

Obstacles to Reform in Jordan

Abstract

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The present book represents the product of a seminar held by the MESC in Amman on October 27, 2012 titled **Obstacles to Reform in Jordan**. It was joined by a number of Jordanian economists and political scientists.

The book discusses the public demands and obstacles to political and economic reform in light of the waning public activity as well as political developments in Egypt and Syria.

Chapter one investigates the activity's motives, geography, features, gains and suitable period to get the fruit, in additions to the barriers to reform and its current situation.

The book reviews the historical background of Theban and its several motives to ignite the activity. Some of these are the economic conditions of poverty, unemployment and migration from rural to urban areas – due to government negligence of agriculture and absence of industrial establishments. There are social factors such as inequality in job chances. Furthermore, political issues have to do with fraud general and local elections, broadening corruption in public financial matters and influence of the Arab Spring.

The book observes the absence of political powers from the beginning of the activity which was exclusive to remote areas, taking a peaceful approach and an east-Jordanian tribal colour. On the

other hand, the officials adopted a policy of containment and soft security, except in few cases like that of the Ministry of Interior Circle event.

Some of the gains of the activity are constitutional amendments, teachers' association, reduction of trespassing public finance and some other laws' amendments.

There are some external impediments to reform, such as international alliances and the stumbling democratic project in the Arab Spring states. On the other hand, internal impediments are seen in the success of the policy of containment; role of official media; continuous control of security on the scene; political powers' lack of a certain vision for reform; their inability to broaden public participation in their activity; their split and failure to send messages of reassurance to the head of the state; the demographic composition of the Jordanian society; and the common interests between those who benefit from the status quo.

Chapter Two explores barriers to economic reform as well as causes of problems in the official economic approach, such as the government's procedures to solve economic imbalances but which require reducing expenditure; its attempts to solve social problems by further spending; disputes over the priority of economic or political reform; traditional powers' stand against reform; dealing with the public slogans which have not been agreed

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upon; incongruity between economic legislations and the reform demands; influence of regional conditions in losing the surrounding markets; inability of new investments to make up for these losses; and the high cost of hosting Syrian refugees.

The book highlights raising individual awareness coping with the reform process; trying to overcome the problem of modest material capabilities and scarce natural resources; putting aside disputes between individuals and political parties; gradual reform steps; and working to achieve sustainability through the correction of various financial imbalances.

The book warns against the unprecedented rising social tension due to the economic hardships. It calls for a new strategy to put an end to social deterioration and for the acceleration of the reform process by means of building trust between various parties, involving everybody in reform and regime's adoption of the process as the most capable party.

There are general problems found in the disagreement on the conception of reform; lack of clear and agreed-upon measures; the public and opposition's frightening of the regime; regime's employment of this to frighten the public from reform; its inability to build a national consensus; and its watching of regional changes.

In conclusion, the book calls for zero problems between political components; going into a new

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stage of building the political, economic process by departing from the principle of trust; coming up with a new election law leading to a strong parliament; and looking in a different way to politics.