

Political Systems and the Role of Parliaments in the Emerging Arab Democracies

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Jordan

Organization: Al-Quds Center for Political Studies, KAS Amman
Office

Program Overview:

Saturday, October 01, 2011

Opening Session:

Mr. Oraib Al Rantawi

Columnist and Director General
Al-Quds Center for Political Studies
Jordan

Dr. Martin Beck

Resident Representative
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Amman
Jordan

Second Session: Reform, the Role of Parliament and the Peaceful Transfer of Power / Examples from Egypt

Chair: MP Jamal Gammoh

Dr. Hasan Naf'ah

Professor of Political Science
Cairo University
Egypt

Third Session: Reform and the Role of Parliaments in Monarchies/ Examples from Jordan and Morocco

Chair: MP Salah Maharmeh

Dr. Mohammad Boulif Najib

MP
Justice and Development Party
Morocco

Mr. Oraib Al Rantawi

Columnist and Director General
Al-Quds Center for Political Studies
Jordan

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Fourth Session: Reform, the Role of Parliament/ The violent Transfer of Power/ Examples from Libya, Yemen, and Iraq

Chair: MP Bassam Haddadin

Prof. Dr. Fuad Al-Salahi

Professor of Political Sociology
San'aa University
Yemen

Dr. Haidar Saeed

Director of Iraqi Research Center
Iraq

Mr. Senussi Bsaikri

Researcher, Political Analyst
Libya

Fifth Session: Reform, the Role of Parliament, General Principles – International Experience and Practice

Chair: Prof. Ahmad Said Nufal

Dr. Jan van Laarhoven

Secretary General of the Benelux-
Union; Eduardo Frei Stichting; Christen
Demokratisch Appel (CDA)
Netherlands/ Belgium

Dr. Amjad Al-Shraideh

Judge
Court of North Amman
Jordan

Sunday, October 02, 2011

Sixth Session: Reform, the Role of Parliament, and the Experience of Moving Towards Democracy in Syria

Chair: Mr. Abdel Jalil Khalil

Dr. Yaseen Ghadben

Member of the Muslim Brotherhood;
Scholar
Syria

Mr. Hakam Albaba

Writer; Political Activist
Syria

Seventh Session: Political Reform and the Role of Parliament – Experiences in the Gulf Region

Chair: MP Wafa BaniMustafa

Mr. Abdel Jalil Khalil

MP
Al Wafaq National Islamic Society
Bahrain

Mr. Najeb Al-Khonaizi

Columnist
Civil Human Rights Committee
Saudi Arabia

Eighth Session: Concluding Remarks

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The participants of the conference

Introduction

The onset of the Arab Spring compelled societies in the Middle East to demand their rights and desire for meaningful democracy. Establishing a democracy requires political institutions, in particular, parliaments that are able and willing to fully represent the interests and demands of the people. Current dictatorships in the Middle East have considerably marginalized the role of the political systems through corruption, anti-pluralism, and repression. The Arab Spring presents, despite its difficulties and challenges, significant political opportunities to the systems in transition.

Thus, in light of these developments, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Amman (KAS Amman) and Al-Quds Center for Political Studies jointly organized an international conference on October 1-2, 2011 to discuss the role political bodies in these states play in achieving democracy and preventing the return of autocracy. More than 50 participants from 10 countries attended the conference.

Opening Session

Mr. Oraib Al Rantawi, Director General of Al Quds Center for Political Studies, opened the conference by highlighting crucial events during the past months of protest in the Arab world. He recalled how the revolution started in Tunis and subsequently led to another 'wave of democratization' – a term coined by Samuel P. Huntington. Mr. Al

Rantawi pointed out that the present moment provides an opportunity to discuss the prospects and challenges the political systems, especially the parliaments, face in this process of democratization. He further thanked all speakers and participants for their contribution and acknowledged KAS Amman for its organization as well as the nine years of fruitful partnership.

Dr. Martin Beck, Resident Representative of KAS Amman, thanked all participants for taking part in the conference and emphasized the impressive commitment of some speakers taking the long journey to attend. Dr. Beck emphasized that it is not yet foreseeable what political outcome the protests will lead to. However, the regional cataclysm which followed has shown that the Arab people are willing and capable to fight for their rights. Thus, prejudices that the Middle Eastern states might be unable to demand and emulate democracy have proven to be mistaken. Europe should, in this context, use its democratic experience to support the Arab Spring. Dr. Beck further pointed out that it is especially the feature of soft power, instead of hard power, which makes these events distinctive. Therefore, it is of significant importance to ask which role political bodies can play in this process.

Second Session: Reform, the Role of Parliaments and the Peaceful Transfer of Power / Examples from Tunisia and Egypt

After **MP Jamal Gammoh** opened the second session, **Dr. Hasan Naf'ah**, Professor of Political Science at the University of Cairo, remarked the importance of recognizing the revolution as a regional phenomenon. Hence this indicates, to some extent, a return to a sense of "Arabism". Therefore, it is assumable that the revolution will either be successful throughout the region or fail in most of the countries. In this context, Dr.

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Naf'ah further emphasized that revolutions and the fighting of dictatorships belong to a transitional process, which is not completed until the point of genuine democracy has been reached. Egypt and Tunisia, for example, have successfully overthrown their former dictators but are still struggling to establish a fully-fledged democratic system. In this context, it is important to consider the different social and economic conditions in the Arab countries which influence the transition process. With regard to Egypt, Dr. Naf'ah emphasized that it was a unique revolution in every sense. Although it started as a revolution organized by the Egyptian youth, through the use of Facebook, it represented the entire society; at one point more than 15 million people joined the demonstrations. Hence, it was not a protest of the poor against the rich or even an Islamic movement, but a revolution representing the will of the majority of the Egyptian people. However, the challenge the revolution faces now is the lack of a specific ideology, hindering the formation of a representative government. This absence of political leadership significantly lowers its strength as well as the potential for success in the long term. This vacuum is likely to lead to elections held in an unstable atmosphere which diminishes their outcomes. Moreover, features of the current political system are likely to hamper the transition process, such as the constitution. The provisional constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt adopted in March 2011, substituting that from 1971, needs to be replaced by a fixed charter; as a working constitution forms the basis for sustainable democracy. Parliaments in particular depend on such a constitutional framework. However, some of the amendments made to the new constitution prevent changes from being made to the core of the political system. This leads to the dilemma that the new parliament must maintain the same structure as in the past. As a result, the law pertaining to the election of MPs cannot be changed. Meaning one-third of the seats in

parliament remain to individuals which might lead to the return of members of the old repressive regime. These factors are challenging the establishment of democracy. However, Dr. Naf'ah emphasized that he is convinced that Egypt will find its way to democracy – although it will be a long process.



From left to right: Dr. Hasan Naf'ah, Mr. Jamal Gammoh

The subsequent discussion focused primarily on the role which Islamic parties play in the revolution. Whilst the Egyptian Islamic movements were quite detached from the revolution at the beginning, they started to support the protests over its course and visibly contributed to its success, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. There has also been a change within the Islamic movements: From being advocates of the Islamic idea to the organization of Islamic parties stemming from the Muslim Brotherhood. Yet, a dominance of an Islamic party or even the establishment of an Islamic state is highly unlikely. Thus, it remains to be seen whether these movements have developed enough to play a role in the future political system. Pluralism of ideas and parties, however, should be seen as being in the interest of a democratic system.

Participants further noted that Jordan is able to benefit from the Egyptian experience through the spirit of the revolution, which is likely to affect the democratic change aspired by many Jordanians. Also, if the revolution in Egypt succeeds, it can give a

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positive example of the democratic transition process.

Third Session: Reform and the Role of Parliaments in Monarchies/ Examples from Jordan and Morocco

After **Salah Maharmeh**, Member of Parliament and chair of the session, thanked the organizers of the conference and welcomed the speakers, **Dr. Mohammad Boulif Najib**, member of the Moroccan Parliament from the Justice and Development Party, presented on the Moroccan experience (beginning in February 2011) during the Arab Spring. Unlike various other states in the region, Morocco has been a country of relative stability in the last decades. Although the monarchy has a democratic constitution, the country has severe democratic flaws in practice. For instance, the division of power is weighted in favor of the executive, while the legislative and judicative have almost no authority. Another main issue negatively affecting the process of democratization is a lack of political pluralism. Whilst Morocco has had a multi-party system since its independence in 1956, currently with 43 parties, the system is neither meaningful nor effective. These parties cannot be considered independent since they are required to uphold the agenda provided by the king and prime minister; the latter being appointed directly by the king. In the event of dissenting MPs trying to challenge the policies, they are accused by the government as working under a foreign agenda and questioning the constitution. Despite these flaws in the political system, only a minority of the Moroccan people – about two to five percent – attempted to topple the regime itself. In contrast, the majority still supports the monarchy, as the king reigns over the religious and civic authorities. Yet, also this majority is requesting genuine political reform: improved living conditions, a decrease in corruption, the deposition of various repressive political figures, and a legitimate

parliamentary system. Dr. Najib asserted, in order to have sustainability, these reforms must be implemented.

Mr. Oraib Al Rantawi, Director General of Al-Quds Center for Political Studies, illustrated the case of Jordan – a country surrounded by states embroiled in revolt and instability. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a monarchy that bases a large extent of its legitimacy on traditional and religious heritage. Similar to the Moroccan case, Jordan suffers from an unbalanced weight of power to the side of the monarch. The situation is to the disadvantage of constitutional institutions such as the government ministries, political parties, parliament, as well as civic institutions. The systematic weakening of the Jordanian constitution has increased over the past years, and led to an unbalanced situation in which politics and the process of democratization are still controlled by the elite. Political pluralism is negatively affected by this situation. Whilst in the 1950s the Jordanian population was able to vote on the basis of meaningful political parties and, thus, a working pluralistic system, parties today are almost entirely eliminated from the political platform. Reestablishing this balance will require time and significant political reform. When the Arab Spring started and the revolutions spilled over from one country to the other, domestic political activism increased in Jordan. Indeed, compared to various other countries in the region, this activism has still been minimal due to the reluctance of the majority of Jordanians to participate in politics. Still, while Jordanians were rarely critical of the government and the monarchy before the Arab Spring, the past months have shown significant boldness on their part. The political elite of the country feared that Jordanians might copy the experiences in Tunisia or Egypt to challenge the status quo. As a result, authorities reacted softer on political criticism to prevent the situation from getting out of control, ending in far

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more severe protests against the political system. They further reacted to the developments by implementing a Constitutional Amendment Committee as well as National Dialogue Committee. However, these initiatives should rather be seen as a continuation of playing on time and not as a genuine effort for change or political reform.



From left to right: Dr. Mohammad Boulif Najib, Mr. Salah Maharmeh, Mr. Oraib Al Rantawi

The following discussion identified similar problems in both states: The reforms and amendments implemented by the political authorities in reaction to the activism did not address the underlying problems, but were rather a tool used by political actors to circumvent the demands of the people. Thus, in both states, the reforms did not limit the core executive power of the monarchy. Participants further emphasized and agreed that pure democracy cannot only develop through reforms in principle. The case of Jordan shows that a democratic constitution is not sufficient to achieve democracy; rather the implementation of democratic practices is needed. In this context, it has further been mentioned that the nature of democracy is not only a political system but also a culture which needs to develop. Therefore, a population educated on the tenets of democracy and understanding political institutions is fundamental to reach that goal.

Fourth Session: Reform, the Role of Parliament/ The Violent Transfer of Power/ Examples from Libya, Yemen and Iraq

After the chair, **MP Bassam Haddadin**, introduced the speakers, **Prof. Dr. Fuad Al-Salahi**, Professor of Political Sociology at the San'aa University, presented on the Yemeni experience in its process of democratization. Prof. Dr. Al-Salahi emphasized that with the protests that started in January 2011, the Yemeni people expressed their desire to change their political system towards democracy, and to reach genuine political pluralism, veritable constitutional amendments, and social justice. Therefore, according to Prof. Dr. Al-Salahi, it has to be realized that democracy is a cultural ideology that needs to develop over time. In order to support this process, the concept of democracy should be implemented as part of school and university curricula. Regarding the political system itself, Yemen faces the problem of an ineffective parliament. Although Yemen does have political parties, elections are based on individual figures, not on party lists. Consequently there is no real competition which can provide opposition to the ruling party; one which also bears the decisive influence of the Yemeni president. Additionally, political communication between the parliament and the civil society has to be improved to reach better representation of the people's will. Thus, the Yemeni revolution must overcome the challenge of a society seeking genuine pluralism clashing with a repressive and despotic regime based on a tribal system. In order to attain success, the political parties, intellectuals, and civil society have to work together in order to coerce the government towards change.

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From left to right: Mr. Senussi Bsaikri, Dr. Fuad Al Salahi, Mr. Bassam Haddadin, Dr. Haider Saeed

Following the first speech, **Dr. Haider Saeed**, Director of the Iraqi Research Center, showcased Iraq's experience with an emphasis on the role of political systems in fragmented countries. Dr. Saeed noted that the countries involved in the Arab Spring have the opportunity to learn from Iraq, as it has an eight year long experience in building democracy. After the occupation that followed the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the foreign powers, led by the United States, pushed for a political system incorporating a vital role of the parliament. This parliament was supposed to encompass the main characteristics of pluralism by covering the various ethnic and religious identities, and assuring their equal political participation. A consensus democracy, or consociation state, was to be established representing all views and, thus, the fragmentation of the country. According to Dr. Saeed, this principle is in general the best option for fragmented countries like Iraq. The Iraqi Constitution of 2005, however, undermined important features of the consociation principles. Instead of building a majority system, it reproduced an elite leading to the underrepresentation of different groups. Yet it was also a result of the isolation of Iraq from genuine political development, as the system could only grow again on the basis of the political elite that existed before the invasion.

The last speaker of the session, **Mr. Senussi Bsaikri**, a Libyan political analyst, introduced the Libyan case. The revolution is different to the experiences in Egypt and

Tunisia for three main points: First, the revolution which began with peaceful protests soon developed into an armed conflict. Second, there was direct international intervention through NATO in favor of the revolutionaries. Third, although the ruling regime under Muammar Gaddafi did not step down, its various institutions almost fully collapsed which led to the establishment of the National Transitional Council – the interim government established by anti-Gaddafi forces. Yet, the success in overthrowing Gaddafi is overshadowed by the challenges the Libyan people face in reconstruction. The first distinct problem is the existing security vacuum which remains highly fragile and has the potential to suddenly unravel due to a lack of working security institutions. Additionally, Libya is missing strong and experienced civil society organizations. In 42 years of the Gaddafi regime only 20 licensed civil society organizations were developed, all of which were affiliated with the regime. Political parties were banned from 1972 onwards when the Gaddafi regime came to power. Thus, according to Mr. Bsaikri, the development of a working democratic political system requires the future government to open dialogue with all political forces in the country. This is a necessary measure in order to address security issues, questions of representation, as well as tribal problems which have been manipulated by the Gaddafi regime for decades. Yet, Mr. Bsaikri also noted that it is of distinct importance that the Libyan people realize that an end of the revolution does not mean an end to the transitional process. Extensive political, social, and economic work remains to be done in order to fully democratize. The leadership of the revolution does have, according to Mr. Bsaikri, significant potential to establish a capable democracy in Libya.

The following discussion pointed out that in Libya the influence of the Islamic movement, including the Muslim

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Brotherhood, is limited. Indeed, there are extremist movements in the country – especially in eastern Libya – and their participation in the revolution contributed to its success; similar to the case of Egypt. However, their popularity within the population is rather low.

Regarding Iraq, participants agreed with Dr. Saeed, saying that the Iraqi political system is highly flawed. Yet, he emphasized that the political alternatives, for instance, elections based on individual districts or mixed systems would have difficulties – probably even more than the current one – and are unlikely to solve the underlying problems of the country.

With respect to Yemen, the discussion made clear that the state's main target should be to unite the various political parties, respectively, to bring them together in the name of cooperative communication.



From left to right: Mr. Oraib Al Rantawi, Dr. Martin Beck

Fifth Session: Reform, the Role of Parliament, General Principles – International Experience and Practice

Following the introduction of the chair, **MP Prof. Ahmad Said Nufal, Dr. Jan van Laarhoven**, Secretary General of the Benelux-Union, conducted his presentation on the general role of parliaments in democracies. Dr. van Laarhoven emphasized the essentials of a parliament: Directly elected members, representation of their constituency, and consisting of political

parties. Additionally, democracies should have a working division of powers with a separation of the legislative, executive, and the judiciary; these powers should be equally weighted. In terms of elections, Dr. van Laarhoven emphasized that it is of high importance that the process is free, people have an equal right to vote, political parties and candidates are respected by the state, and that access to the media and other sources of information is unhindered. Moreover, a state or parliament can have different party systems: A single party system, such as in the former Soviet Union or in Syria, where the government is formed by only one party and no other party is permitted to run for election. The two party system in which a parliament consist of two major parties with one holding the majority. States applying this system are, for instance, the US, the UK, or Spain. The third party system, existent in France, the Netherlands, and Germany encompasses two to ten parties, which demands the creation of coalitions. All parliaments, regardless of their party system, should be divided into two chambers, separating the responsibilities and decision making between them.

Following this presentation, **Dr. Amjad Al-Shraideh**, Judge in the Court of North Amman, demonstrated the connection between parliaments and democracy using the example of Jordan. Dr. Al-Shraideh emphasized that under no circumstances should democratic life be separated from a parliamentary system. Parliaments, he elaborated, play an important role in modern political systems through forming a base for democracy and being a requirement for political reform. The main functions of a parliament are as follows:

1. Functioning as the legislative body
2. Providing oversight and monitor government activity
3. To serve as the managing body of state expenditures and financial oversight

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4. The provision of services by the MPs to the constituents
5. To give political legitimacy to the decisions and resolutions issued by the executive authority.

Additionally, Dr. Al-Shraideh noted that there is a strong connection between the role of the parliament and the fight against corruption, as parliaments can use their oversight function as a powerful tool. In Jordan however, he emphasised, the effectiveness of the parliament is restricted due to significant internal and external limitations. The internal limitations refer first to a lack of institutional work, hence, a lack of restrictions on government power. Second, there exist many conflicts of interests and heavy competition among the members of parliament. Additionally, Jordan suffers from a weak representation of political parties. Here, Dr. Al-Shraideh noted, the parties themselves, the people, and partly also the Arab culture could be held accountable to some extent. The external limitations of the Jordanian parliament refer to a lack of resources for the MPs to fulfil their functions, and an unbalance between the bylaws and the duties of the MPs. Moreover, the control or dominance the executive authority has over the parliament, limits its effectiveness. Instead, the parliament should be free to endorse its own agenda separate from that of the executive. In this context, Dr. Al-Shraideh further noted the lack of confidence of the public towards the parliament, which negatively influences its work and image. This mistrust is of course also a result of the personal interests and the lack of accountability of some of the MPs, as well as a lack of transparency which keeps many people away from political participation. In this respect, he emphasised that the Jordanian constitutional amendments of September 2011 are a sign for the monarchy's aim to create an active parliament, capable of holding the government accountable and exercising its oversight duties which will positively affect

the country. He noted that the Jordanian constitution clearly acknowledges pluralism, with regard to parties and also through the right of freedom of expression. Dr. Al-Shraideh added that it is important to mention that such pluralism should never be linked to the exclusion of specific political parties.

During the following discussion, participants made clear that the Western states do have an advantage, as their strength lies in their states' institutions and civil societies. In contrast, states in the Arab world are weak politically, as institutions have not fully developed and the civil society is fragile since it is penetrated by the state. However, although such democratic developments need time – which the West has had to develop – it is important to see that the Arab world is in a different situation now. With the Arab Spring, states in the Middle East gained the chance to develop towards democracy. Indeed, there will not be an ideal democracy from the beginning. Yet, it is of high importance that the Arab countries now genuinely try to reach this point in order to be successful in the long term.

Regarding the case of Jordan and its political system, participants noted that the current electoral law needs significant reform, as it hinders the formation of effective parties, and insufficiently reflects the will of the people. Furthermore, there should be a distinct separation of power between the monarchy and executive authority, which would make the latter more accountable for its actions. Participants acknowledged that there are indeed positive aspects to the Jordanian constitutional amendments, yet they do not appear to have had significant impact.

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Sixth Session: Reform, the Role of Parliament, and the Experience of Moving Towards Democracy in Syria

After **Mr. Abdel Jalil Khalil** welcomed all participants to the second day of the conference, **Dr. Yaseen Ghadben**, a scholar and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, held a presentation on the Syrian struggle for freedom. Syria gained independence in 1946 and was at that time the first democracy in the Arab world. However, it only witnessed meaningful democracy for three years from 1946 until 1949. Subsequently the state suffered from repressive regimes, particularly after 1963 under the rule of the Ba'ath party. The regime systematically undermined the political system and the Muslim Brotherhood was heavily subdued; the party was not only banned legally, but violently repressed in 1982. This repression was justified by law number 49 – the 'Shame Law' – which functionally sentenced all members of the Muslim Brotherhood to death. When the protests started this year on March 15, Dr. Ghadben continued, the slogans cried for "God, Syria, and Freedom," which demonstrates the basic demands of the Syrian people. When the attempts for reform by the government turned out to be empty promises, the demonstrations continued. The government and the military brutally crushed the protest and prosecuted oppositionists.



From left to right: Mr. Hakam Albaba, Mr. Abdel Jalil Khalil, Dr. Yaseen Ghadben

The second speaker of the session was **Mr. Hakam Albaba**, a Syrian writer and

political activist. Mr. Albaba explained that when the Syrian people took to the streets in March 2011 they wanted to end the repressive rule of the Assad regime, which has held power for almost 50 years. Since the beginning of the protests over 3000 people have been killed and thousands more have been arrested or injured. One reason which undermines the strength of the revolution according to Mr. Albaba is the division between the internal and external opposition. Whilst the internal group believes that the outside opposition is orchestrated by foreign intelligence services, the latter sees the internal group as being influenced by domestic forces. He further elaborated on the Istanbul Council launched by Syrian oppositionists at the time of this conference. According to Mr. Albaba, the council does have many good aspects especially as it is aimed at unifying the opposition. However, he questioned the real intentions of the council, which he contested to be masquerade of foreign intervention. He further emphasized that he is unsure about the future, if the revolution is successful in overthrowing Assad. This is partly because there does not appear to be an appropriate force or party that could genuinely protect and promote the people's goals. Mr. Albaba continued to elaborate on the role of the Islamists in the Syrian revolution. He highlighted that the rise of Islamist movements or parties, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria as well as in Tunisia and Egypt, should be scrutinized with suspicion. Whilst the protesters at the moment do not identify with a specific religious sect, Mr. Albaba made clear that he hopes that it will stay that way, and that the revolution will not fall under the name of Islamism. The issue he sees in this context is that nobody can guarantee during the revolution that the forces, groups, or parties will keep their promises *after* the revolution if they have gained power. The last point he raised, was the fear of minority groups have that if a Sunni government that comes to power, it would repress them greatly in

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retaliation for not joining the revolution. However, he does not think that this fear is justified and rather sees it as manipulation by the Assad regime.



Discussants

The subsequent discussion focused mainly on the general role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab Spring. Some of the participants suggested that the concerns regarding the plans of the Muslim Brotherhood are needless. Thereafter, the Muslim Brotherhood does not aspire to implement an autocracy or even a theocratic state, or a system based on the Islamic thought as in Saudi Arabia, but a pragmatic political regime. Hence, the criticism is unjustified and the fear of Islamic parties in general is exaggerated. Instead, if states really want to implement democratic systems they have to allow for non-secular parties in the name of democracy and, hence, equal rights and freedom of expression. Thus, if a ruling Islamic party represents the will of the people this has to be accepted. However, some of the participants also noted that it is unclear whether the Muslim Brotherhood really wants to promote a civil state that acts on the base of economic and political progress. Therefore, participants noted, Islamist movements in general should announce clearly whether they are seeking a more secular or a theological system.

Seventh Session: Political Reform and the Role of Parliament – Experiences in the Gulf Region

MP Wafa Bani-Mustafa opened the last session and introduced the first speaker, **Mr. Abdel Jalil Khalil**, a Bahraini MP of the Al Wafaq National Islamic Society, (also know as the Islamic National Accord Association) and the largest party in Bahrain. Opposition protests began on the 14th of February, and Bahrain became the fourth state in the Arab world to challenge its regime. At least 60 percent of the Bahraini people participated in these protests. The movement was led by the so called 'youth of the 14th February' and the 'Alliance of the Second Society'. Thus, the revolt began as a coalition between liberal and Islamic societies; between Sunnis as well as Shias. The key demands of the revolutionaries are:

1. The establishment of a constitutional monarchy, in which the king remains the symbol of the state but does not embody its executive authority
2. The formation of a parliament with full jurisdiction
3. An elected government endorsed by the parliament
4. The equal distribution of the electoral districts, as current district lines are designed in a way that produces loyalists to the government and undermines oppositionists.

The Bahraini monarchy began to brutally crackdown on the protestors and imprison or even execute all people suspected of belonging to the opposition. They further agreed together with the GCC – the Gulf Cooperation Council – to adopt a military solution and to send Peninsula Shield Force troops – the military of the GCC – to Bahrain. Whilst Kuwait 'only' sent warships to the coast of Bahrain for observation, Saudi Arabia deployed about 1000 armed troops. The Bahraini political authorities stigmatized the protestors as Shias acting as a proxy of Iran, attempting to set up an Islamic state. This, according to Mr. Khalil, was contrary to reality as the opposition is

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demanding democratic reforms and not the adoption of the Iranian model. Mr. Khalil further stressed in his presentation that it was very striking that various Arabic media companies turned a blind eye to the protests. They failed to recognize the related human rights violations and did not present the demonstrations as an expression of the national will. This highlights the mistrust of many Arab states towards the Shia population in Bahrain. Indeed, the monarchy did set up new elections in late September as a reaction to the demands. These elections, however, were rather a cosmetic attempt of the government to address the demands of the people. As a result, only 17 percent of the population voted, while all seven opposition groups boycotted the elections.



From left to right: Mr. Abdel Jalil Khalil, Ms Wafa Bani-Mustafa, Mr. Najeb Al Khonaizi

Mr. Najeb Al Khonaizi, columnist and member of the Saudi Arabian Civil Human Rights Committee, started his presentation with a brief overview of the Saudi history and continued with elaborating on the extremist Islamic forces in the country. Whilst there had not been any extreme Islamist movements in the 50s or 60s, the 1970s changed the country drastically. During this time, according to Mr. Al Khonaizi, Saudi Arabia became a haven for Islamic fundamentalist movements from various Arab states and, hence, promoted Islamic extremism. As a result of these developments, a political vacuum was generated that was used by various extremists for controlling parts of the society. The Arab Spring influenced Saudi

Arabia – as well as other states in the Gulf region – spiritually. People in Saudi Arabia do not want to topple the regime, but they see their state in political crisis and thus are demanding political reform. Their key requests are: A reduction of the unemployment rate (currently 10-15 percent), better public services, a decrease of corruption, effective civil society organizations and parties, a clear separation of powers, an elected Shura Council, and increased public freedoms such as the right to write or to organize. The experiences in other Arab states encouraged the population to demand reforms. Therefore, Mr. Al Khonaizi emphasized, the ruling regime has two options: First, implementing genuine and comprehensive economic, political, social, and cultural reform; or second, not reacting on the people's demands. The second option, yet, might encourage the population to follow the example of Tunisia and Egypt.

In the following discussion some of the participants expressed their concerns about the Bahraini revolt. They underlined that it appeared as though the Bahraini government is capitalizing on the political developments in the country to intensify the religious disparity between Sunnis and Shias. Although the two Islamic branches have the same demand for political reforms in Bahrain, the revolution may widen the sectarian divide through manipulation by the government. In this context, participants further noted that they also see the Saudi Arabian intervention in Bahrain as highly critical for two reasons. First, it further undermines the demands of the Bahraini population as it also uses the pretense of the revolt being led by Iranian-supported Shias. Second, the intervention is counterproductive to the whole Arab Spring as it delegitimizes the will of the Arab people for freedom and democracy, no matter in which country. Therefore Saudi Arabia has put itself, to some extent, in

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confrontation with all revolutions in the Arab Spring.

Concluding Remarks

The two day conference offered various revealing presentations, and also showed an intense and impressive exchange of opinions by various scholars, politicians, and activists in the name of democracy. The event demonstrated that notions of democracy are not solely a Western concept, but a global one. The Arab world is in the same way vocal in its demand for rights as people elsewhere. Therefore, it is imperative that states increase their focus on the shared values they have – freedom and democracy. The event successfully gathered experts from 10 different countries together to discuss a topic which affects all of them domestically and internationally. Most of them have never had the chance before to exchange their ideas and thoughts. It has been made clear that political institutions, especially parliamentary systems, form the base for democracy in every country and that it is of crucial importance to encourage them in times of transition. In this respect, it can be concluded that the event gave all participants, representing various countries of the Arab world, significant input in a time of remarkable magnitude for their future development.

The Arab revolutions continue to unfold and involved states are still in the process of democratization. Therefore, KAS Amman and Al-Quds Center for Political Studies are dedicated to monitor all developments, and to offer those states willing to change their systems towards democracy all support needed. Due to the relevance of the topic and the number, expertise, and variety of participants the media coverage of the conference was significant. Please click the links below to the articles that appeared during the time of the conference:

http://www.addustour.com/ViewTopic.aspx?ac=%5CLocalAndGover%5C2011%5C10%5CLocalAndGover_issue1448_day02_id359355.htm

http://www.addustour.com/ViewTopic.aspx?ac=%5CLocalAndGover%5C2011%5C10%5CLocalAndGover_issue1449_day03_id359620.htm

http://alarabalyawm.net/pages.php?news_id=329673

<http://alsiasi.com/index.php/2010-03-07-12-00-59/40576-2011-10-03-11-07-18>

<http://postjordan.com/news/pages.php?id=138165>