information concerning *Ikhwan* activity on the campuses of Jordan's universities is taken from private interviews with students and faculty conducted during the summers of 1985 and 1986.

of students. The time will come when scapegoating the Communists (or even Palestinian nationalist radicals) to hide a crackdown on the activists will not be sufficient, and whatever public consensus there may be to act against Communists certainly does not carry over to the activists.

Analogies to the 1970-71 civil war are inaccurate. Unlike the Palestinian *fedayeen*, Jordan's Islamic activists are themselves products of the Hashemite system. Though the King moved slowly in confronting the *fedayeen*, there was a general consensus within the Kingdom (and especially among East Bankers) that the Palestinian militants were parasitical and, by their very nature, enemies of the state.

Islamic activists are not viewed that way. Indeed, Islamic activists will continue to build their credibility within Jordan by laying great emphasis on the social and educational aspects of their movement and by exhausting all legitimate means of political participation before venturing into that unknown field of open confrontation with the regime. It should be remembered that the 1985 crackdown on the Islamic activists was an act of the King's choosing and was not a direct response to any significant anti-regime activity on the part of the Islamic activists.

The Islamic movement in Jordan has not reached the stage at which open confrontation with the government is its only available course of action. There are still parliamentary moves to be made and, more importantly, much organizing to be accomplished. Yarmouk itself was not an organized attempt by Islamic activists to militate against the regime; the activists were surely not ready for such a confrontation and probably did not expect it to occur. Rather, Yarmouk was essentially an intramural protest that developed into a political contest of wills, with the activists using every opportunity to increase the stakes of the contest.

In short, it would be an error to overstate the extent to which Islamic activism currently poses a threat to the domestic security of the state. A re-enactment of Tehran 1979 is simply not in the cards. First, Jordanian clergy do not have the traditional status and independent power base that Iranian clergy enjoyed. Second, Jordan's middle class has not yet even begun to conceive of irreparably breaking with the regime. Third, the Kingdom's security services remain strong and loyal, though their reputation for efficiency was sorely tarnished by their bullheadedness in Irbid. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, Hussein's personality emotes very little of the Shah's aura of self-delusion; the King has been careful to avoid emulating the Shah's profligate and irreligious ways. The residual attachment that most Jordanians have to their King, despite the regime's faults, will most likely prove to be the most powerful deterrent to any sort of popular religious

revolution. But at the same time, the worsening economy, the flirtation with negotiations with "the Zionist entity," the reconciliation with the "murderous," Alawite regime in Damascus and the gradual build-up of the activists<sup>1</sup> moral and political authority inside the Kingdom will hasten a process of confrontation against the Kingdom's rulers.

As a result, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the use of parliament to deflect criticism of the Hashemite regime and to offer the semblance of democratic freedoms entails its own costs, measured primarily in terms of free elections and free speech. If those basic costs are not accepted in principle by the government, parliament adds to, not defuses, domestic tensions. The government's heavy-handed response to the prospect of an Islamic activist victory at the polls in Irbid suggests that the regime is unprepared to accept those costs.

Second, the conduct of the General Security Forces and the mukhabarat in Irbid raises questions about their ability to handle demonstrations efficiently, quietly and professionally. In contrast to Syria, where harsh and ruthless government oppression is a fact of political life, a relatively benign attitude toward political opposition has always been at the heart of the King's social compact with his subjects. Irbid was the first example in recent Jordanian history of the failure of implied government intimidation and the necessity of resorting to brute, naked force to quell a perceived internal threat to regime security. In the eyes of many Jordanians, a new threshold has been reached in the relationship between ruler and ruled.

Third, Hussein's political options in dealing with the Islamic activist movement are constrained. On the one hand, he could cease the game of one-upmanship which he has been playing with the activists for the past several years in order to prevent a further schism with that segment of the body politic that identifies itself with Islam. By continually portraying policy initiatives within an Islamic framework, the King permits the Islamic activists to determine the definitions of success and failure, thereby opening himself to attack and criticism. On the other hand, Hussein cannot surrender the Islamic issue to the activists without sacrificing an important element of his legitimacy. The Hashemite regime rests on too shaky a foundation for it to cede the Islamic high ground without a fight. The Guardian of the *Haram ah Sharif* has no other choice but to be an active, not reactive, player in the contest. As a result, Hussein is left a narrow path between the staunch defense of his policies in Islamic terms and the further escalation of tensions with the activists.

Fourth, Jordan's recent foreign policy maneuvers have taken a severe domestic political toll by placing the King at odds with the Islamic activists.

By siding with Iraq in 1980 and by settling with Syria on Asad's terms in 1985, Jordan paid a price in terms of domestic discontent. Specifically, Hussein's personal overture to Asad provoked resentment among Jordanian Muslim Brothers whose Syrian counterparts had sacrificed much in their opposition to Alawite rule. The irony is that Amman moved closer to Damascus precisely because it needed to cover its Arab flanks while pursuing the tortuous task of consigning Yasir Arafat to a role of junior partner in the peace process. In the end, that effort failed and Hussein was left without an Arafat subordinate to him but with both the Syrians and the Islamic activists more potent than before.

### *ISLAMIC ACTIVISM AND THE PEACE PROCESS*

Lastly, and most significant for U.S. policy, the rise of Islamic activism may have its most important impact on Hussein's ability to maneuver in the peace process - potentially, the most explosive issue facing the regime. Nothing is more likely to provoke open, and perhaps violent, confrontation between the Islamic activists and the regime as public accommodation and negotiation with Israel. The King's much publicized efforts to negotiate a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict "before it is too late" leave him open to charges of treason and capitulation from Islamic activists weaned on the battle against Israel, Zionism and the occupation of Jerusalem. If Jordan were to engage in peace process diplomacy less clandestinely than it has in the past, the King can expect an even stronger backlash of domestic, Islamic-based reaction.

While few elements of Jordanian society have a vested interest in exchanging the current *modus vivendi* with Israel for a formal peace treaty, the Islamic activists would be on the front lines of opposition to such a move. Unless the King were able to assure his subjects that all territories occupied in 1967 were regained he stands little chance of winning even the acquiescence of the Islamic activists. Any attempt on his part to broker a deal that, for example, leaves the Arab sector of Jerusalem under the effective control of Israel would mark him as the Muslim leader who lost Jerusalem in both war and peace and would strip him of his remaining Islamic credentials.<sup>45</sup> In that light, Sadat's misfortune must bear heavily on Hussein's mind. Despite his success in regaining every inch of occupied

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<sup>45</sup> See Aaron D. Miller, 'Jordan and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Hashemite Predicament,' *Orbis*, winter 1986.

Arab territory (Taba notwithstanding), Sadat was still the target of an Islamic militant assassin.

If Hussein is sincerely intent on taking up the offer of "territorial compromise" - the only Israeli bargaining position that even begins to approach Arab demands - his continual references to his responsibility for regaining every inch of the land are creating expectations that will be impossible to realize. Instead, he will have to prepare his people psychologically for the give-and-take that is the essence of negotiation and find a way of dealing effectively with the Islamic activist opposition to such a compromise. But given the structural weaknesses of the Jordanian regime, such a policy may be beyond Hussein's capabilities. Should that be the case, the constraining force of Islamic activism, coupled with the King's own powerful instinct for survival, may lead Hussein to a policy of informalizing the peace process and promoting tacit accommodation with Israel. Pursuing that route would permit the King to make progress on the Palestinian issue without exposing both his people and himself to a bitter, and perhaps regime-threatening experience.



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