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U.S. Democracy Promotion Policy in the Middle East: The Islamist Dilemma

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Summary

This report assesses U.S. policy toward Islamist organizations in the Arab world, specifically those groups that have renounced violence and terrorism. The report analyzes U.S. government attitudes toward Islamist movements and investigates how U.S. democracy promotion policy is applied in three Arab countries with a significant Islamist presence in the political sphere: Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan. It may be updated periodically to include new case studies of Islamist movements in Algeria, Yemen, Kuwait, Bahrain, or areas outside the Arab world.

The Bush Administration has made the promotion of democracy in the Middle East a national security priority, stating that greater political freedom can undercut the forces of Islamic radicalism and indoctrination. As U.S. democracy promotion policies have moved forward, policy makers have confronted a significant dilemma: how to respond to challenges posed by political Islamist movements (i.e. parties and political organizations that promote social and political reform in accordance with Islamic religious principles that may lead them to oppose U.S. foreign policy).

In response to this dilemma, some observers have questioned whether the United States should exert pressure on Arab governments to open their political systems and respect human rights with the knowledge that such steps, if successful, may benefit Islamist groups. Representing a powerful and popular political force in the Arab world today, many Islamist political parties and organizations are largely opposed, at least rhetorically, to key aspects of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, such as support for Israel, the occupation of Iraq, and the large U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf. Elections in Iraq, Egypt, and the Palestinian Authority that were supported by the United States have strengthened the political positions of Islamist organizations, including, in the case of Hamas, armed groups that have refused to renounce violence.

Non-violent Islamist groups, which have chosen or been permitted to peacefully participate in politics, present their own challenges to U.S. policy makers. This report raises the following questions: Are Islamists liberal democrats or fundamentalists? Should the United States support their participation in democratic politics? Do non-violent Islamists welcome dialogue with the United States or would such action discredit them among their followers?

While many continue to speculate over the direction of U.S. democracy promotion in the Middle East, Congress may use its oversight authority to bring further clarity to the Administration's regional strategy, particularly on the issue of dealing with Islamist groups. Congress also appropriates funds for regional democratization programs and foreign aid projects and may specify that these funds be used for certain projects or channeled to certain groups.

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U.S. Democracy Promotion Policy in the Middle East: The Islamist Dilemma

Overview

As an ongoing response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and a justification for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Bush Administration has made the promotion of democracy in the Middle East a national security priority, stating that greater political freedom can undercut the forces of Islamic radicalism and indoctrination.¹ However, with ongoing sectarian violence in Iraq and Arab regimes firmly entrenched in power, this policy has come under increasing scrutiny. Many have questioned the practicality of this approach and the U.S. ability to accelerate the forces of modernization and social change across a wide and diverse geographic area. Yet, despite continuing reservations over U.S. sincerity, depth of commitment, and consistency on the democratization issue, the enormous attention that Middle East or Arab democratization has received in the years since the September 11th terrorist attacks is believed by many skeptics and advocates alike to have reverberated across the Arab world, for better or for worse, sparking debate, anti-government demonstrations, and regime-manipulated elections to appease internal and external demands for democratization.

At the heart of this upheaval lies a long, vexing dilemma for U.S. policy makers: should the United States exert pressure on Arab governments to open their political systems and respect human rights with the knowledge that Islamists, the most popular opposition force in Arab politics, stand to benefit from regional democratization? Many observers assert that Islamist² political parties and organizations are largely opposed, at least rhetorically, to key aspects of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, such as support for Israel, the occupation of Iraq, and the large U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf. Moreover, some suggest that with the ascent of Shiite

¹ Since the Administration set out to promote democracy in the Middle East, some critics assert that the United States focuses too heavily on holding elections rather than on the structural underpinnings commonly found in liberal democracies across the world. In a recent statement on her interpretation of democracy, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice remarked that “Elections are the beginning of every democracy, but of course they are not the end. Effective institutions are essential to the success of all liberal democracies. And by institutions I mean pluralistic parties, transparent and accountable legislatures, independent judiciaries, free press, active civil society, market economies and, of course, a monopoly for the state on the means of violence.” U.S. Department of State, “Secretary Rice’s Remarks on Democracy at BBC Today-Chatham House Lecture,” March 31, 2006.

² The term “Islamist” refers to individuals and movements that want the prevailing political and social order in their countries or societies be based upon their interpretation of Islamic law.

Muslim parties in Iraq and fundamentalist Hamas in Palestinian Authority elections, the United States, by encouraging free and fair elections across the region, may have inadvertently strengthened Islamist opposition movements, particularly militant ones.

This dilemma becomes even more problematic when turning to the possible participation of non-violent Islamist groups that have chosen or been permitted to participate peacefully in politics. Many of these groups exist in what some experts call a “gray zone,” in which their participation in politics is permitted but limited. Since these so-called “moderate” Islamist groups have renounced violence and terrorism, it would seem logical that U.S. efforts to promote Arab democracy would include seeking more rights for all legitimate actors, including these Islamists. However, circumstances differ across the Arab world, and democracy promotion in the Middle East is a complex issue with many outstanding questions, particularly when examining Islamism. This report examines how U.S. democracy promotion efforts interact with the political realities on the ground in three Arab countries (Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan) and raises the following questions: Who are the Islamists? Are such groups legitimate democratic actors or militant fundamentalists in disguise? To what extent are Islamists opposed to U.S. Middle East policy? Should the United States engage with non-violent Islamist groups, either gradually or immediately? Would such engagement isolate key Arab regimes whose cooperation is vital to waging the war on terrorism and securing other U.S. national security goals? Do non-violent Islamist groups even welcome or accept dialogue with the United States or would such action discredit them among their followers? Should these non-violent Islamist movements be embraced, cautiously accepted, or circumvented? Are U.S. democratization efforts designed to foster alternatives to Islamists?

Islamism and Identity Politics

At the heart of the democratization issue in the Middle East is the question of national identity. In many countries, questions about the role of Islam in political life, rights for ethnic and religious minorities, and the role of women remain unresolved. With secular Arab nationalism having been largely discredited in the wake of successive Arab defeats at the hand of Israel in 1967 and 1973, Islamism and ethnic politics have largely stepped in to fill an identity vacuum in the Arab world.

Today, a number of competing and overlapping identities vie for primacy in the Middle East. “Moderate Islamists” seek to balance the need for political and social reform with the desire to create a society governed by the general principles of Islamic law (*Sharia*). Other, more radical Islamists may use elections as a tool to come to power in order to create more rigid Islamic rule. Non-Islamist reformers draw support from both secular intellectuals and minority religious/ethnic communities, who have traditionally been relegated to second-class status. Secular intellectuals, members of some minority groups, and women’s rights advocates are frequently accused of collaborating with foreigners because their vision of democracy may closely resemble the liberal democracies of Western Europe and the United States. Ruling elites in the military and private sector, who often have manipulated the state system to obtain a minimum of popular support, have created their own

“national identities” to reinforce their rule. Some regimes have created secular republics dominated by one ruling party and the military. Other ruling families have based their legitimacy on their common ancestry from the prophet Muhammad.

Many analysts consider Islamism to be the most popular of the identification models in the Arab world. According to scholar Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Islamic activism is rooted in the symbolism, language, and cultural history of Muslim society and as a result has successfully resonated with increasingly disillusioned populations suffering from political exclusion, economic deprivation, and a sense of growing impotence at the expense of outside powers and a faceless process of globalization.”³ Asserting that “Islam is the solution” (a common Islamist slogan) to the socio-economic problems posed by modernity and Western consumer culture, Islamists, both radical and non-violent groups, have sought to construct their own institutions in society, ranging from political organizations to health clinics and schools. Through their extensive social welfare networks, Islamists have created alternative state structures that serve to reinforce their appeal among the lower and middle classes.

There are many examples across the Middle East of legal or semi-legal Islamist organizations that have been granted either full or limited participation in the political system. Some of these groups have renounced violence and peacefully oppose their respective governments. Some regimes have allowed their participation, in part because Islamist parties may act to bolster the strength of the one-party state or royal family. For example, when facing economic recession and large-scale public unrest, Arab governments sometimes have granted Islamist organizations more leeway in conducting opposition activities in order to relieve the political system of public pressure. Thus, non-violent Islamist groups have existed in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, regimes may exaggerate the threat Islamists pose to state stability and therefore maintain that these groups are illegal. On the other hand, they may permit Islamists to conduct limited opposition activity if such activity ultimately benefits the regime. Arab dissidents have long maintained that some secular authoritarian regimes offer Islamists limited participation in politics to prevent secular opposition groups or leaders from challenging the ruling party.

U.S. Government Concern Over Islamist Groups

In previous Administrations, when regional democratization was not seen as a U.S. national security priority and Islamist extremism was not seen as a significant threat, the Islamist dilemma was largely an academic question rather than an immediate policy concern. Since the 1979 Iranian revolution, the U.S. government has increasingly believed that, should Islamist groups come to power, they would pursue a more confrontational approach in their foreign policy toward the United States and that key U.S. strategic interests would suffer, including access to oil reserves, military cooperation, and the security of Israel, among others. To the extent that the United States pushed for regional reform, the focus was largely on economic reform and trade liberalization; concern over the lack of democratization and human

³ Wiktorowicz, Quintan, *Islamic Activism, A Social Movement Theory Approach*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, p. 25.

rights was secondary. Arab regimes largely focused on the symbolic rather than the substantive elements of democratic change in order to diffuse occasional international attention to their lack of political freedom. Many governments continue to employ this strategy by manipulating elections, keeping parliamentary systems weak, and allowing only a token opposition to operate openly and legally.

The entry of the Palestinian Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah movements into the formal political process also has fueled U.S. suspicions of Islamist movements. As U.S.-designated terrorist organizations and combatants in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Hamas and Hezbollah have maintained armed militias and refused to renounce terrorism or violence as means of achieving their political goals. Though both groups participate in their respective political systems, they are infamous for maintaining armed/terrorist wings that threaten Israel.⁴ Some experts argue that non-violent Islamist groups that renounce violence as a tactic in their own countries but support its use in the Palestinian-Israeli context should not be considered non-violent.

In addition, analysts have long observed how some Arab regimes have played on Western fears of political Islamism by attempting to paint all Islamist organizations as radical, thereby positioning themselves as the only moderate alternative likely to support U.S. objectives. Some Arab governments, such as Egypt, Syria, and Algeria, have a history of violent confrontation with Islamic extremists who have assassinated government officials and launched costly insurgencies against security forces. In some ways, Arab governments have been engaged in their own “war on terror” for many years, and the experience has made them reluctant to recognize non-revolutionary Islamist groups. Many Arab human rights advocates have asserted that regimes have harnessed the fear of fundamentalist-inspired terrorism and instability in order to justify continued one-party rule and relieve external pressure for political reform.

⁴ State Department-designated Palestinian and Lebanese terrorist groups, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, have played a major role in fostering an extreme distrust of all Islamist groups in the eyes of many U.S. officials and lawmakers. Though Hamas and Hezbollah members hold government leadership positions and claim that these activities are separate from what they describe as “legitimate resistance” to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Lebanese lands, the groups’ suicide bombing operations and rocket attacks against civilian targets have made it difficult for the United States to consider them as anything but terrorist organizations. Moreover, some supporters of Israel fear that any Western recognition of Islamist organizations anywhere in the Middle East would lead governments down a slippery slope and would ultimately strengthen the positions of Hamas and Hezbollah, who seek international legitimacy for their respective political roles in the West Bank/Gaza and Lebanon. See U.S. State Department’s *Country Reports on Terrorism and Patterns of Global Terrorism 2005*. Available at [<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/65472.pdf>].

U.S. Policy Toward Islamist Organizations: Different Options and Approaches

Bush Administration officials rejected the argument that authoritarian Arab regimes are the bulwark against Islamic radicalism in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The idea that a democratic Middle East would be less vulnerable to the forces of extremism contributed in part to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and, in the months following the active combat phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the President put forth his “Forward Strategy of Freedom in the Middle East,” asserting that:

“Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe — because in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty. As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export. And with the spread of weapons that can bring catastrophic harm to our country and to our friends, it would be reckless to accept the status quo.”⁵

With the United States committed, at least rhetorically, to changing “the status quo” of authoritarian governance in the broader Middle East, many have speculated about what political outcomes would be preferable for U.S. policy makers should genuine political reform take hold in the Middle East. Within the U.S. foreign policy establishment, there has been an ongoing, vigorous debate over the issue of engaging Islamist groups, some of which have renounced the use of violence and entered into mainstream politics.

Combating Islamism and Promoting Liberal Alternatives

Some believe that all Islamists, whether they espouse peaceful or violent means to achieve power, are suspect. Dr. Martin Kramer, a Middle East expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, argues that all Islamists are fundamentalists who are inherently anti-democratic and anti-Western. In his essay, “Islam vs. Democracy,” Kramer writes that

Democracy, diversity, accommodation — the fundamentalists have repudiated them all. In appealing to the masses who fill their mosques, they promise, instead, to institute a regime of Islamic law, make common cause with like-minded “brethren” everywhere, and struggle against the hegemony of the West and the existence of Israel. Fundamentalists have held to these principles through long periods of oppression, and will not abandon them now, at the moment of their greatest popular resonance.⁶

⁵ “President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East,” Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, Office of the White House Press Secretary, November 6, 2003.

⁶ Martin Kramer, “Islam vs. Democracy,” *Commentary*, January 1993, pp. 35-42.

Other experts have echoed such beliefs, asserting that the idea of non-violent Islamism is a myth, since even non-violent Islamists routinely fail to condemn terrorist acts committed by their more radical counterparts. According to Daniel Pipes, director of the Philadelphia-based think tank the Middle East Forum, facilitating the immediate political participation of Islamists is tantamount to “helping the enemy.”⁷

Others believe that Islamists would set back regional democratization by restricting the rights of women and religious minorities and that their ascension to power would be detrimental for U.S. policy in the region. In order to counter Islamist influence, some have suggested that the United States, if it is going to promote regional democracy, should aggressively work to strengthen the rule of law, separation of powers, civil society, and alternative, preferably secular, movements. There also continues to be strong sentiment among some foreign policy experts and Arab government officials that the United States should refrain from pushing for political liberalization and allow market forces and globalization to gradually build educated middle classes who can push for change indigenously.

Engaging Mainstream, Non-Violent Islamists

Some scholars assert that the United States should, at the very least, lessen its traditional suspicions of non-violent Islamist groups and not oppose their integration into political systems. Many Middle East experts have asserted that if Islamists were able to exercise real political power, considerations of *realpolitik* would moderate their behavior and consequently improve their relations with Western governments.⁸ Some point to more or less cordial U.S. relations with Turkey, whose government is led by a conservative or center-right Islamist party, although Islamism in Turkey is counter-balanced by Turkey’s long tradition of secularism and constitutional provisions supporting secularism. In addition, some counter-terrorism experts have long suggested that the recognition and integration of non-violent Islamist groups into politics would provide a positive outlet for Muslim activists and lessen the allure of more radical groups.

A Pragmatic Approach?

With U.S. democracy promotion policy toward Islamists left somewhat vague, perhaps even deliberately so, there are many foreign policy practitioners in the U.S. State Department who believe that, at the moment, the United States is taking a pragmatic approach toward Middle East democratization. Some officials assert that U.S. policy is flexible and applied to specific circumstances on a country-by-country

⁷ “Should the United States Support Islamists?” *Program Brief*, Nixon Center, October 24, 2005.

⁸ According to University of Maryland Professor Shibley Telhami, “Skepticism about the real aims of these groups [Islamists] should be balanced by openness to the possibility that their aims once they are in power could differ from their aims as opposition groups. This requires partial engagement, patience, and a willingness to allow such new governments space and time to put their goals to the test of reality.” See “In the MidEast, the Third Way is a Myth,” *Washington Post*, February 17, 2006.

and case-by-case basis, since political conditions and the orientation and legal status of Islamist movements in one country may be markedly different from another. According to one scholar, moderate Islamist parties are mistakenly treated as monolithic entities, when instead, groups “differ among themselves on the question of how much of the historical *Sharia* (Islamic law) — that is, the corpus of traditional Islamic legal rulings inherited from the past — can and should be revised.”⁹ Some suggest that the U.S. government, because it is constrained by its strategic relationships with authoritarian regimes, may only be capable of selective engagement with some non-violent Islamist groups. In this viewpoint, such an approach, though it would be far less ambitious than the grand rhetoric outlined by the Administration and would leave the U.S. government open to accusations of promoting reform inconsistently, could serve U.S. interests by promoting reform where it is possible without disrupting relations with other key Arab partners.

Implementing U.S. Democracy Promotion Policy

Though many have criticized U.S. democracy promotion efforts both inside and outside the Arab world, there has been widespread recognition that President Bush and his Administration have made the pursuit of regional reform a high-profile issue and have provided additional resources for its implementation. The United States employs a variety of diplomatic tools and policy instruments to promote democracy in the Middle East. Behind the scenes bilateral diplomacy, in which U.S. officials engage Arab governments on the reform issue, is considered by many experts to be one of the most effective ways of promoting democracy.¹⁰ Public statements by Administration officials visiting the region, such as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s July 2005 policy speech on democracy at the American University of Cairo in Egypt, is another way for U.S. policy makers to keep reform a visible issue in U.S. dealings with Arab regimes. However, visiting U.S. officials who raise the democratization issue are often accused in the Arab media of unfairly meddling in Arab affairs or as patronizing the Arab people. Islamist groups often reiterate such attacks, seizing on opportunities presented by visiting U.S. delegations speaking on reform to criticize U.S. policies in the Middle East.

⁹ “Islamists at the Ballot Box, Findings from Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, and Turkey,” Judy Barsalou, *U.S. Institute for Peace Special Report 144*, July 2005.

¹⁰ See “In Support of Arab Democracy: Why and How,” Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force Report No.54, Madeline K. Albright and Vin Weber Co-Chairs, 2005.

U.S. Democracy Programs

Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the United States has significantly increased funding for democracy promotion in the Arab world. Measuring its effectiveness is difficult since democracy cannot be quantified or measured like traditional U.S. foreign assistance for tangible projects, such as road construction, water resource development, and school improvement. Further, proponents of current policy say that the United States continues to spend far more resources on military assistance to the region than on reform. While this statement is factually correct, it focuses too narrowly on levels of spending rather than on the substance of U.S. programming. Support for indigenous reformers does not necessarily require large amounts of financial assistance. Rather, it must be properly channeled to support reformers without de-legitimizing them in the process. Providing democracy assistance can be problematic since some regimes legally restrict foreign assistance to non-governmental organizations.

Leading U.S. Organizations Supporting Democracy in the Middle East

NED. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is a semi-private, nonprofit organization created in 1983 to strengthen democratic institutions around the world through non-governmental efforts. [<http://www.ned.org>]

NDI. The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization funded by NED that works to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. [<http://www.ndi.org>]

IRI. The International Republican Institute (IRI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization funded by NED dedicated to advancing democracy, freedom, self-government, and the rule of law worldwide. [<http://www.iri.org>]

MEPI. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) is a U.S. State Department program designed to promote political, economic, and educational development in the Middle East. [<http://mepi.state.gov>]

USAID. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is an independent federal government agency that supports economic and political development around the globe. [<http://www.usaid.gov>]

Through annual foreign operations and State Department appropriations, Congress currently provides funding for the following reform programs:

- the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), a State Department program designed to encourage reform in Arab countries by strengthening Arab civil society, encouraging micro-enterprise, expanding political participation, and promoting women's rights;¹¹
- the State Department's Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF), an account that funds human rights promotion in Muslim-majority countries; and
- the National Endowment for Democracy's (NED) Muslim Democracy Program.

¹¹ See CRS Report RS21457, *The Middle East Partnership Initiative: An Overview*, by (name redacted).

Beyond U.S.-sponsored programs, the Administration proposed and participates in the “Broader Middle East & North Africa Initiative,” a G8-led development and reform initiative aimed at fostering economic and political liberalization in Arab and other Muslim-majority countries.¹² USAID also funds a number of democracy and governance activities through bilateral assistance to Arab recipients such as Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Yemen.

Congressional Action to Allow Direct Support to NGOs. Congress may also specify how U.S. democracy funds are spent on the ground. Traditionally, USAID’s Democracy and Governance grants have been awarded to U.S. and international subcontractors to carry out specific programs, mainly due to certain Arab governments’ reluctance to allow U.S. support for domestic groups. However, the FY2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-447) stipulates that U.S. funds for democracy and governance activities in Egypt are no longer subject to the prior approval of the Egyptian government. Now, USAID can channel funds toward non-governmental organizations in Egypt in coordination with an independent board of Egyptian political activists and experts. Funds for NGOs are awarded competitively, using an Annual Program Statement (APS) method that describes and publicly advertises the types of activities USAID is interested in funding and then invites interested NGOs to submit proposals. There are quarterly meetings to review new proposals received as a result of the advertisement, and awards are made throughout the year following those reviews.

The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). Some analysts believe that MEPI can have a positive impact on the region by promoting democracy and economic development. In 2004, MEPI began issuing small grants directly to NGOs in the Middle East in order to support political activists and human rights organizations. MEPI grants were awarded to some NGOs to help train election monitors for the 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections in Egypt.¹³ Critics charge that MEPI, as a State Department-run program, has little credibility in the Arab world, as it awards grants to mostly American-run organizations to implement programs with little long-term impact.¹⁴ Some experts have recommended that MEPI be transformed into a private foundation in order to partly disassociate it from direct U.S. government control. U.S. officials have rejected this idea, asserting that the United States needs such policy tools to effect change in the region.

The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA). BMENA is a multilateral initiative among G-8 countries and regional partners to promote democracy and reform in the “Broader Middle East.” The main component of BMENA is the convening of an annual conference designed to promote dialogue between the reformers and Arab and Western governments. The inaugural “Forum for the Future” was held in Rabat, Morocco in December 2004. The following year,

¹² See CRS Report RS22053, *The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: An Overview*, by (name redacted).

¹³ See “Tentative Steps: Democracy Drive by America Meets Reality in Egypt,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 11, 2005.

¹⁴ “Statement of Amy Hawthorne, Analyst, Middle East Democracy,” Hearing on Political Change in the Arab World, House International Relations Committee, April 21, 2005.

the forum was held in Manama, Bahrain. A third meeting is tentatively scheduled to take place in Jordan in late 2006.

At this time, it is unclear what additional resources the international community will devote to BMENA or how the initiative will be institutionalized beyond its annual convention. By helping to create BMENA, the Bush Administration has been credited with raising awareness within the international community for the need for political and economic reform in Muslim-majority and Arab countries. However, some analysts believe that BMENA is too broad to promote reform effectively and doubt that it can evolve into something more than a forum for inter-governmental dialogue.

Currently, BMENA countries support two funds. The “Foundation for the Future” is designed to channel financial grants toward non-governmental organizations in the region to help civil society strengthen the rule of law, to protect basic civil liberties, and ensure greater opportunity for health and education. The “Fund for the Future” is designed to help businesses in the region, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, gain access to the capital they need to create jobs and economic growth. U.S. contributions to both funds come from MEPI-controlled accounts and appropriations.

Islamist Groups in Selected Arab Countries

The following section profiles several non-violent Islamist movements in Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan. This is not a comprehensive assessment of all non-violent Islamist groups in the Middle East. Indeed, many groups inside and outside the Arab world would provide additional insights. Groups that have not disarmed their militias or renounced terrorism are not treated in this study.

Morocco¹⁵

Long before the September 11th terrorist attacks, experts focused their attention on the Moroccan reform process because of its possible implications for democratization elsewhere in North Africa and the Middle East. Over the past decade, Morocco has embarked upon a limited liberalization process that has witnessed a moderate, non-revolutionary Islamist party, the *Parti de Justice et Développement* (Islamist Justice and Development Party or PJD), gain seats in successive parliamentary elections in 1997 and 2002.¹⁶ With a history of stable monarchical rule in which the King, as “Commander of the Faithful,” derives his religious authority from his dynasty’s claimed descent from the prophet Muhammad, Morocco has accepted some Islamist political activity so long as Islamists do not

¹⁵ For more information, see CRS Report RS21579, *Morocco: Current Issues*, by (name redacted).

¹⁶ The PJD holds 43 seats in parliament (the third largest party) and could significantly expand its presence there during the next round of elections in 2007.

challenge the king's authority.¹⁷ The PJD has accepted such a bargain, and the relationship between it and the palace, though at times confrontational, has overall been mutually beneficial. Moroccan authorities have sought to avoid the kind of bloody confrontation with Islamists that plagued neighboring Algeria throughout the 1990s, but concern remains over the proliferation of Jihadist terrorist groups, like Al Qaeda, that seek to recruit Moroccans at home and abroad. Thus, Morocco has chosen a path of inclusion rather than exclusion in order to lure Islamists away from militancy and toward more legitimate means of political participation. There also may be an economic reason to allow Islamists into the political system. Morocco, which lacks natural resources like oil and depends on foreign aid and trade with the West, has an economic incentive to maintain its momentum on the reform front, particularly given the recent focus by Morocco's key trading partners in Europe and the United States on democracy and human rights promotion.

The PJD is not the only Islamist group in Morocco. A second group, known in Arabic as *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* or Justice and Charity (JCO), is only legally recognized as a charity. The JCO rejects the legitimacy of the Moroccan monarchy. Though no reliable data on the popularity of either group are available, there seems to be a consensus among Morocco experts that the JCO has a wider national base of grassroots support, though the PJD is very active in urban areas.

The PJD. Like many Islamist groups across the globe, it is difficult to discern what the PJD's true goals and objectives are over the long term.¹⁸ Some believe that, although the party has agreed to work within the current system, it remains committed to establishing an Islamic state in Morocco with Islamic law, or *Sharia*, as the basis for legislation. Others see the PJD's principles as deliberately ambiguous, with its leadership desiring to strike a balance between continuing its opposition to government corruption and nepotism while possibly participating in future government coalitions, perhaps after the 2007 parliamentary election. Reportedly, the PJD covets the Social Affairs and Education ministerial portfolios, where it could pursue an Islamist agenda.

Due to its participation in the Moroccan political system, some have called the PJD the "Islamists of the palace," though observers note that the PJD's aggressive campaigning among lower- and middle-class Moroccans has made the group more popular than many of Morocco's older and more established parties.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the aspirations of the PJD remain limited, as it has consistently sided with the monarchy, even on issues that would appear to contravene a conservative interpretation of Islamic law, such as their acceptance of King Muhammad's 2004 groundbreaking revision of the family code (*Mudawana*), which, among other things, raised the legal age for marriage for women from 15 to 18 and allowed women to divorce with a judge's approval. The PJD argued that because the family code

¹⁷ Experts also note that Islam commonly practiced in Morocco is traditionally less dogmatic and more tolerant than the more austere and rigid interpretations in places like Saudi Arabia.

¹⁸ The PJD's party website is located at [http://www.pjd.ma/sommaire_en.php3].

¹⁹ Observers have noted that political parties in Morocco are extremely weak and generally ineffective. Under such circumstances, the PJD stands apart as a real party actively seeking constituents.

revision was democratically enacted, its members should accept it, since the party is committed to both democratic and Islamic principles.²⁰ According to PJD Vice-Secretary Abdelah Baha, “Islam and democracy can go together as global principles ... our party bases its objectives on religious principles, and then adapts them to political ends. We’re like the American evangelicals.”²¹ Some critics in Morocco believe that the PJD has failed to articulate original policies, other than general pledges to fight corruption and unemployment. Others are encouraged by the PJD’s campaign to bring more transparency to Moroccan politics. One recent report noted that the PJD publishes the attendance record of all members at parliamentary sessions in order to highlight chronic absenteeism found in other parties.²² The PJD’s party leaders require PJD parliamentarians to attend all legislative sessions and to be more productive than members from other parties.

Justice and Charity. Though the PJD and Justice and Charity are ideologically similar, the latter group has had a far more contentious relationship with the Moroccan government due to its outright rejection of the monarchy. Justice and Charity is led by Shaikh Abdessalem Yassine, a sufi cleric and former employee of the Education Ministry who spent decades under house arrest and remains under surveillance. His daughter and JCO spokesperson, 47-year old Nadia Yassine, was arrested in 2005 after stating in a newspaper interview that Morocco would be better off as a republic than as a kingdom. Observers suggest that although Nadia Yassine has made similar remarks on more than one occasion, she may have finally pushed the government to its limit. According to Morocco’s Minister of Communication, “In certain countries, you can talk about republican values ... here, we have monarchic values, and she is transgressing these values.”²³ The PJD immediately condemned Yassine’s remarks, saying that she harmed the country’s sacred institutions. In an uncertain political climate, in which opposition figures like the Yassines have become emboldened and regimes have grown more wary of political dissent, the prosecution of Nadia Yassine has drawn widespread international attention. In May 2006, the trial was indefinitely postponed, and Yassine remarked in a press interview that “I wanted the trial to take place — it’s an important battle for us.... But I could feel their trepidation. They (the regime) realized the trial was a big mistake.”²⁴

Justice and Charity condemns terrorism and the use of violence for political means. The government has tolerated its social service activities and campus activism, though it is reportedly closely monitored and generally treated as a subversive organization. Moreover, many Moroccans question its political agenda beyond merely opposing authoritarianism, believing that Justice and Charity would

²⁰ “Islamist Movements and the Democratic Process in the Arab World: Exploring the Grey Zones,” A Joint Publication of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Herbert-Quandt-Stiftung, Number 67, March 2006.

²¹ “Morocco’s Rising Islamist Challenge,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 23, 2005.

²² “The U.S., the EU and Middle East Reform: What Can We Learn from Morocco? A Middle East Program Morocco Trip Report,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), March 2006.

²³ “Feud with King Tests Freedoms in Morocco,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 13, 2006.

²⁴ “An Islamist Feminist Tackles Moroccan Taboos,” *Financial Times*, June 1, 2006.

limit social freedoms by imposing restrictions on women's dress and banning alcohol. Although supporters of Nadia Yassine believe she is an Islamic feminist, she opposed the 2004 revision of the Moroccan family code, remarking that "it was signed to please foreigners and the feminist movement in Morocco rather than to change the real situation of women."²⁵ She also led demonstrations against an earlier attempt to revise the code. One recent assessment of the JCO's political program stated "The group's leadership has such faith in the moral and spiritual power of its movement that it assumes that once Moroccans are sufficiently familiar with the group, they will support it *en masse* and will also support the imposition of Islamic law, or *Sharia*."²⁶

In 2005 and 2006, Nadia Yassine made several visits to the United States to speak on college campuses and promote her new book, *Full Sails Ahead*.²⁷ During one lecture at Georgetown University in April 2006, Yassine remarked that she "swears on the Koran" that should the JCO come to power, the rights of all women will be respected and no woman would be forced to wear the veil. She also noted that 30% of the JCO's internal consultative (*Shura*) council is composed of women. Yassine also opposes a quota system for women in government or parliament because she believes that such systems, found in other parts of the Arab world, are insulting to women.²⁸ However, when asked about her group's opposition to the King's changes to the personal status laws, Yassine was careful not to criticize the actual reforms and even suggested that her group proposed such changes two decades ago. Furthermore, Yassine acknowledged that the JCO has no specific economic agenda and would therefore seek out opinions from all Moroccans.²⁹

U.S. Policy vis-à-vis Morocco. There are multiple dimensions to the U.S.-Moroccan relationship, with democracy and human rights promotion being one of several pressing priorities for U.S. policy makers. Morocco has long been considered a key U.S. partner in North Africa and the Arab world and has assisted U.S. efforts to promote Middle East peace and counter terrorism in the Sahara. Since the September 11th terrorist attacks, the United States has taken a number of concrete steps to further its relationship with Morocco including increasing military and economic aid, concluding a free trade agreement, and sponsoring an international conference in Rabat on reform as part of the Administration's "Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative."³⁰ Morocco is eligible for funding under the Bush Administration's new foreign aid initiative, the Millennium Challenge Account. In

²⁵ "Is Change Just Around the Corner?(Morocco)," *The Middle East*, June 1, 2004.

²⁶ CSIS, March 2006, op.cit.

²⁷ Supporters of Nadia Yassine maintain a website devoted to her writings and the Justice and Charity organization. Analysts believe that the JCO draws most of its funding from Moroccan expatriates living in Western Europe and the United States. Yassine's website is available online at [<http://nadiayassine.net/en/index.htm>].

²⁸ Morocco reserves 30 parliamentary seats for women.

²⁹ CRS notes from Nadia Yassine lecture at Georgetown University's Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, April 20, 2006.

³⁰ For more information on BMENA, see CRS Report RS22053, *The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: An Overview*, by (name redacted).

addition, Morocco has been used as a test case for the Administration's other new reform program, the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). All told, concern that deteriorating socio-economic conditions in Morocco could lead to increased radicalism has led to a number of new activities and increased U.S. funding for education, health care, women's rights, job creation, and structural readjustment programs, all of which have been welcomed by the Moroccan government.

To a certain extent, U.S. democracy promotion efforts in Morocco are largely regime-friendly, as policy makers may be reluctant to disrupt strong U.S.-Moroccan relations. Nevertheless, the United States has become more involved in Moroccan domestic politics and has sponsored several programs in which the PJD is an active participant.³¹ In fact, U.S. diplomats and PJD party leaders openly acknowledge such participation, though, according to U.S. officials, there are no special outreach efforts to work with the PJD or any other Islamist group in Morocco.³² The PJD is simply treated as one of several organizations whose members attend National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI)-sponsored seminars on strengthening political parties and enhancing campaign skills. Public opinion polls conducted by IRI in Morocco have indicated that up to 47% of the Moroccan electorate were leaning toward supporting the PJD.³³

Perhaps as a sign of the PJD's growing activism and grasp of democratic politics, several democracy specialists in Morocco noted that PJD members have seized opportunities for additional training and technical support from a variety of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to a far greater extent than older, more established Moroccan parties. Experts also noted that the PJD initially rejected participating in U.S. government-sponsored training programs; however, over time, its opposition abated.³⁴ According to Thomas Carothers, a democracy specialist at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Morocco's PJD clearly has a legitimate role to play in Morocco's electoral politics. I also think it is normal for the U.S. government to develop and maintain contacts with a wide variety of legitimate political actors in a country, including those that may not like some elements of U.S. foreign policy."³⁵

U.S. officials in Morocco state that the United States should pursue a policy of engagement with the PJD rather than ignore it. In May 2006, the U.S. State

³¹ U.S. dialogue with Islamists in Morocco does not extend to members of the Justice and Charity organization. Although some speculate that the JCO is actually stronger than the PJD in terms of its grassroots support, its rejection of the monarchy precludes it from participating in politics.

³² U.S. Embassy officials in Morocco must constantly respond to Moroccan media and other accusations that the United States is destabilizing Morocco by maintaining relations with the PJD. CRS Analyst conversation with U.S. Embassy officials in Rabat, Morocco, April 21, 2006.

³³ "Morocco Sees the Rise of Acceptable Islamist Party," *Financial Times*, May 23, 2006.

³⁴ CRS analyst conversation with U.S. democracy specialists in Morocco, April 24, 2006.

³⁵ "Dealing with Moderate Islam," *Asia Times Online*, July 15, 2005.

Department's International Visitor's Program sponsored a visit by the PJD's leader, 50-year old Saad Eddine Othmani. In a sign that the PJD itself may be eager to expand dialogue with the United States, the party sponsored a March 2006 conference in Morocco entitled, "American Decision Making and its Impact on the Moroccan-American Relations." When asked about U.S. democracy promotion policy in the Middle East, Othmani remarked that "We cannot deny the role of external factors, but the reforms have not been simply imposed from outside.... The U.S. administration cannot achieve its goals at our expense, and should seek to build trust and identify common interests through a cooperative dialogue."³⁶

U.S. engagement is complicated by internal divisions within Islamist organizations such as the PJD, in which liberal and conservative factions vie for influence. The PJD, while outwardly more moderate in its political discourse, has its hardliners, many of whom are opposed to better relations with the West and may be more emboldened following the Hamas victory in the January 2006 Palestinian legislative elections.³⁷ The PJD's leadership must balance its more progressive approach to politics with the needs of conservative Islamist party members. When asked about its relations with the United States and U.S. policy in Iraq, one PJD leader remarked that, "I'm not in favor of meeting Americans who are on official missions. They are killing Muslim people.... I am against any relation with them. If they say they are going to leave Iraq, I don't have any problem with meeting them. Our position is very clear. We don't approve their policy."³⁸

Thus, the party has occasionally boycotted some U.S. embassy-sponsored events, particularly during times of regional tension. The PJD has demonstrated against the U.S. presence in Iraq and has criticized the United States and European Union for ending all direct support for the Palestinian Authority following the 2006 Hamas victory. Nevertheless, PJD leader Saad Eddine Othmani has been cautious in his remarks on Hamas, stating in a recent interview that the Hamas victory "was a major event that marked both the victory of democracy and of the strategy of resistance to the occupation. Hamas in government will be different from the Hamas

³⁶ "Interview with Saad Eddin Al Othmani, leader of Morocco's Party of Justice and Development," *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2005, Volume 3, Issue 10.

³⁷ In January 2006, the PJD's newspaper published many articles praising the Hamas electoral victory. One front page article mocked attempts to violently suppress Islamist movements saying "Only the Arab eradicators who call themselves neo-liberals, that is America's liberals, and the modernists of the culture of tyranny that falsely dons the robe of democracy and modernism, these eradicators are the only ones who will be biting their fingers for anger, and who will notice a rise in the levels of their adrenaline, blood sugar, and salt. They alone are going to go through dark days." "Morocco: Paper Says Islamists Sure of Victory at Next Legislative Elections," *Casablanca Al-Ahdath al-Maghribiyah*, February 1, 2006, translated from Arabic to English by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) or Open Source Center (OSC), Document ID: GMP20060201710043.

³⁸ *Asia Times Online*, op.cit.

in the opposition, and I do not rule out the possibility of its moving towards a search for a peaceful solution.”³⁹

Overall, U.S. policy makers have been careful not to overemphasize U.S. contacts with the PJD, since there continues to be widespread public skepticism in Morocco of all political parties, the PJD included. The United States may welcome more European Union cooperation with Islamists groups since EU intentions are far less suspect among Moroccans in general.⁴⁰ Observers have focused intently on the 2007 parliamentary elections, speculating whether the PJD will decide to or be permitted to run the maximum number of candidates. In past elections, the PJD succumbed to government pressure and fielded candidates in just 20%-30% of electoral contests. The PJD, like the United States, takes a gradualist approach to political reform in Morocco. Also, it may not want to relinquish its position in the opposition, which according to some officials, allows it to comfortably criticize government corruption and inefficiency without having the responsibility of running the country’s day-to-day affairs.⁴¹ Others suggest that the PJD might participate in the next coalition government to develop experience in governance and improve its electoral chances in the 2012 elections.

Some commentators are dismayed by any U.S. government dealings with Moroccan Islamists, asserting that the ultimate goal of all Islamist groups is the establishment of a non-democratic state based on Islamic law (*Sharia*). These experts argue that the PJD’s non-violent approach to politics masks its ultimate non-democratic agenda and that non-violence is merely a tactic rather than an end goal. According to Dr. Robert Satloff, Executive Director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy,

The spread of radical Islamism, not U.S. unpopularity, is the most serious challenge to U.S. interests in many Arab and Muslim societies. The solution — as frequently expressed by liberal Moroccans — cannot be found in reaching an accommodation with Islamists... Anti-Islamist Moroccans complain that Washington sends the wrong message when it provides parliamentary training funds that are used by Islamist legislators to become more effective critics of the government.⁴²

Critics contend that U.S. policy should be exclusively focused on promoting democratic alternatives to Islamists. U.S. government officials insist that they are not

³⁹ “Secretary General of Morocco’s Islamist PJD Party Interviewed on Political Issues,” *Paris Jeune Afrique-L’Intelligent*, April 2, 2006, translated from French to English by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) or Open Source Center (OSC), Document ID: GMP20060420380001.

⁴⁰ For more information on EU support to Morocco, see the European Commission’s Office of External Cooperation (Morocco program) online at [http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/med/bilateral/morocco_en.htm#EU%20co-operation%20programme%202002-2006].

⁴¹ CRS analyst conversation with U.S. Embassy officials in Rabat, Morocco, April 21, 2006.

⁴² “Lessons from the Front Line: My Two Years in Morocco,” *PolicyWatch*, number 889, August 2, 2004, published by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

favoring groups like the PJD and treat all Moroccan parties equally. Some Moroccan media outlets have reiterated demands that the United States cease all contacts with Islamists, fearing that U.S. policy may inadvertently empower organizations like the PJD and perhaps lead to a Hamas-like outcome. For its part, the Moroccan government often warns U.S. observers that non-violent Islamists in Morocco view electoral politics as a means to come to power and establish a theocracy in the kingdom.

Role of Congress. Congress has been supportive of the Administration's efforts to strengthen ties to Morocco. Congress approved a free trade agreement (FTA) with Morocco (P.L. 108-302) on August 17, 2004, and it came into effect on January 1, 2006. Congress has appropriated increasing amounts of foreign aid to Morocco to assist with countering terrorism, democratization, and the FTA. In FY2006, Morocco is receiving \$10.890 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF), \$12.375 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF), \$8.217 million in Development Assistance (DA), and \$1.856 million for International Military Education and Training (IMET). For FY2007, the Administration has requested \$18 million in ESF, \$12.5 million in FMF, \$5.4 million for DA, and \$1.975 million for IMET.

Egypt⁴³

The potential dilemma that non-violent Islamist movements pose for U.S. democratization policy is of greater strategic importance vis-a-vis U.S. relations with Egypt than with Morocco or possibly elsewhere in the Arab world. The Egyptian government, led by 78-year old President Hosni Mubarak, is a strategic Arab partner for U.S. national security interests in the region. Egypt, which has been at peace with Israel since 1979, received the largest amount of U.S. foreign assistance to Arab countries until U.S. involvement in Iraq. Both countries cooperate closely on military and intelligence issues, and President Mubarak has fashioned himself as a reliable interlocutor in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Some analysts believe that Egypt's strategic importance has increased since the Hamas 2006 rise to power, as Egypt, Israel, and the United States all share a common interest in containing Hamas.

Nevertheless, the Egyptian government has been wary of U.S. calls for political reform because authorities do not want to empower the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB), by far the most organized and effective opposition group in Egypt today. Despite the MB's decades-long commitment to pursuing political power peacefully, it stands opposed, at least rhetorically, to Egypt's close ties to the United States, and many observers are uncertain whether MB leaders would reverse the course of Egyptian foreign policy should they come to power. Furthermore, Egypt, unlike Morocco, has a long history of violent confrontation with fundamentalist terrorist groups, which has led the government to discredit all Islamists, militant and non-violent alike. Finally, Egypt is a heterogeneous society. Egyptian Coptic Christians number in the millions and have a strong presence in the private sector.

⁴³ For more information on Egypt, see CRS Report RL33003, *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*, by (name redacted).

Many Copts fear that an Islamist government would exacerbate sectarian tensions, which already are flaring in various parts of Egypt.

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood has the precarious status of an illegal organization whose treatment by the government fluctuates between support, tolerance, and outright suppression. Moreover, despite an almost three-decade commitment to non-violent opposition, the MB's radical history, its fundamentalist ideologues, and younger and perhaps more militant members have prompted differences among Western observers over the issue of pursuing engagement with the group. Complicating matters further is the steadfast opposition of the Egyptian government to any Western dealings with the MB. With terrorist activity resurfacing in Egypt, authorities may be even more resistant to further legitimizing political Islamists. Nevertheless, some democracy experts believe that, over the long term, Egypt and Western governments will ultimately have to engage with the MB since it is by far the most powerful opposition group in Egypt. Others would rather see the West promote alternative secular opposition groups. Finally, many observers believe that the issue of Islamist inclusion in the political system is strictly an Egyptian domestic issue and that foreign involvement will only stoke the fires of Egyptian nationalism, further entrenching government opposition to reform.

Since its founding in 1928, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has been the vanguard of Sunni political Islamism in the Arab world, as branches of the MB have spread to countries across the region. Between 1930-1950, the movement grew increasingly militant in pursuit of its political, social, economic, and legal goals. By the late 1940s, the Brotherhood was presenting serious challenges to the Egyptian regime. Though it did assist the Egyptian Free Officers in overthrowing the monarchy in 1952, the MB soon turned against Egypt's new military leaders and was violently suppressed and forced to go underground after a failed Brotherhood assassination attempt against Egypt's second post-monarchical ruler, Prime Minister (and later President) Gamal Abdul Nasser in 1954. With many members imprisoned and the organization badly weakened, the MB renounced violence in the early 1970s and its members were gradually allowed to reenter politics, though the organization itself remains outlawed.

Since the mid-1970s, the MB has fielded candidates in parliamentary elections by either joining other opposition parties or, more recently, running as independents. In the 2000 parliamentary elections, 17 independent candidates, who were regarded as Brotherhood sympathizers, were elected. In 2005, Brotherhood-affiliated candidates won 88 seats in parliament (it agreed to contest only a limited number of seats). Though opinions vary on how much mass support the Brotherhood commands, it is recognized by many Egyptians for its charitable and social services work and its support among the professional middle class. The MB controls many of the professional syndicates (associations), including those representing engineers, doctors, lawyers, and academics.

Although the MB has long renounced the use of violence, opinions differ whether this criterion alone should allow it to enter into mainstream politics. According to one scholar, "For some, the movement is a reaffirmation of moral idealism, for others an outlet for frustration and resentment [in which] good and bad

factors apparently are working together ... real religion and neurotic fanaticism, honest idealism and destructive frenzy. It would be wrong to deny the former and perhaps dangerous to ignore the potentiality of the latter.”⁴⁴

The MB claims that it is in favor of Egyptian democratization. According to one of its leaders, “Since the early 1970s, in the context of [President Anwar]Sadat’s liberalization, opening and dialogue, the Society adopted a new strategy, which relies on democracy as a means of change and as an objective. Democracy is not incompatible with Islam; *shura* [consultation] is like democracy, it forces respect for basic liberties and the rights of women. We don’t disagree with the West on this, except that the West has left democracy behind.”⁴⁵ In 2004, the Muslim Brotherhood published a 50-page declaration endorsing elections, reform, accountability, and non-violence. Nevertheless, some doubt the MB’s democratic credentials. Internally, the group is traditionally led by a septuagenarian or octogenarian “Supreme Leader,” who, in the past, was tied to the movement’s early leaders, including its founder, Hassan al Banna. Much of the inner workings of the MB remain unknown to outsiders, fueling suspicions.

Due to Egypt’s proximity to and involvement in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, MB anti-Israeli rhetoric is particularly pronounced and anti-Semitic (although Egyptian state-owned media outlets also fuel anti-Israeli incitement). In December 2005, MB leader Mohammed Mahdi Akef said that the Nazi holocaust was a myth, reiterating comments made earlier by Iran’s president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.⁴⁶ The Israeli-financed Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) regularly translates Brotherhood statements on Israel and Judaism. In one dispatch from April 2006, MEMRI translated excerpts from a Brotherhood website for children, in which there reportedly were anti-Semitic passages that accuse Jews of murdering Muslim prophets.⁴⁷

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is one of the most vocal organizations rejecting the normalization of Arab relations with Israel. Although the organization itself may not commit acts of terrorism against Israel, its leaders call for continued resistance to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian lands (and U.S. occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan). After the Hamas 2006 legislative victory, the MB launched a fund-raising campaign on behalf of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority. Despite Brotherhood condemnations of terrorist bombings aimed at tourist resorts in the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula, MB leaders do not extend such condemnations to Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians. According to MB leader Akef, “Israel is an occupier, and it’s the right of the people of the country to resist

⁴⁴ Smith, Wilfred Cantwell, *Islam in Modern History*, New York: Mentor, 1957, P.164.

⁴⁵ “Islamism in North Africa II: Egypt’s Opportunity,” International Crisis Group, Middle East and North Africa Briefing, Cairo/Brussels, April 20, 2004.

⁴⁶ “Muslim Brotherhood Leader Says Holocaust Is a Myth, Lashes Out at U.S.,” *Associated Press*, December 22, 2005.

⁴⁷ Available on the MEMRI website at [<http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=egypt&ID=SP114106>].

occupation by all means.”⁴⁸ Whether such rhetoric would lead the MB, if it came to power, to abrogate Egypt’s nearly three-decade long peace with Israel is an open question. Some experts believe that, in a scenario in which the MB ascend to power, the Egyptian military would intervene to preserve the status quo. Others assert that, under the same scenario, economic realities would force the MB, despite its harsh rhetoric toward Israel, to be pragmatic and maintain Egypt’s “cold peace” with Israel.

Hizb Al Wasat (The Middle or Center Party). Although not a legally recognized party, the Al Wasat organization has received attention among Western observers for its commitment to pluralism, religious toleration, and acceptance of secular political principles.⁴⁹ Established in 1996 by former Brotherhood members, Al Wasat is made up of a cadre of younger political activists and encourages participation by women and by Coptic Christians. According to party leader Abu-Ila Madi, the Al Wasat Party is not a religious party. “We affirmed on many occasions that we are against religious parties that are based on a religious basis, and adopt the theocratic thinking of clergymen, which we totally reject.”⁵⁰ However, its application for legal recognition as a political party has been rejected on three separate occasions by the government’s Political Parties Committee on the grounds that it illegally sought to establish a party with an Islamic basis (Egyptian law prohibits political parties based on religion). Overall, the organization appears relatively weak in terms of popular support.

U.S. Policy in Egypt. Although the United States has long advocated the promotion of human rights and political freedom in Egypt, most experts agree that, prior to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, economic reform superseded political reform in the West’s relations with Egypt, as well as other Middle Eastern countries. However, with the recent push for democracy in the Middle East seen as a counterweight to Islamic militancy and intellectual and social stagnation, U.S. policy regarding Egypt has been reinvigorated, as policy makers seek to balance U.S. security and economic interests with U.S. democracy promotion policies.

U.S. officials have employed a variety of diplomatic tools to push for reform in Egypt. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has made visits to Egypt and has spoken about the need for reform at the American University in Cairo and held meetings with political activists. The United States also has expanded its foreign aid and democracy programming activities in Egypt. In 2005, the State Department’s Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) began distributing small grants directly to NGOs in Egypt to support secular political activists and human rights groups,

⁴⁸ “Muslim Brotherhood Leader Criticizes Sinai Blasts, Supports Palestinian Bombings,” *The Daily Star Egypt*, May 2, 2006.

⁴⁹ Augustus Richard Norton, “Thwarted Politics: The Case of Egypt’s Hizb al-Wasat,” in Robert W. Hefner (ed.) *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization* (Princeton, 2005).

⁵⁰ “Egypt: Muslim Brotherhood Sharply Criticizes Gamal Mubarak’s Statements,” *Al-Misryun*, January 26, 2006, translated from Arabic to English by the *Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS]* or *Open Source Center [OSC]*, Document ID# GMP20060126710025.

particularly during the presidential and parliamentary election seasons.⁵¹ The United States has been less willing to overtly pressure Egypt; though when Egyptian authorities arrested, tried, and imprisoned Ayman Nour, an opposition leader and runner-up in the 2005 presidential election, the United States protested and reportedly withheld announcing its intention to negotiate a long sought after U.S.-Egyptian free trade agreement. Although some have labeled Nour as an opportunist and minor political figure, he represented a secular alternative to the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), a tenuous position that the authorities may have deemed unacceptable.

Nevertheless, some analysts have questioned the depth of the U.S. commitment to democratization in Egypt, particularly after the recent Hamas victory in Palestinian parliamentary elections earlier this year. With the Hamas takeover of most of the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, the United States, and Israel have a shared purpose in containing Hamas and the spread of its violent Islamist influence into neighboring states. In this changed atmosphere, in which Egyptian security cooperation on the Gaza-Egyptian border also is valued, some observers have speculated that U.S. policy makers may tone down their rhetoric on reform in Egypt. For example when the Egyptian parliament voted to approve the two-year extension the nation's 25-year old Emergency laws in April 2006, a move long opposed by the United States, the Administration was careful not to overly condemn the maneuver, particularly as it came only days after several deadly terrorist attacks in the Sinai Peninsula.⁵²

At present, the Islamist dilemma in Egypt appears to perplex U.S. policy makers and outside observers alike. Should the United States aggressively push for reform and run the risk of a nationalist backlash or of empowering radical groups? Or should the United States patiently pursue long-term modernization and institution-building programs that are largely regime-friendly and thereby run the risk of deflating the hopes of Egypt's liberals? Are there other paths to pursue?

The United States respects the Egyptian government's desires not to allow illegal Islamist organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to officially participate in U.S.-sponsored reform activities in Egypt or have extensive contacts with U.S. diplomats in Cairo. Reportedly, U.S. non-governmental democracy organizations must ensure that no Brotherhood participants attend U.S.-funded seminars or training programs. Moreover, Egyptian law prohibits even legal organizations or parties from accepting financial support from "foreign entities." Nevertheless, the United States has not outrightly rejected having any contact with Brotherhood members. According to the U.S. State Department, the United States will not deal directly with the Brotherhood since it is banned under Egyptian law, but

⁵¹ For a list of MEPI programs in Egypt, see [<http://mepi.state.gov/c10154.htm>].

⁵² The State Department did comment on the action saying, "It's a disappointment. We understand that Egypt is facing its own issues related to terrorism, but President Mubarak during the presidential campaign had talked about the fact that he was going to seek a new emergency law, but one that would be targeted specifically at fighting terrorism, counterterrorism, and that would take into account respect for freedom of speech as well as human rights. Certainly we would like to see President Mubarak and his government follow through on that pledge." *U.S. State Department Daily Press Briefing*, Sean McCormack, Spokesman, Washington, DC, May 2, 2006.

Brotherhood members will not be barred from meetings between U.S. officials and parliament members. According to J. Scott Carpenter, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs at the U.S. State Department, “There is recognition that there are a number of folks who have been elected to Parliament, and they are there. This is an issue for Egyptian society to deal with it, it’s not something for us necessarily to involve ourselves with.”⁵³

Given these barriers, U.S. officials must be cautious in broaching the Islamist issue in Egypt. Still, according to some observers, the possibility for informal dialogue between the United States and some Egyptian Islamists exists. The Al Wasat organization, whose legal status is precarious since it is an aspirant political party that has been unsuccessful in its registration attempts (rather than an outright illegal organization like the Muslim Brotherhood), could be more amenable to future participation in U.S.-government sponsored democracy training programs. However, U.S. policy makers would need to be careful about appearing to favor any one group in Egyptian politics. In June 2006, the Egyptian government accused the local head of the International Republican Institute’s (IRI) Egypt program of meddling in Egypt’s internal affairs and demanded that the organization temporarily halt its activities there.

U.S. officials are continually pressing Islamists on their views on issues of importance to U.S. policy in the region. With 88 independent members of parliament sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood, MB politicians operate openly and are readily accessible. According to J. Scott Carpenter, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs at the U.S. State Department, “On specific things like protection of minorities and protection of women’s rights, that is something that in our discussions with Islamists parties we have to continue asking them: What is your position? Do you protect women’s rights? What about the Coptic (Christian) community in Egypt? It is important that we retain our clarity even as these groups struggle to come to a conclusion within the gray zones.”⁵⁴

Some analysts question whether Islamists in Egypt would welcome U.S. dialogue in the first place due to their deep suspicion of Western intentions and foreign meddling. Observers note that many Muslim Brotherhood members are opposed to U.S. policy in the Middle East and might want to steer clear of any appearance of cooperation in politics. Although there are always individual members who may not be as resistant as most party members to participating in U.S. programs, for the most part, only a few Brotherhood members interact with Western observers.

Overall, while many experts recommend that U.S. policy reinforce, rather than initiate, local demands for accelerated political liberalization in Egypt, there is lack of consensus over which reformers the United States should bolster. By limiting the realm of political space to either the ruling National Democratic Party or the Muslim Brotherhood, Egyptian authorities have forced the West to choose to support the

⁵³ “U.S. remains committed to reform in Arab World despite Islamist gains, such as Brotherhood in Egypt,” *Daily Star Egypt*, March 23, 2006.

⁵⁴ “The US Is Gauging Islamist Organizations’ Commitment to the Democratic Process,” *Voice of America*, March 31, 2006.

regime or the MB with little else in between. Though many U.S. programs are designed to foster what some call a “Third Way,” i.e., non-Islamist or secular liberal movements, regime action has succeeded in stymying such attempts.

Some experts believe that U.S. support for reform in Egypt does not necessarily have to resemble a zero-sum game. Some suggest that the United States should refrain from openly supporting any opposition movement and instead promote openness and provide resources that will enable Egyptians to address these problems themselves. According to Michele Dunn of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “The principal role of foreign governments is not to negotiate with oppositionists but to deal with the Egyptian government. Thus, what the United States and Europe can and should do is press the Egyptian government to keep open the political space needed for productive dialogue between Islamists and secularists. Such a dialogue among Egyptians themselves is where solutions to the problem of Islamist inclusion in the political sphere can emerge.”⁵⁵ Other observers have stated that the Egyptian government, by limiting political space, has stoked the West’s impatience with the pace of change in Egypt.

Role of Congress. Through annual foreign operations and State Department appropriations legislation, Congress provides funding for reform in Egypt through the following programs: the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Egypt Office; the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), a State Department program designed to encourage reform in Arab countries by strengthening Arab civil society, encouraging micro-enterprise, expanding political participation, and promoting women’s rights; the State Department’s Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF), an account that funds human rights promotion in Muslim-majority countries; and the National Endowment for Democracy’s (NED) Muslim Democracy Program.

Congress also seeks to ensure that U.S. foreign assistance for Egypt is being appropriately used to promote reform. In conference report language accompanying P.L. 108-447, the FY2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act, conferees specified that “democracy and governance activities shall not be subject to the prior approval of the GoE [government of Egypt]. The managers intend this language to include NGOs and other segments of civil society that may not be registered with, or officially recognized by, the GoE. However, the managers understand that the GoE should be kept informed of funding provided pursuant to these activities.”⁵⁶

P.L. 109-102 (H.R. 3057), the FY2006 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, designates \$100 million in economic aid (out of a total \$495 million) for USAID education and democracy and governance programming. In addition, report language accompanying the bill stipulated that “not less than 50 percent of the funds for democracy, governance and human rights be provided through non-governmental organizations for the purpose of strengthening Egyptian civil society organizations,

⁵⁵ “Evaluating Egyptian Reform,” Michele Dunn, *Carnegie Papers - Middle East Series*, number 66, January 2006.

⁵⁶ Conference report (H.Rept. 108-792) to accompany H.R. 4818, November 20, 2004.

enhancing their participation in the political process and their ability to promote and monitor human rights.”⁵⁷

In June 2006, the House narrowly defeated an amendment (198-225) to H.R. 5522, the FY2007 Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill, which would have reallocated \$100 million in economic aid to Egypt and used it instead to fight AIDS worldwide and to assist the Darfur region of Sudan. Many supporters of the amendment were dismayed by the Egyptian government’s spring 2006 crackdown on pro-democracy activists in Cairo.

Jordan⁵⁸

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, a valuable but vulnerable U.S. partner in the war on terror, may be the Arab country most affected by the electoral gains of Hamas in the Gaza Strip and former Jordanian-controlled West Bank. With perhaps over half the population of Palestinian origin, there are potentially thousands of Hamas sympathizers in Jordan, whose government has tried vigorously to construct a unique Jordanian identity in order to lessen the appeal of Palestinian nationalism and Islamism. Jordanian Islamists, many of whom claim Palestinian descent, could be tempted to forge closer ties to Hamas in the West Bank. With municipal elections scheduled for this year and parliamentary elections in Jordan tentatively scheduled for 2007, many observers are carefully monitoring Jordanian politics in order to assess the prospects of non-violent Islamists.

The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood (The Islamic Action Front). The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has long been integrated into the political mainstream due to its acceptance of the legitimacy of Hashemite monarchy, although relations between the Brotherhood and the Palace have fluctuated over the years. The Brotherhood presence in Jordan dates back to the 1930s, as it has been tacitly recognized first as a charitable organization and later as a quasi-political organization, which has openly fielded candidates in parliamentary elections albeit under a different name (Islamic Action Front - IAF). The relationship between the Brotherhood and the Palace has been mutually beneficial over the years. Successive Jordanian monarchs have found that the Brotherhood has been more useful politically as an ally than as an opponent (as opposed to the Brotherhood in Egypt), as it secured Islamist support in countering Arab nationalist interference during the 1950’s and 1960’s and secular Palestinian nationalism in the 1970s.

Jordanian Islamists have been most effective at gaining control of Jordan’s educational system. After the Brotherhood sided with King Hussein during the Black September crisis of 1970, in which the Palestinian Liberation Organization openly clashed with the Jordanian armed forces, King Hussein granted the Brotherhood control over the Education Ministry. Through its extensive charitable networks, the Brotherhood also established a number of Sunni Muslim schools (*Madhaheb*), in

⁵⁷ Conference report (H.Rept. 109-265) on H.R. 3057, Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2006, November 2, 2005.

⁵⁸ For more information on Jordan, see CRS Issue Brief IB93085, *Jordan: U.S. Relations and Bilateral Issues*, by Alfred Prados.

addition to institutions of higher education. The Brotherhood's educational, social, and health services have grown so extensive over the years that some experts believe that the Brotherhood's budget for services rivals that of the Jordanian government.

In 1992, the Brotherhood's political wing, the Islamist Action Front (IAF) was legally recognized as a political party in Jordan under a new political parties law. Three years before that, Jordanian Islamists running as independents gained almost 40% of the seats in parliament. The government responded by altering the electoral law, changing the system from a multiple/transferable vote system in which voters could cast as many ballots as there were seats in their constituency, to a one-person, one vote system, which led most voters to choose candidates from their extended families or tribes over ideological parties, such as the IAF.⁵⁹ Those Jordanians who did vote for the IAF hailed predominately from urban areas dominated by middle-class Jordanians of Palestinian origin. Government-IAF relations have not always been smooth, however, and the IAF boycotted the 1997 elections. The most recent parliamentary elections, held on June 17, 2003, gave 62 seats in the 110-member lower house to conservative, independent, and tribal allies of King Abdullah. However, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) won 22% of the vote, thereby gaining 18 seats in the lower house, plus 6 sympathizers. When asked about the IAF's prospects in future elections, one member reportedly remarked that "I am not optimistic that we can win a majority now, because the laws have still not been changed.... But we are not trying to take everything away. We just want to take part in a fair process."⁶⁰

In 2006, there has been much speculation about the IAF's ties to Hamas. In a recent interview on *Al Arabiya*, Zaki Sa'd Bani-Irshayd, the new secretary general of the IAF, was careful to emphasize that the IAF and Hamas have agreed to avoid any inter-organizational relations, emphasizing that each movement has its own financial, administrative, and organizational system.⁶¹ On February 16, 2006, Jordanian Prime Minister Marouf al-Bakhit congratulated Hamas on winning the January 2006 Palestinian Authority legislative elections and said Jordan would welcome a visit by a Hamas delegation. However, on April 20, 2006, the press reported that Jordan cancelled a planned visit by the Palestinian Foreign Minister Mahmoud al-Zahar, who is also a high-level Hamas official, on the grounds that Hamas had hidden weapons and explosives in a cache in Jordan. Hamas denied the charge and claimed that Jordan was using this allegation to justify cancelling the visit. Hamas had been expelled from Jordan in 1999, shortly after the ascension of King Abdullah II to the throne.

The IAF has questioned the Jordanian government's accusations against Hamas, believing that security officials fabricated the story in order to discredit Islamists.

⁵⁹ Clark, Janine A. *Islam, Charity, and Activism*. Bloomington: Indian University Press, 2004, p.88

⁶⁰ Possible changes to the electoral law are still being discussed within the Jordanian government. "Jordan Islamists Stir Tensions by Displaying Election Skills," *New York Times*, May 12, 2006.

⁶¹ "Jordan's Islamic Action Front Leader Comments on Ties with HAMAS," Dubai *Al-Arabiya* Television, translated by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], April 6, 2006. Document ID#GMP20060421537006.

Some experts believe that the IAF's new leadership is more closely tied to Hamas than in the past. According to one recent assessment, "While East Bank Jordanians still control a majority of the seats in the IAF, Bani-Irshayd's election represents a trend toward a growing Palestinian presence in the organization's leadership and suggests a potential " Hamasization " of the group."⁶²

Like other Islamist groups, the IAF's attitude toward the United States combines pragmatism with a general opposition to U.S. policy in the region. With a growing population and a severe lack of natural resources (Jordan is one of the most water deprived countries in the world), observers remain doubtful that non-violent Islamists groups in Jordan could afford to cut ties with the United States should they ascend to power. However, if such a situation were to occur, Jordan's nearly 12-year old peace treaty with Israel could be at risk, as Islamists in Jordan are at the forefront of the anti-normalization campaign which calls on the Jordanian government to cut all relations with Israel. According to IAF leader Bani-Irshayd, "We are clear.... We reject this treaty because it is against Jordan's national interest. But we will move cautiously. We will ask for a referendum on it."⁶³

In June 2006, just days after the death of the terrorist mastermind Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, four IAF parliamentarians were arrested after making statements praising the Al Qaeda leader. One IAF deputy reportedly remarked that Zarqawi was a martyr and a holy warrior.

U.S. Policy in Jordan. Given Jordan's dependence on foreign assistance from the United States and Europe, its government continually touts its reform credentials, as the Jordanian government has sought to position itself as the regional model of a modernizing Arab state, particularly in the economic sphere. Observers note that the pursuit of reform-minded programs allows Jordan to conform to the policy priorities of the United States, which provides large amounts of economic and military aid to Jordan. Jordanian leaders also are anxious to develop opportunities for the country's largely young population, which faces unemployment rates that may be as high as 30% unofficially. U.S. policymakers have welcomed Jordan's initiative, emphasizing that encouraging development in the region is part of a U.S. national security strategy, especially after the September 11, 2001, attacks. On October 24, 2000, the United States and Jordan signed a free trade agreement, leading to a dramatic increase in Jordanian exports to U.S. markets.

One sector which has already been targeted for reform is Jordan's educational system. In July 2003, the Education Ministry, in conjunction with USAID, the World Bank, and other international lenders, developed a program called the Educational Reform for a Knowledge-based Economy — a \$380 million, five-year comprehensive educational reform plan. Under this plan, Jordan, with help from Microsoft and Cisco Systems, has built computer labs in several public schools and developed a modern curriculum which incorporates information technology.

⁶² "Hamas Weapons in Jordan: Implications for Islamists on the East Bank," *PolicyWatch*, #1098, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 5, 2006.

⁶³ "Political Islam's Opportunity in Jordan," *Washington Post*, April 13, 2006.

However, this initiative has drawn much criticism from Islamist deputies in Jordan's lower house of parliament. Many Jordanian lawmakers were upset that 10th grade teachers were teaching a curriculum that drew distinctions between terrorism (specifically suicide bombing) and "legitimate resistance." According to IAF deputy Moussa Wahsh, "the United States has pressured several Arab and Muslim countries to change their school curriculum under the slogan of modernization."⁶⁴ In early 2004, the Jordanian parliament held a special session in which several deputies expressed similar sentiments. The government must try to balance the need to improve institutions while avoiding Islamist charges that the government was beholden to outside or secular interests.

U.S. democracy assistance to Jordan has focused on female participation in politics. In 2003, King Abdullah established a six-seat quota for women parliamentarians in Jordan's National Assembly, the 110-seat lower house of Parliament. In 2003, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched a women candidates' training program for women wanting to run in local and parliamentary elections. NDI has trained four of the current six women in parliament. The International Republican Institute also runs programs in Jordan focused on overcoming political apathy and increasing citizen participation in politics.

Jordan has become a major target of Jihadist terrorist groups, particularly organizations operating from Iraq led by the terrorist mastermind Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi -- himself a Jordanian citizen now in exile. On November 9, 2005, near simultaneous explosions at three western-owned hotels in Amman (the Radisson, Grand Hyatt, and Days Inn) killed 58 persons and seriously wounded approximately 100 others. The terrorist organization Al-Qaeda in Iraq headed by Zarqawi claimed responsibility for the act.

Consequently, U.S. officials may be hesitant to push the monarchy too hard on the issue of political reform. While some IAF members, particularly women, may participate in U.S.-sponsored workshops, there is no concerted effort among U.S. diplomats in Amman to engage the IAF, though occasional dialogue may take place. King Abdullah and other senior Jordanian officials have repeatedly emphasized that change is necessary for Jordan's survival but that a reform process should be internally driven. On March 11, 2004, then Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher told a Washington audience at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars that "We do not differ over the content of this reform," but he went on to say that such a program should not be "imposed, or perceived to be imposed, in any way, from the outside." With Jordan facing a terrorist threat emanating from Iraq in the east, and with Hamas in control of parts of the bordering West Bank, the United States seems willing to accept whatever pace the government sets for the political reform process.

Role of Congress. Congress has supported Administration efforts to bolster Jordan's economy and military in recent years. Jordan has seen a steady increase in its aid since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The war in Iraq also has led Congress to provide Jordan with additional assistance in appreciation of its efforts

⁶⁴ "Jordanian MPs Slam Government Plan to Reform Education," *Daily Star* (Beirut), March 10, 2004.

to train Iraqi police and army units. Between FY2002 and FY2005, Jordan received an annual average of \$780 million in economic and military aid (including supplemental funding), up from an average of \$246 million per year between FY1996 and FY2001. The Senate version of H.R. 4939, the FY2006 Emergency Supplemental Bill, contains \$100 million in economic aid for Jordan to continue and accelerate economic reforms.

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