

How the Jordanian Government is Shaping the Country's Muslim Brotherhood

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Brief Analysis

Due to external pressures and internal fissures, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) today is experiencing its worst days since its establishment in 1946. This decline follows the challenges of the broader Muslim Brotherhood organization, which is facing an “internal crisis” after losing much of their momentum after the Arab Spring and subsequent crackdowns in a number of countries. In Jordan, despite a governmental approach that differs from that of many other Arab governments, the movement is facing a major turning point in its position.

The Jordanian political system appears to be pleased with the general direction of the Muslim Brotherhood at present—especially those in the General Intelligence Directorate. The monitoring of Islamist groups and other forms of “political Islam” have generally been under the purview of the the GID, and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring—when Jordan’s Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated its strength in the country relative to other opposition groups—the GID’s strategy has been to put pressure on the MB and encourage the subsequent internal conflicts within the group. Since this period, the MB has indeed undergone a series of major splits, leaving four comparatively weaker factions competing for the support of the Jordanian public.

The first split occurred in 2013 with the establishment of the National Congress Party Zamzam (زمزم) headed by the politician and intellectual Dr. Rahil al Gharaibeh—who on August 6 was appointed to become Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Center for Human Rights. The 62 year old Gharaibeh—former head of the political bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood—is the secretary-general of the National Congress Party.

The core Muslim Brotherhood society considers itself closest to the Zamzam party politically. However, the core society has been effectively banned since 2015, when its government license was transferred to a reformist faction—the political arm of the “Islamic Action Front” remains legal. Now, two separate organizations go by the name of ‘Muslim Brotherhood’—the core and the licensed reformist faction.

The most recent split occurred in 2017 with the formation of the “Rescue and partnership party” (حزب الشراكة والابتعاد). The goal of this party is to develop an inclusive party framework built on partnership with other Jordanian political forces and on the principles of a civil state. However, these various splits within the movement are very weak, with each trying to survive even as its distinguishes itself from other factions.

The Jordanian Dual Approach to the Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood has reached this point of internecine struggle in part through the encouragement of the General Intelligence Directive (GID). The GID's attitude towards the MB stems from a complete lack of trust regarding the organization as a whole, and it has worked to control the scope of MB activities while encouraging the group's internal crises.

On the other hand, there appears to be a more recent, parallel approach employed by the Jordanian parliament with a more conciliatory tack. In particular, the Omar Razzaz government, just over a year old, has developed several contacts and meetings with all branches of the movement. Key to these contacts are Jordan's Minister of Culture and Youth, Dr. Mohammed Suleiman Abu Rama, and Mubarak Ali Mubarak Aboyamin, the minister of State for Legal Affairs. Both of these politicians, while not officially members of the MB, have a very close relationship with MB and political Islam. This is especially the case for Abu Ruman, who believes that these parties (splits) represent post-political Islam trends.

This new approach pursued by the government may indicate its intention of using its local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood to develop a 'back-door' connection with Hamas in case of what Jordan sees as a regional 'worst-case scenario': Hamas becoming a major Palestinian point of contact with the Israelis and Americans through a peace process resulting from the "Deal of the Century." Underpinning this fear is both ongoing speculation on the Deal of the Century and the the waning power of the Palestinian Authority relative to Hamas.

In light of a potential new regional prominence for Hamas, the Jordanian government may see its local Muslim Brotherhood as a way to keep in touch—while keeping a low profile—with Hamas as another means to secure Jordan's national security and political interests, especially the Hashemite Custodianship of Jerusalem's Islamic and Christian holy sites.

Ironically, the GID and parliamentary strategies have combined in the recent appointment of Dr. Rahil al Gharaibeh as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Center for Human Rights. At the same time, Jordan must continue to weigh how its approach towards the MB affects its foreign relations with its Arab allies, in particular Egypt and the Gulf States. Even so, pressures from these states do not seem to have tipped the hand of the Jordanian government, especially in light of recent parliamentary and ministry decisions. The country instead continues use a 'grey area' approach in an attempt to balance the expectations its allies with the country's national interests.

Future Trends for the Muslim Brotherhood

However, it is also important to consider how Jordan's 'two-track' approach will impact the future of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood itself. Given increasing internal fragmentation, there is a weakening of the groups' political strength, which the leaders of both the original Muslim Brotherhood and its splinter groups recognize. They also understand the urgency of their situation, and are likely to work hard to develop new narratives, missions, and strategies to maintain the unity and functionality of their organization and remain relevant in Jordanian society.

Yet these competing efforts are likely to lead to an increasing competition between the groups for the trust of the Jordanian people. This competition, in turn, may lead to increasing hostility between the banned core of the Muslim Brotherhood, along with its legal political arm the "Islamic Action Front" (جبهة العمل الإسلامي), and the "Rescue and partnership party," especially the pragmatic and ambitious spokesman and First Deputy Secretary General of the party Salem Yousef Al-Falahat. There is also likely to be increasing tension with Zamzam in light of Rahil al Gharaibeh's recent appointment as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Center for Human Rights.

As Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood struggles to avoid continued fragmentation and domestic isolation, the groups are likely to hone their focus on external targets, such as the 'Deal of the Century,' in order to bolster domestic support. Even so, and despite some parliamentary willingness to engage, it appears increasingly unlikely that the Muslim

Brotherhood in Jordan will be able to return to the type of strength demonstrated just eight years ago during the Arab Spring. ❖

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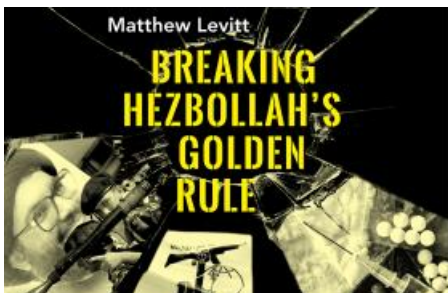
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