

**U.S. Democracy Strategy:
An American-Jordanian Dialogue**

April 19-21, 2007
Amman, Jordan

Conference Recommendations

The following recommendations were approved democratically by young Americans and Jordanians (ages 18-28) at a conference entitled “U.S. Democracy Strategy: An American-Jordanian Dialogue” in Amman, Jordan from April 19-21. Each recommendation was developed by the participants in small group discussions, then discussed and amended in general session, and finally voted upon by the participants by secret ballot. The recommendations were approved by a majority of the Americans and a majority of the Jordanians.

The conference was organized by Americans for Informed Democracy (AID), the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED) and the al-Urdun al-Jadid (New Jordan) Research Center (UJRC). Some of these recommendations are directed toward the U.S. government, others to the Jordanian government, and others to the media and civil society organizations.

Strengthening Democracy

1. Recognizing that the limits placed on freedom of speech and assembly in Jordan are undefined and unknown, causing inconsistency in their application of upholding and protecting such rights and freedoms, and also causing a high degree of confusion, discouraging citizens’ engagement with the political system:

We recommend that these laws and their method of application be defined and published for the people, to promote consistency of application and also to promote and facilitate citizen participation and engagement.

2. In order to create a culture of participatory democracy, we recommend compulsory civic education in Jordanian schools starting in kindergarten. This includes:
 - a) engaging youth in voting activities that allow them to see the result of their participation;
 - b) empowering young adults to affect public policy and decision-making;
 - c) critical thinking skills; and
 - d) integrating into the basic curriculum available folklore that demonstrates democratic principles.
3. Any student council in a public school or university should be elected by popular vote.

4. Create independent public awareness tools, such as a website or television campaign on a channel with a large Jordanian viewership, to inform citizens of prospective changes in the existing Parliamentary election system.
5. Universities should ensure that students are not penalized for their political affiliations. This includes:
 - a) an ongoing student dialogue regarding political participation among university students; and
 - b) in cooperation with university administrations, codification of policies regarding the political activities of university students so that they may be consistently applied.
6. To educate the general public on the importance of democracy, its implications, and their freedoms and rights as citizens of a democratic government, we recommend using television programs among other forms of media communication as a vehicle through which to instill the values necessary for a successful democracy.
7. Reaffirming the importance of America's significant foreign aid to Jordan, we encourage the United States government to demand accountability for its financial support of Jordanian institutions in order to ensure that the funds have been directed toward their intended destination. This information should be made accessible to the Jordanian and American publics.
8. To strengthen democracy in Jordan, we believe in educating Jordanians at the grass-roots level for the purpose of generating conditions upon which an organically cultivated, benevolent awareness of democratic principles may be fostered. To this end, we recommend the following:

Creating actual spaces where dialogue may occur between citizens and governmental representatives in order to maintain clear lines of accountability, including conferences, town hall meetings, open parliament sessions, increased office hours for representatives, and other initiatives.
9. Mobilizing an independent traveling troupe to engage citizens in a tangible presentation of democratic principles by means of dramatic performance.
10. Recognizing the overwhelming influence of the tribal and familial pressures on Jordanian voter participation and considering it an obstacle to genuine democratic reform, we suggest that the following actions be taken to promote an empowered and educated electorate:
 - a) Each candidate should formulate their own platform *based on constituent needs*.

- b) No candidate should be allowed to provide gifts, monetary or in-kind, in exchange for votes.
11. The Jordanian media's involvement in political campaigns should be expanded to using radio and television stations as well as newspapers to increase candidate and platform recognition by:
 - a) A government-run television station that establishes and airs debates between candidates and allocates equal time.
 - b) Candidate newspaper advertisements should contain the following information: 1) name; 2) past political activities and voting history where applicable; 3) policy goals and platforms.
 12. An independent non-partisan NGO, such as Project VoteSmart, should be established and advertised to the general public. As a result, we hope that grassroots groups would use this information for advocacy purposes.
 13. Remove or diminish limits on the number of individuals who can meet to discuss politics without a permit.
 14. Change the one-man one-vote law to a system in which each voter has the same number of votes as seats in the district.

Engaging Political Islam

1. Recognizing that:
 - a) Islamist political groups are well-established and popular actors on the Jordanian political scene; and
 - b) As Prince Hassan bin Talal observed in his opening address for this conference, excluding Islamist leaders from reform efforts invites them to obstruct such efforts,

We recommend that the U.S. engage those Islamist individuals and groups that express a credible willingness to participate in democracy by offering the same dialogue to Islamist reformers that is currently offered to other reformers. Even if dialogue is refused, the U.S. should avoid stigmatizing Islamist politics in official rhetoric.

2. Recognizing the inclusion of mandatory religious education throughout the Jordanian public school system and the importance of religious issues in the region, we recommend the inclusion of open and objective discussion on pertinent contemporary religious issues such as the role of women in society, democracy and Islam, terrorism, and an objective explanation of the beliefs of other world religions.

3. We encourage the United States to invest in and support local Jordanian initiatives that would significantly encourage individuals and/or representatives of all political parties to increase their involvement in the political process, through the organization of training sessions on campaign strategy, fundraising, media relations, and similar skills.
4. We encourage American media to increase unbiased coverage of Islam.

Women's Democratic Participation

1. To cultivate the delicate flourishing of democracy and share the different processes thereby emphasizing the significance of women's participation upon which democracy relies, we recommend that international collaboration be implemented between Jordanian and American women through:
 - a) joint international projects and training centers; and
 - b) political exchange and fellowship programs.
2. We encourage the United States and Jordan to invest in and support local Jordanian initiatives that would work toward the creation of a Jordanian National Women' Rights Charter.
3. We encourage the United States and Jordan to invest in and support local Jordanian initiatives that would:
 - a) Significantly encourage women to participate in the political process through the organization of training sessions on campaign strategy, fundraising, media relations, and related fields.
 - b) Encourage both men and women to promote the engagement of women in the political sphere, through public awareness campaigns.

Regional Impacts on Reform

1. Although democratic reforms in Jordan can and should be pursued regardless of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the U.S. should continue to consider the ways in which its policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict hinders democratization and strengthens extremism.
2. We contend that economic stability will act as a buffer against the impact of regional instability on reform. To attain this, we reaffirm the promotion of small and medium enterprise initiatives and micro-financing projects.

3. We reaffirm the importance of a clear and effective strategy to foster a more stable situation in Iraq, while using the Arab League peace initiative as a starting point and encouraging the US to re-initiate peace talks between all democratically elected representatives and homegrown initiatives regarding Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
4. Recognizing the interconnectedness of political, social and economic affairs in the region, and the significant impact of events in each country on the entirety of the region, in particular the approach of the U.S. government in dealing with affairs in Iraq, Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which work to hinder the cause for democratic reform within countries of the region, we recommend that:

The U.S. administration continue to approach the Middle East as a whole region, and address the conflicts in it in the context of the region, with the cooperation of states in the region, rather than as isolated incidents, maintaining that different countries and peoples require different frameworks for resolution and democracy promotion.

5. We call for organizing a series of regional conventions to let involved parties in Iraq come together to discuss their demands and reach a consensus.