Jordanian Spring, Hashemite Winter: The Weakening of the Regime and the Implications for Israel

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Two years since the onset of the "Arab Spring," it has become clear that although the Hashemite kingdom may have weathered the storm, the marks left on the regime by the upheaval are indelible. The string of revolutions in the Arab world deepened the process of the regime's weakening already underway and further undermined its ability to govern, a process that commenced in 1999 with the ascent to power of King Abdullah II and the advent of his neo-liberal economic policies.

In effect, the "Jordanian Spring" began several months before the "Arab Spring," when the divide between the regime and the Transjordanian ("tribal") population, its long time bedrock, rose to the surface. This divide has been expressed through the systematic undercutting of the King's political initiatives by the conservative elite; riots and armed violence in the rural periphery over the socio-economic situation; growing and more daring public protests – to the point of crossing red lines – against the power of the security services (Mukhabarat) and corruption among high echelons of the regime; and finally, the formation of a Transjordanian rebel movement with clear anti-monarchist tendencies. The common denominator of all these phenomena was that they took place concomitant with but independent of the criticism and familiar demands for political reform sounded by both the Muslim Brotherhood and liberal forces. The challenge emerged from the hard core of the Transjordanian population,

including the elite, and was a powerful test of the ability of the old order to save itself from the power that threatened to destroy it, namely, the monarchy.[1]

Against the background of the domestic unrest, this article surveys the impact of the "Arab Spring" on Jordan's relations with the United States and Israel on the one hand, and with the Gulf states on the other. It will also analyze the changes on the domestic scene during this period, and the regime's response to the challenge posed by pressures from both the Islamist and the Transjordanian sectors, the latter being its veteran stronghold. The main conclusion of the essay is that even if the Hashemite regime does not currently face a tangible threat of collapse, its ability to govern and take decisions in the political, diplomatic, and socio-economic realms has significantly eroded since the end of King Hussein's reign. As much as it can, Israel would do well to work to strengthen the pragmatic, liberal-reformist school within the monarchy's elite, in order to ensure Jordan's internal stability and thus the survivability of the Hashemite regime.

Shock and Loss of Faith in Allies

As a rentier state lacking in natural resources and economic resilience, where a significant portion of income relies on external sources rather than on local production, Jordan has always needed wealthy and generous allies. Except for some brief intervals, the United States and some Gulf states have faithfully filled this role.

Perhaps for the first time, the "Arab Spring" punctured Jordan's belief that if it embraces domestic and foreign policies acceptable to the US, it will continue to enjoy American support. At least during the first months of the upheavals, it appeared that US policy was opposed to the interests of the Hashemite regime shaped over recent decades. Both supporters and opponents of the regime interpreted the push given by the US to the fall of Mubarak as a sign of the superpower's infidelity, and the fears of the conservative elite in Jordan grew following what were perceived as hints that American aid would be conditioned on political reform. Moreover, the public discourse in Israel and the West regarding the advantages of democratization in the Arab world aroused anxiety in the Jordanian leadership that external and internal demands for equal rights

for Palestinians would intensify, ending with the "nightmare" of Jordan becoming the Palestinian state.

From the moment the Jordanian leadership began to lose faith in the US, its final line of defense became the Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia. Indeed, since he rose to the throne King Abdullah II has cultivated closer relations with several Gulf rulers. Saudi Arabia's opposition to Jordan's joining the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Abdullah's first year as king did not deter him, and he later demonstrated an unusual readiness to employ military and security forces outside of Jordanian soil for the sake of Western and Gulf interests, when early in the "Arab Spring" Jordan rushed to aid Bahrain in thwarting the Shiite uprising. As with other issues, the central consideration was economic: the perception was that against the background of the vacuum formed in the old order of the Middle East and the change taking shape in the West toward the region's authoritarian regimes, Jordan would desperately need the support of the Gulf states.

In the spring of 2011, the anxiety in Jordan ebbed somewhat following King Abdullah's warm and encouraging reception in the US, in which an intensive economic aid package to the kingdom was announced. Although the sums mentioned lacked immediate economic significance, the visit conveyed the impression that the US had recovered from the shock of the "Arab Spring" and was ready to help stabilize regimes among its Middle East allies that survived the upheavals. Jordan even requested that the US lobby for it among the Gulf states.

Likewise in the spring, the GCC unexpectedly announced on May 9, 2011 that it was willing to accept Jordan and Morocco as full members. The initial impression was that this was an unprecedented and serious offer, with a final goal of full membership for Jordan in the Council, with no limitations or conditions. The process, intended to be gradual, was to start with Jordan's joining the Gulf states' regional security forces.

The US role in the creation of the new monarchist axis was a matter of debate. The prevalent response in Jordan and abroad was that even if the US supported and encouraged the move, Saudi Arabia and Jordan should themselves reap the maximum from it, in part as an insurance policy against uncertain US loyalties. To this end, Saudi Arabia would bring the Arab monarchies under its wing in face of the West's developing support

of the Muslim Brotherhood as an acceptable alternative to the old Arab order.[2] In addition, among some segments of the Jordanian political elite, the primary concern was that the "Gulf move" would deal a death blow to reform efforts and the struggle against corruption. The Transjordanian population likewise feared a "security for money" deal: Jordan, such was claimed, would need to pay for the Gulf aid by joining the Gulf states' political and security struggle against Iran. Even the familiar conspiracy theory about the West and Gulf states leveraging Jordanian aid in order to solve the Palestinian issue at Jordan's expense gained additional support.

The progress of the "Gulf move" was slow and Jordanian concerns resonated among the public discourse,[3] until the GCC summit meeting in December 2011 put the final nail in the idea's coffin. The optimistic aid projections were not realized, as the Council decided to establish a fund for development projects from which Jordan and Morocco would be granted 2.5 billion dollars each. The political elite suspected that the US and Saudi Arabia worked together to thwart the "Gulf move," each for its own reasons: the US out of a desire to pressure Jordan toward further democratization, and the Saudis with the goal of diminishing "Arab Spring" volatility in the Gulf states. In addition, the theory was that Jordan's entry into the GCC was thwarted by the fear of the Syrian crisis spilling over into Jordan, which in turn could destabilize the kingdom in a manner that would endanger the Gulf states, or expose them to democratization pressures. According to this explanation, the Gulf states sought to avoid an agreement that would commit them to saving the Hashemite regime.

The Hashemite regime emerged from the year of the "Arab Spring" with the sense that it had been betrayed by its allies precisely when it needed support. The Transjordanian elite pointed to the fact that in the civil war (1970-71) the domestic arena was in a shambles while the West's support stayed strong, whereas in the 1991 Gulf War external support collapsed as the domestic scene remained strong. In late 2011, however, there were noticeable cracks on both the external and domestic fronts. This was one of the explanations for Jordan's acting to shore up its western flank: Israel on the one hand, and the Palestinian Authority and Hamas on the other.

The Western Border: The Thicket of Contradictory Interests

Shocked by the developments in the first months of the "Arab Spring," the Jordanian elite believed that the new reality demanded a review of the kingdom's foreign relations. Then-Prime Minister Marouf al-Bakhit connected this reassessment with Israel, defining Jordan's relations with its western neighbor as "at their lowest point." He emphasized that Jordan urgently needed Arab aid, as it was "the final stronghold standing before the Zionist project," and due to its responsibility for its Palestinian "brothers," whom he defined as an "internal Jordanian problem." This sort of terminology and reasoning were common in Jordanian political discourse during the four decades preceding the peace agreement with Israel. Nevertheless, it gradually became clear that Jordan has no real alternative to its veteran allies within the region and globally. Thus the "Arab Spring" and the freeze in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process pulled Jordan in two opposite directions: toward a tightening of the strategic alliance with Israel, and at the same time, toward preparation for heavy pressure, both internal and external, to reconsider the peace agreement.

It is no wonder, then, that as opposed to previous years, King Abdullah moderated his criticism of Israel in general and of its government in particular, and made do with noting his frustration with Israel's "wait and see" approach to the "Arab Spring." Although public discourse in Jordan and Israel has grown more sensitive to statements from across the border, which reveal more than they conceal,[4] the government agencies of both states in general have demonstrated responsibility and discretion. The unfolding crisis between the two countries over the Mughrabi ramp has still not been solved, from time to time sparking friction between them. It seems, however, that the two sides are aware of the danger inherent in the crisis and seek to manage it far from the eyes of the media. In the spring of 2012, there even were five visits of senior Jordanian officials, among them the King's two brothers, to the al-Aqsa compound, together with senior Sunni and Sufi religious figures from the Arab world. Israel and the Hashemite regime had a common interest in these visits: for Jordan this emphasized the preferred position and status Israel grants it in the al-Aqsa compound at the expense of all other actors in the Arab and Muslim world;

and for Israel this was both an indication of "normalization" and de facto recognition of its sovereignty over the Temple Mount, as well as its own act of modest support for the Hashemite regime. Perhaps likewise in this vein Israel launched exploratory talks with the Palestinians in Amman in early 2012, in part – if not primarily – to help improve the King's image and strengthen his position.

Although the establishment of a Palestinian state would underscore the separation between Jordan and Palestine, which is a leading strategic interest of the Transjordanian elite, the Jordanian leadership was very worried about the unilateralism embodied by the Palestinian UN bid for acceptance as a non-member observer state. Alongside weighty strategic considerations, led by the need to maintain functional relations with any element enjoying influence and popularity in the West Bank, this was a good reason to renew relations with Hamas, which King Abdullah had suspended in 1999. Recent years have seen a growing sense among the Transjordanian elite that closer relations with Hamas are essential for Jordan in order to deal with the danger of the establishment of a pseudo "Palestinian state" built on many concessions. The "Arab Spring" provided a suitable opportunity to initiate a rapprochement with Hamas, in particular given the weakened (if not withdrawn) objections by the US and Egypt to a renewal of relations between Jordan and Hamas, and new motivations to this end, led by Qatar's positive stance toward the organization. This small Gulf state also served as an example among the Jordanian elite that good relations with Hamas do not necessarily mean bad relations with the US.

Although in late 2011 it seemed that Jordan was struggling between supporting the PA and thawing relations with Hamas, its moves on the Palestinian scene were an outgrowth of its support of intra-Palestinian reconciliation.[5] The King's rare visit to Ramallah in November 2011, arranged with great haste, was meant to provide moral support to the PA in general and to Abu Mazen in particular, against the backdrop of growing threats of dismantling the PA and the President's resignation. The visit was also apparently intended to persuade Abu Mazen to support the EU initiative on renewal of talks with Israel in exchange for EU support of the 2012 UN bid, should the negotiations fail. In any case, the stances of the security establishments in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, which opposed

any reconciliation between Jordan and Hamas unless Hamas distanced itself from Iran, cooled the process of rapprochement between Jordan and Hamas. The visit by Qatar's crown prince to Amman in January 2012, accompanied by Khaled Mashal and several senior Hamas officials, was actually a polite yet meaningless visit.[6]

The election of Mohamed Morsi to the Egyptian presidency on June 30, 2012 required the regime to prepare for the arrival of the "Muslim era" at its doorstep. A delegation of Hamas senior figures, headed by Mashal, was well-received in Amman, with this time the visit including an official reception and warm meetings with the King, senior officials in Jordan's political and security elite, Muslim Brotherhood leaders, public figures, and journalists. Mashal stayed in the kingdom for almost two weeks, and his visit marked the opening of a new page in Hamas-Jordan relations. The Hamas leader demonstrated complete neutrality on internal Jordanian issues in general, and in particular on the conflict between the doves and hawks in the Muslim Brotherhood movement, even advising the Muslim Brotherhood to refrain from boycotting parliamentary elections. The Hamas delegation also reached a detailed agreement with the Jordanian security leadership, whereby it would refrain from all involvement in the sensitive issue of Jordanian-Palestinian relations in the kingdom, and from all activity that would harm Jordan's security. In return, the movement was promised periodic political consultations and freedom of movement in the kingdom, although not the opening of official offices in Amman. The two sides could also expect to reap political and public relations gains from the move: Jordan will lobby for the good of Hamas in the West, and Hamas will lobby for the good of the Hashemite regime among the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the Arab world, as well as in Jordan itself.

Syria: The Evil Comes from the North

The year 2012 marked a rehabilitation of Jordan's trust in its allies. The King's visit to the US in January, in which President Obama praised the progress of reforms in the kingdom, conveyed the message that for the US, internal stability in the kingdom was an important goal, and as long as the regime could maintain this stability, the US would support the way it ran its affairs. As the weeks passed, the sentiment in the Jordanian political

discourse grew that the US in effect had abandoned its expectation for democratization in the kingdom. In the summer of 2012 the US announced additional economic aid totaling 100 million dollars, some of which was designated to cover the expenses caused by the influx of Syrian refugees. The US also announced a significant easing of minimum conditions for the provision of economic aid to Jordan in the current year. For its part, the International Monetary Fund announced an unusual loan to Jordan of 2 billion dollars for three years, for the purpose of lowering the deficit in the state budget and supporting the economically weak sectors.

The Gulf Cooperation Council also ultimately mobilized to provide assistance. Although the possibility of Jordan joining the Council is no longer mentioned, the GCC began examining the option of raising the level of aid to Jordan to 5 billion dollars for the next five years for the purpose of infrastructure and development projects. The Gulf states have since budgeted many hundreds of millions of dollars for investment projects in Jordan, beginning in the next fiscal year. In mid-year, the king met with parliament members and informed them that Jordan is about to reach economic stability thanks to aid from the Gulf.

However, as the political elite feared, Gulf aid comes with a price tag. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar leveled heavy pressure on Jordan to "get off the fence" regarding Syria and support the deposing of Bashar al-Assad. Carrots were mixed with sticks, threats, and "blackmail." This played out, for example, in the slow transfer of the Gulf aid to Jordan and in the foot-dragging regarding investments in the kingdom. The military and security coordination between Jordan and the Gulf states, which before the summer of 2012 had noticeably tightened, focused on matters related to Syria and aid to Jordan. Reportedly, it included also a Gulf attempt to strengthen the resolve of Jordan's conservatives against the Muslim Brotherhood.[7] The "November uprising" that erupted in the kingdom in late 2012 due to a government decision to raise prices of oil products aroused the fear once again among the elite and the Transjordanian population regarding the depth of commitment of the Gulf states (and the West) to Jordan's domestic stability.

Jordan's desperate need for support from the Gulf states, along with the formation of a Western-Arab front against the Assad regime in late 2011,

complicated Jordan's position regarding events in Syria. From the outset, Jordan was worried both about the Assad regime's reaction should Jordan support the rebels, as well as the potential ethnicization of the conflict in Syria that would lead to a forced exodus to Jordan of hundreds of thousands of Syrians, mainly of Palestinian origin. The King's famous statement in a BBC interview in November 2011 that if he were in Assad's position he would step down, was taken out of context. In essence, he emphasized that the problem is not with the ruler but with the system, and actually expressed faith in Bashar al-Assad's ability to change the system from within, albeit at the price of his removal from power. At the end of that month, the Jordanian government laid down "three nos" regarding Syria: no to recalling the Jordanian ambassador from Damascus, no to expelling the Syrian ambassador from Amman, and no to joining international or Arab sanctions against Syria.

By the spring of 2012, the number of legal and illegal Syrian aliens in Jordan grew enough to make its mark by way of social unrest and tensions within the Jordanian opposition, between it and the Syrian refugees, among the Syrian refugee population, and between the refugees and the Jordanian residents of the rural periphery. Reports from international organizations even warned of destabilization in Jordan and Lebanon as a result of the flow of refugees from Syria into their territories. Salafi jihadist activists based in northern Jordan trickled into Syria with the goal of joining the rebels, arousing heightened concern among the authorities. It gradually became clear that the government also recoiled from dealing with the wealthy and strong tribes in the north, who cooperate with groups and gangs on the Syrian side in the systematic smuggling of arms and equipment to the rebels. Jordan attempted to prohibit entirely the entry of Syrian citizens to its territory, but the criteria it set were applied mainly to visitors and not to the refugees who escaped to its territory each night, to be rounded up by the security forces.

In the summer of 2012, the situation on the border deteriorated to the point of shooting incidents between Jordanian and Syrian forces, with the latter attempting to prevent the flight of citizens to Jordan. As the number of refugees fleeing daily to Jordan rose steadily, the tensions between them and the Jordanian population intensified, the burden on infrastructure and

educational and health systems increased, and the damage to Jordan's economy and commercial activity soared. By the end of the year, the estimated number of Syrians in Jordan – those who entered legally or illegally – was 250,000. Of these most settled in cities and towns, and only about 45,000 live in the a-Zatari refugee camp in the north. Most of the refugees were of the lower class, pushing locals out of the labor market and aggravating the unemployment problem. The great fear of the Jordanian leadership, expressed by the King as well, was that the situation in Syria would deteriorate into all-out civil war and lead to the establishment of an Alawite enclave led by Assad loyalists. The King is convinced that the Middle East would need decades to recover from such a nightmare scenario.[8]

The Domestic Arena: Liberal Rhetoric, Conservative Practice, and Royal Weakness

With the outbreak of the "Arab Spring," most of the actors in the domestic arena, out of respective reasons, mobilized for initial stabilization of the system. Among the various regime opponents, and between them and the regime, there was in essence a balance of fear, reflecting the concern that domestic destabilization would end in a terrible civil war, in which each side would attempt to utterly defeat the other in a zero-sum game. As in the past, genuine concern was voiced that Israel would take advantage of the anarchy to turn Jordan into the alternative homeland for the Palestinians. Among these nightmare scenarios, the Hashemite regime was naturally considered the lesser evil. However, and despite the fact that at that stage open demands to depose the King were not in circulation, there was agreement among the regime, the establishment elite, and the opposition elite – both Transjordanian and Palestinian – regarding the essential need for dramatic change. The debate was about the goals of such change, its extent, and its pace.

The collapse of the regimes in the Middle East in the first months of the "Arab Spring" intensified the temerity and defiance of regime opponents, and new red lines were crossed weekly in demonstrations with thousands of participants in Amman, and even more so in the Transjordanian periphery. The growing demand for constitutional reforms, whose practical significance would mean a cut in the King's powers, was

discussed openly, and the regime and its supporters appeared helpless and bereft of any counterarguments. The principal players in the political realm, beyond the regime itself, were the conservative elite – mainly the security establishment (Mukhabarat); the long time opposition, led by the Muslim Brotherhood movement, most of whose demands focused on equal political representation for Islamists and Palestinians; and the new Transjordanian opposition, whose demands were mainly socio-economic, primarily the eradication of corruption and attention to the longstanding neglect and poverty in the periphery.[9] As a rule, the demand to strengthen the separation of powers and rein in the tremendous power of the executive branch, mainly the palace and the Mukhabarat, was common to all opposition parties and acceptable to the broader public, both Palestinian and Transjordanian.

In that sensitive period, however, it was precisely the Muslim Brotherhood, mainly the hawkish wing identified with Hamas and the kingdom's Palestinian population, that showed restraint and refused to officially adopt the ideas of the constitutional monarchy and other demands that arose from the dovish ranks of the movement, and from the ranks of the broadening Transjordanian opposition.[10] The latter blatantly exploited the King's weakness in order to demand resources and budgets, as well as a "return to the 1952 constitution," which would impinge on the ability of the King and his emissaries in the security establishment to shape the political scene according to their needs. For its part, the conservative elite attempted to stop the current driving toward cutting the King's powers, and to this end heightened the Jordanian-Palestinian divide by falsely connecting the demands for reform with an anti-monarchist Palestinian agenda. The immediate result was a worsening of domestic tension to the point of creating an atmosphere of civil war.

The regime worked to lower the flames by appointing national committees to examine changes in the constitution and elections and party laws, to strengthen the separation of powers, and to create an impression of an uncompromising fight against corruption. The encouraging news from the Gulf in the spring of 2011 enabled the regime to plan the pace of progress of political reforms carefully, but the news also reinforced the power of the conservatives, including their bargaining power in relation to

the King.[11] Several of the fundamental recommendations of the committees were abandoned, which was perceived as evidence that the King's liberal rhetoric and public criticism of the conservative elite were hollow, or worse, that his power could not stand up against the security apparatuses, making him essentially a pawn in their hands. The amended elections law, adopted in June 2011, brought meager tidings to the reformists, and reflected the country's great fear of Islamists and Palestinians. The recommendations of the committee for constitutional reform, which were submitted to the King two months afterward, were likewise in the category of too little, too late. Moreover, the problem was not in the ability to formulate liberal articles in the constitution, but in the will and ability to implement them.[12] The constitutional reforms laid the foundation for a tug of war between regime supporters and opponents regarding fundamental limitation of the King's powers, turning the people into the sovereign, and founding an actual constitutional monarchy. The regime has automatically rejected any demands of this sort, with the argument – raised continually in the government media – that they endanger the fragile domestic stability of the kingdom.

The strategy employed by the regime to manage the political crisis was shaped in part by its fear that the Muslim Brotherhood, whose "Arab Spring"-era political power is perceived by the West as an element it had better get used to, is not interested in a deal with the government, but rather seeks a serious crisis with the monarchy itself. The Brotherhood vehemently denied any connection with the US, and continued to emphasize that it does not seek the downfall of the regime, only reforming it. At the same time, however, the organization did not care much about providing the regime guarantees regarding the ultimate goal of its demand for change.

In the meantime, the anti-regime protests in the Transjordanian periphery intensified, embodying both criticism of the security apparatuses and socio-economic demands, first and foremost the eradication of corruption linked to the King, his family, and close associates. The radicalized discourse and the anti-monarchist demands sparked concerns in the security establishment regarding civil disobedience that would threaten the regime itself. However, the Jordanian-Palestinian divide blocked the unification of regime opponents and in the end worked to the regime's benefit. Many

of the Transjordanian opposition leaders and activists worried that the Brotherhood was not ready to join forces in the struggle against neo-liberalism and corruption, and that it seeks, with Western aid, to control the political sphere. Moreover, the Transjordanian opposition feared that the regime would sell out its interests in exchange for a comprehensive deal with the Muslim Brotherhood.[13]

Extensive unrest in the periphery in October 2011, following a government decision to slash the resources of the municipal authorities, led to a comprehensive changing of the guard in the decision making leadership – the Prime Minister, the head of the Mukhabarat, and the head of the royal court – and to the appointment of a new government. A sense of helplessness and a loss of confidence in the leadership, however, continued. The failure of the King to decide between contradictory interests and approaches among decision making circles deepened the social and political polarization, and led to incidents of armed violence in the streets. It seemed that the Transjordanian elite, recognizing the regime's weakness and strengthening of regional political Islam, would no longer rely on the King to guarantee its interests, and looking ahead might be ready to settle for a "Turkish model": a popular Islamic government and a state establishment – the security sector with or without the palace – functioning as the "supervising adult" in charge of foreign policy and security.[14] For its part, the regime attempted to extricate itself from the dead end through a tough strategy of crushing the opposition, in its various incarnations, along with placating public opinion with a policy marketed as a courageous struggle against corruption.

The year 2012 has been marked primarily by stronger support on the part of the US and Gulf states for the Hashemite regime. Events in the region also had a cooling effect on regime opponents: the worsening of the Syria crisis, which deepens the polarization among the ranks of the Jordanian opposition,[15] and the bleak political and economic news from most of the "Arab Spring" states, sharpened the popular fear of instability inherent in change. All of these factors have thus far worked to the benefit of the regime, if only partially and temporarily. In the meantime, the King has decided in favor of the conservatives on a number of additional occasions: he approved additional problematic amendments in the election

law, and decided to hold parliamentary elections by the end of the current year, even without the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood. He also broadcast the message that boosting the economy takes precedence over democratization, which justifies limiting the fight against corruption so as not to scare off investors from the Gulf states. Finally, the King retired Prime Minister Khasawneh, who was perceived by the conservatives as overly liberal and pro-Islamist, and appointed Fayez al-Tarawneh in his place, a rigid, conservative Transjordanian.

It has gradually become clear that the King believes that Jordan has successfully weathered the storm of the "Arab Spring," thanks to the reformist yet cautious course that it plotted for itself, and its avoidance of a slide into the anarchy and elite power struggles experienced in other states. The King believes that the main challenge facing the regime is socio-economic and not political.[16] But the renewal of violence and the socio-political protests in the Transjordanian periphery, and the growing gap between the Muslim Brotherhood and the regime against the backdrop of a boycott of parliamentary elections, involve a combined socio-economic and political challenge, and it is doubtful that the regime can handle these successfully as long as it continues with its conservative security thinking. The basic assumptions of the regime were indeed unexpectedly shattered with the outbreak of the mass uprising in November 2012

Implications for Israel-Jordan Relations

The conventional wisdom holds that the Hashemite regime will survive as long as it possesses the ability to fulfill the historical "social contract," in other words, to finance patron-client relations with the Transjordanian population. But this survivability, which itself depends on Western and Gulf states to continue their economic maintenance of Jordan, as well as on the balance of fear between Transjordanians and Palestinians on the domestic front, is tenuous at best, as the King's neo-liberal policy and the ensuing rifts with the elite and Transjordanian populace have eroded the traditional support of this sector for the regime, denying it of a major base. In the era of the "Arab Spring," it is doubtful how long a conservative regime in a divided society lacking resources can continue to exist as the lesser of two evils. Moreover, the question is no longer the survivability of

the monarchy as a system, but its ability to take difficult decisions in the diplomatic, political, and socio-economic realms, which it will certainly need to do in the coming years. In other words, even if various causes and reasons seem to assure the survival of the Hashemite regime for now, its political power and ability to govern have declined in recent years, and the "Arab Spring" has only underscored and accelerated this process.

Under such circumstances, and as long as the regime continues to yield to conservative security thinking, three possible scenarios join the possible continuation of the status quo. The first involves a coalition between the strong power elements in the Islamic and Transjordanian oppositions and elements within the royal family, security sector, or even foreign elements, to challenge King Abdullah personally, while leaving the monarchy itself intact. The second is violent unrest, mainly on a socio-economic backdrop, that would breach the boundaries of logical considerations of the various players and bring about the downfall of the regime. The third scenario, which is perhaps most likely, is the maintenance of King Abdullah's rule, with a noticeable and prolonged diminishing of his authority, power, and ability to govern. In each of these scenarios, it appears that the Transjordanian rural periphery will remain fundamentally a center of upheaval and anti-monarchist protest, and that violent, armed unrest among tribes, and between them and the security forces, will continue to erupt from time to time. Consequently, the possibility cannot be discounted of a sudden escalation that would spiral out of control, as occurred in November 2012.

The tight cooperation between Israel and the Jordanian military-security establishment is a source of power for both countries, especially for the Transjordanian elite. Nevertheless, it might blind Israel to developments in Jordan, as the elements of the Jordanian establishment in routine contact with Israeli colleagues would likely avoid describing the true depth of the regime's distress: the image of "control" and "domestic stability" attributed to the Hashemite regime is a critical strategic asset for Jordan. Israel can, with US help, greatly strengthen Jordan's military-security capabilities regarding foreign threats, but its influence over events on the domestic scene is limited, and the more it distances itself from its neighbor's domestic issues, the better. Nevertheless, public policy – regional or bilateral – on the part of Israel, and direct or indirect messages communicated to Jordan,

can influence the decision making process in Jordan. Therefore, Israel may have a certain capability of bolstering the stability of the Hashemite regime in the domestic realm or, alternatively, undermining it.

Possible hints of change in Israel's strategic stance toward Jordan lie beyond the scope of this article.[17] Suffice it to say that the most effective step that Israel can take to help stabilize the Hashemite regime is a determined and genuine pursuit of the establishment of a Palestinian state west of the Jordan River. However, as the window of opportunity for the two-state solution is in the process of closing, Israel and Jordan have entered – in the estimation of many in Jordan, including elements in its military-security establishment – a path that could end in strategic conflict. Nonetheless, Israel presumably remains anxious regarding the stability of the Hashemite regime and its ability to govern, and will do everything it can to stabilize it. Its deliberations, therefore, would concern the correct way to do this.

Anti-Islamic and anti-Palestinian conservative security thinking may lead Jordan toward the abyss. This assessment is accepted not only by the Islamist and Palestinian elite, but also by serious elements in the Transjordanian elite who discuss openly and publicly how to "save the Hashemite regime from itself." Uncontrolled concession of the regime to the expectations and demands of its traditional pillar of support, the Transjordanian sector, will lead Jordan to economic collapse. It appears that the King understands this, as do his financiers in the West and the Gulf. In essence, since his rise to power, the King has tried tirelessly, though without success, to escape the choking grip of the Transjordanian population and the patron-client relations that have historically characterized the relationship of this sector with the regime. According to this logic, if Israel is truly and sincerely interested in stabilization of the Hashemite regime and its strengthened ability to govern, it must bolster its bargaining power versus conservative-hawkish elements among the Transjordanian elite. In other words, any Israeli action or message that will strengthen conservative-security thinking will work to the detriment of the Hashemite regime, and any action or message that will strengthen liberal-reformist thinking will work to its benefit.

An open and balanced approach by Israel to the "Arab Spring" might help strengthen the reformist school in Jordan and diminish conservative

opposition to the change demanded in order to stabilize the system. This is said, first and foremost, regarding Israel's position concerning the rise of political Islam in the Middle East. A change in Israel's policy in this area, if only rhetorical at first, is likely to strengthen the approach of the liberals in the regime leadership regarding relations with the Muslim Brotherhood on the domestic scene, and with Hamas and political Islam on the regional scene, and lead to political arrangements that would also be acceptable to elements within the kingdom's conservative security elite.

Regarding the Muslim Brotherhood, painful political concessions on the part of the regime are likely in the offing; there is already some consensus among various elements in the political elite for such measures, and some of these concessions were even approved by committees appointed by the King himself in recent years. As to Hamas, the crux is activating a political approach that in any case is accepted among circles of the Transjordanian elite, including the military-security establishment, whereby improved Jordan-Hamas relations is a strategic need for Jordan, due to considerations of West Bank stability and the future of the peace process. Indeed, the more Hamas is dependent upon Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey, rather than Iran, the more this will benefit the political process between Israel and the Palestinians. This proposed adjustment of Israeli policy to the "Islamic Spring" will need to be coordinated, one way or another, with Saudi Arabia, which can thwart the effectiveness of any closer relations between Jordan and political Islam.

From a bilateral civilian perspective, it is doubtful whether Israel can provide Jordan aid that would specifically strengthen the approach of the liberals. In effect, under current circumstances a positive approach by Israel to Jordan will be insufficient to serve even the more modest purpose of displaying the two countries' relations as a role model for regional cooperation. This is not only because of the freeze in the peace process, but also due to the paralysis that has struck regime circles, and the regime's governance challenges, which limit its capability to promote unpopular policies. This state of affairs already constricts the political-diplomatic aspect of Israel-Jordan relations to more or less controlled spats over events in East Jerusalem, which, as opposed to economic cooperation with Israel, do not damage the regime's image at home.

Most of Israel's attempts at upgrading its relations with Jordan since the outbreak of the "Arab Spring" have been met with an indifferent response or have been ignored. This is due to the disappointment of the Jordanian leadership with the failures of previous agreements between the countries, as a result of Israel's suffocating bureaucracy; the unwillingness of officials in Jordan to commit to cooperation with Israel at the present time; and the inability, explicit or implicit, of the regime to back such cooperation. Nonetheless, Israel can rehabilitate the faith of the Jordanian leadership in civilian-economic cooperation between the two countries by filling the position of Head of Tracking and Oversight of Implementation of the Peace Agreement, a position that functioned in the Prime Minister's Office from 1994 to 1996. It appears that this is the only element that can accelerate inter-ministry cooperation in Israel, bypass bureaucratic obstacles quickly, and choose between the positions of various players. Israel can prove to the Jordanian government that it is giving high priority to bilateral civilian-economic cooperation. Tangible achievements for Jordan from such cooperation will not only aid the regime's stabilization; they can serve as a sorely lacking regional paradigm for how an Arab-Israeli peace accord can benefit the "common man."

In addition, the State of Israel can prepare for future events by reinforcing the efforts of the government apparatuses in charge of the Jordanian issue, both in military-security and civilian aspects. Israel needs an expert, experienced core that will be capable of providing comprehensive analyses and assessments on various topics connected with Jordan's foreign relations and domestic policies, including political economy, the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi jihadists, tribal politics, and center-periphery relations. In this framework, the erosion of the "social contract" between the regime and the Transjordanian population should be observed carefully, along with the various manifestations of the regime's lack of ability to govern. As these issues will determine the future of Jordan and the stability of the Hashemite regime, a deep familiarity with them in Israel will enable the various state apparatuses and its diplomatic and civilian arms to plan and implement a sound policy that will aid in stabilizing Israel's important neighbor to the east.

Notes

1 For a more extensive discussion, see Assaf David, "Presence Out, Ideas In: Representation and Sociopolitical Change in Jordan," *Representation* 48, no.3 (2012): 295-305.
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3 Bassam a-Badarin, "Warnings in Jordan as to the Blurred Framework for Joining the GCC," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, November 16, 2011.
4 For a more extensive discussion see Assaf David, "Israel-Jordan Relations: At a Strategic Turning Point?" *Can Think*, October 27, 2011.
5 Nabil Ghishan, "Will the King's Visit to Ramallah Inaugurate New Contacts?" *al-Arab al-Yawm*, November 22, 2011.
6 Samih al-Maayta, "After Weeks of Declarations, was the Government Informed of Mashal's Visit by the Media?" *al-Arab al-Yawm*, January 31, 2012.
7 Bassam a-Badarin, "Saudi Strategy against the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood Limits Political Reforms in Jordan," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, July 5, 2012.
8 King Abdullah's interview with the Bloomberg network, August 8, 2012, http://www.bloomberg.com/video/8-8-king-abdullah-ii-of-jordan-on-syria-~zps6XG6QrWND3JmE~letg.html.
9 For more on the cracks in support of the Transjordanian populace for the Hashemite regime as a result of the neo-liberalism led by King Abdullah, see Assaf David, "One Year since the Jordanian Spring," *Can Think*, April 2012.
10 See for example Nahed Hatar, "Institutionalizing the Reformist Stream in the Muslim Brotherhood," *al-Arab al-Yawm*, February 27, 2012; and Nahed Hatar, "Is Jordan a Homeland or a Theater?" *al-Akhbar*, July 10, 2012.
11 See for example Marwan Muasher, "A Decade of Struggling Reform Efforts in Jordan: The Resilience of the Rentier System," *Carnegie Paper* (May 2011), http://carnegieendowment.org/files/jordan_reform.pdf.
12 Mahmoud Abu Rumman, "Wherein Lies the Value of Changes in the Constitution?" *al-Ghadd*, August 16, 2011.
13 See in this context the interesting discussion on the regime-Brotherhood political duality, *al-Sabil*, November 14, 2012.
14 Conversation with a Jordanian researcher, November 2011.
15 See Assaf David, "A Syrian Bomb on the Jordanian Spring," *Can Think*, February 11, 2012.
16 King Abdullah's interview with Bloomberg network, August 8, 2012.
17 For more on this, see David, "Israel-Jordan Relations: At a Strategic Turning Point?"