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**JORDAN AFTER THE HAMAS VICTORY:
STRATEGIC CHALLENGE AND HISTORICAL RESILIENCE**

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Hamas' victory in the Palestinian Legislative Council has set off a flurry of speculation about the possible implications for regional politics beyond the Israeli-Palestinian relationship. Considering the longstanding historical ties between the populations of the two Banks of the Jordan River, the large Palestinian population in Jordan itself (more or less half of the total), and the fact that Jordan ruled the West Bank for nearly twenty years prior to the 1967 War, the election results might appear to have particularly negative consequences for the Hashemite Kingdom. A broader perspective on these issues might therefore serve as a useful corrective.

As an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas has strong ties with the Brotherhood in Jordan and its political party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF). The latter have begun to relate to the Hamas achievement as if it were their own. For example, Azam Hunaydi, the leader of the IAF's 17-member bloc in the Jordanian Parliament of 110, now has the self assurance to go on record with audacious statements to the effect that the Jordanian Islamic movement is "mature enough to take over government responsibilities" while simultaneously criticizing the regime for its "continuous marginalization of the Islamists."

The IAF has strong support in Jordan's major

urban areas that are heavily populated by Palestinians, and Palestinian members of the Jordanian Brotherhood are often more radical than their Jordanian colleagues. It is they who are presently said to be gaining the upper hand in the internal organs of the Brotherhood in Jordan. All this appears to bode ill for the hitherto very carefully balanced relationship between the Monarchy and the Islamists.

On the other hand, the Palestinian population in Jordan is socially stratified and politically diverse and certainly does not constitute a monolithic block of opposition to the regime. And while the erstwhile dichotomy between Jordanians and Palestinians has by no means disappeared, it is less sharply defined than it used to be. Inter-marriage between Jordanians and Palestinians is very common, and as long as these marriages maintain their religious consistency (i.e., Muslims marrying Muslims and Christians marrying Christians), they are hardly even seen socially as "inter-marriage." Since the civil war of 1970, many Palestinians have made their peace with the Monarchy and would rather be part of the ruling elite than be ranked forever with its opponents. Palestinians in Jordan are no longer satisfied with the role of experts serving the government. They want to be real partners. Indeed, the original Jordanians, fearful of

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competition from their Palestinian compatriots, are less favorably disposed to integration of the Palestinians than are the Palestinians themselves. Furthermore, Hamas' election victory was facilitated to a large degree by the chaotic disarray of Fatah and by the virtual absence of any state machinery of the sort that, in other Arab states, could have constrained Islamist control and exploitation of the electoral process. In Jordan, by contrast, the balance of power between the Monarchy and the Islamists is tilted very heavily in favor of the regime. Two dates in Jordan's history are etched very deeply in the collective political memory. One is 1957, when King Husayn outlawed all political parties after the Nasserist opposition sought his downfall. The other is 1970 -- "Black September" -- when the PLO was routed following its attempt to overthrow the Hashemites. Under the shadow of these formative influences, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan has thus far deliberately avoided any head-on collision with the regime. Indeed, Hani Hourani, a seasoned scholar and observer of the Jordanian scene and an expert on the Islamist movement in Jordan, recently noted that the Brotherhood has the "established identity" of a moderate player and, he added, they would be "wise to keep it that way."

True, the regime itself has no reason at present to seek confrontation with Hamas and the Brotherhood. On the contrary, it has every reason to try and tame Hamas. An escalating Palestinian-Israeli confrontation is a Jordanian nightmare because of the possibility that it could spill across the River into Jordan. Moreover, growing Islamization on both Banks of the Jordan could dilute the particular Jordanian identity, which the regime has been deliberately promoting in an effort to differentiate between Palestine and Jordan as two distinct nation states. This concern is only exacerbated by growing Islamist influence to the East as well, to which King Abdallah himself alluded in December 2004 when he raised the specter of the "Shiite

crescent" of rising Iranian influence in a post-Saddam Iraq. The combination of the Hamas victory to the West with the "Shiite Crescent" to the East is hardly a savory prospect for the Jordanians, and the regime will therefore spare no effort to minimize tensions with its domestic opponents.

But should confrontation nevertheless prove unavoidable, Jordanian resilience should not be underestimated. Almost half a century ago, in July 1958, just after the bloody overthrow of the Hashemite Monarchy in Iraq and when the Nasserist onslaught against Arab "reactionaries" was at its height, a former British Minister, Anthony Nutting, said of King Husayn: "However much one may admire the courage of this lonely young king, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion his days are numbered." In fact, Husayn continued to rule forty more years and peacefully bequeathed the Monarchy to his son, Abdallah. And Abdallah, whose future is now the subject of similar predictions, has already demonstrated his own mettle. In his very first year on the throne, in 1999, the young and still untested Monarch decided to expel the Hamas leadership from Jordan; the Jordanian Brotherhood responded with petitions and protests but Abdallah refused to back down and the Brotherhood kept the peace.

Jordanian staying power has always rested on three main pillars: the cohesion and determination of its political elite; the strength and effectiveness of the country's armed forces and security establishment; and the Kingdom's geopolitical centrality, which has led many regional and extra-regional powers to support Hashemite Jordan as an essential component of broader regional security. As a result, Jordan has already weathered countless storms, and though there can be no certainty that the future will always resemble the past, it would be wise to bear the lessons of the historical record in mind.

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