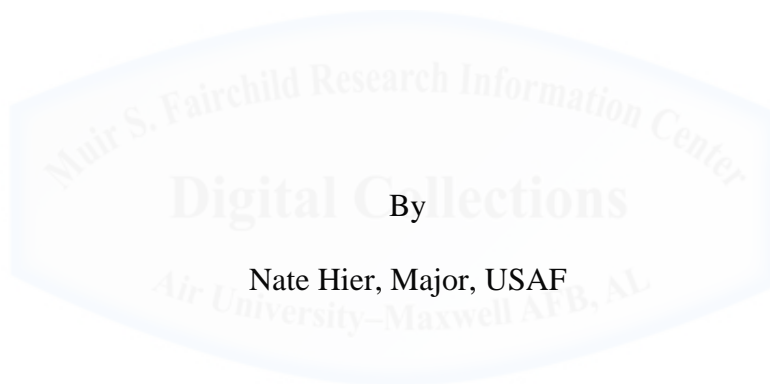


AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

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**HIGH-STAKES CHESS:
HASHEMITE MONARCHY MASTERS THE GAME IN SPITE OF ALL ODDS**



By

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Abstract

Jordan faces severe security challenges, but the Hashemite Monarchy has shown skill in using political tools to overcome internal and external conflict and strife. King Abdullah II has proven himself adept in negotiation. His administration has repeatedly proven themselves as masters of compromise to maintain stability in the country. Jordan's leadership weathered the storms of the Arab Spring for three primary reasons: the institution of the monarchy provides a focal point of social cohesion and legitimacy that restrains the desire to rebel; the king and his supporting coalition, by virtue of its self-confidence, identity, and extensive experience made better decisions in response to the external events that triggered bigger, more sustained protests elsewhere; and finally, the monarchy received critical support from its Western allies and fellow Middle Eastern monarchies, most prominently, Saudi Arabia. Time and time again, the Hashemite Monarchy has skillfully walked a political tight rope to keep the peace between wildly different camps within and external to its borders. The kingdom will need all its considerable political skills in years to come as tough times certainly continue.

High-Stakes Chess: Hashemite Monarchy Masters the Game in Spite of All Odds

The tumultuous protests and rebellions that marked what came to be known as “The Arab Spring” in 2011 shook nearly every country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen fell.¹ Widespread protests broke out across the region. Leadership in remaining regimes such as Saudi Arabia actively engaged in neighboring countries to quell the rebellions and preserve their power. Jordan, like many other countries, endured widespread protesting. However, in spite of grievances against the same austere conditions and poverty that motivated revolt elsewhere, and with far less material resources than neighboring Gulf states, the monarchy survived, protests remained relatively peaceful, and protestors made no strong demands for regime change. Jordan’s leadership weathered the storm for three primary reasons: First, the institution of the monarchy provides a focal point of social cohesion and legitimacy. This restrained the desire, direction and strength of the potential for rebellion. Second, the king and his supporting coalition, by virtue of its self-confidence, identity and extensive experience, made better decisions in response to the external events that triggered bigger, more sustained protests elsewhere. Third, the monarchy received critical support from its Western allies and fellow Middle Eastern monarchies, most prominently, Saudi Arabia.

The Hashemite Monarchy has significant experience dealing with complex, high-stakes politics to preserve the peace. To begin to understand how they pushed through the Arab Spring without approaching anything close to collapse, an examination of the way the regime has astutely played a chess match with opponents and allies from all corners for years and managed to consistently make superior moves provides crucial insight into the government’s response to the initial protests. To retain power and maintain relative peace since its inception in 1946, the

Hashemite Monarchy has repeatedly made excellent choices regarding when to give and take with political opposition, most predominantly in its long-standing relationship with the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood. Additionally, the royal family has also managed to form and maintain strong alliances with the United States, Britain, the European Union, and Saudi Arabia.

Following the end of the Second World War in 1945, the British established the constitutional monarchy of Jordan in 1946. Its first King, Abdullah, consistently faced many of the same forms of turmoil as his son and grandson, Jordan's subsequent rulers, faced and continue to face today. According to Ryan, "Jordan exists – sometimes tenuously – in a very difficult neighborhood, surrounded by more powerful states whose problems seem continually to spill over into the Hashemite kingdom."² Among Jordan's neighbors – Israel, the West Bank, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia – the latter has supported them politically and economically. Every other border presents an outright threat, or at least a particularly thorny situation in the case of its relations with Israel.

Jordan also faces internal threats: from its birth the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has operated with substantial freedom in Jordan. As Köprülü describes it, "The Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood [was] established in 1945 by 'a group of merchants who supported a religious struggle (*jihad*) against Zionists in Palestine,' ... Its respect for the constitution of the monarchy was crucial in shaping its close ties with the Hashemite regime."³ This long-stranding symbiotic relationship dates back to the earliest years in Jordan's history, when King Abdullah I gave the leader of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood a place in his cabinet, opting to include rather than isolate the organization from Jordan's domestic politics.⁴ However, this heritage of support for jihad against Zionists by the founders and leaders of the Jordanian Muslim

Brotherhood creates a potential conflict with the Jordanian government's more recent policy of peace with Israel, inaugurated by treaty in 1994.

In his extensive examination of the Muslim Brotherhood, Wessel compares and contrasts how the Egyptian and Jordanian governments chose to interact with the organization in their respective countries over the course of their relationships. "In Egypt they faced repression, imprisonment and often violent confrontation with the government. This situation in turn led to an escalation of the Brotherhood's tactics and a radicalization of the organization. In Jordan the Brotherhood achieved a symbiotic relationship with the monarchy, exchanging support for legitimacy. This situation led to stability, continued moderation in the organization's platform and an increased influence over Jordanian society."⁵ Wessel essentially supports the Hashemite Monarchy's approach as a blueprint other MENA countries should adopt as he states, "a government can use limited inclusion as a tool to control the message and to marginalize the power of the fundamentalist groups in society while maintaining peace and stability."⁶

Perhaps nothing demonstrates the shrewdness of the monarchy's political acumen more precisely than its longstanding symbiotic relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. Wessel states, "compared to the trials and the hardships faced by their counterparts in other Middle Eastern countries it appears that the Jordanian Brotherhood has found a happy balance of state loyalty, democratic practice and Islamic principles. The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan has occasionally objected publicly to government actions but has chosen to express itself in forms of public discourse rather than endorsing action against the government."⁷ For instance, the organization supported the Hashemite Monarchy throughout the turbulence of the Arab Spring rather than seizing a potential opportunity to incite revolt. Looking further back, the Muslim Brotherhood also maintained its support for the regime even when it absolutely disagreed with

the Israeli peace treaty and the establishment of women's suffrage. The Hashemite Monarchy's strategy of inclusion enabled this critical balance.

In addition to its other serious challenges, Jordan lacks appreciable resources and constantly faces economic struggles. Unlike its neighboring Gulf states, it lacks oil reserves from which to draw for the economic power to ensure its security and care for its citizens. Instead, Jordan depends heavily on foreign aid. The fact that much of this aid comes from the United States only further complicates Jordan's domestic political struggles. Noueihed and Warren note that "Jordan's outstanding domestic debt had reached 35 percent of GDP in 2010, compared to 23 percent three years earlier, and its finances remained reliant on foreign aid."⁸

On top of having a weak economy that cannot support the needs of native Jordanians, the country has also become something of a "melting pot" of the Middle East through the years. It is home to Palestinian Jordanians, once refugees, who now comprise more than half the population.⁹ Additionally, due to the civil war raging across its northern borders in Syria, Jordan has given refuge to hundreds of thousands of Syrians who have fled the violence. Ryan reports that "between 2011 and 2013, more than half a million Syrian refugees crossed into Jordan to escape the horrors of the Syrian war, joining previous waves of refugees that had fled to Jordan since its independence in 1946: Palestinians (in several waves) from the west, Iraqis from the east and now Syrians from the north."¹⁰ Opening its borders to these people in such an exemplary humanitarian fashion certainly earns Jordan points with its Western allies, but it does not help the country deal with its growing economic problems.

A struggling economy, reliance on Western support, war on its borders, and the melting pot population present the Hashemite Monarchy with an increasingly complex domestic political situation. Even as it attempts to institute liberal reforms, it must constantly preserve its

legitimacy in the eyes of significant portions of the population that prioritize faithfulness to Islam and conservative values. The country's at times fragile stability depends in large part on the monarchy retaining power. Since its birth in 1946, Jordanian leaders have faced these challenges and made astute political moves time and time again to ward off threats and keep the peace, but the challenges only continue. As Ryan observes, "Jordan's stability and security are not figments of the imagination, especially considering the revolutions, civil wars and endemic terrorism that seem to have afflicted most of the country's neighbors. Yet the calm may not be sustainable, as Jordan confronts its own continuing struggles over reform and change; faces seemingly countless threats in terms of its internal and external security; and attempts to deal with its own economic crises and challenging energy needs."¹¹ Remarkably, these problems all existed prior to the Arab Spring and yet the monarchy skillfully negotiated its way through the new turmoil, just as it did previously.

While the Arab Spring took the world by surprise in 2010 and 2011, its roots can be traced to popular, widespread discontent building throughout the region in the decade prior. As Noueihed and Warren argue, "Far from being a sudden awakening, the Arab Spring capped a decade of protest, political activism and media criticism that had laid the ground for more open political systems. Movements against rising prices and unemployment, against corruption and political stagnation, had gained traction."¹² Long-standing dictators in four Arab nations lost power, but the influential protestors that demanded democratic reforms failed to emerge as the new leaders in the scramble for political power that followed. Instead, a volatile power vacuum emerged in the wake of falling governments across the region. The flames of liberty gave the rest of the world hope that a more peaceful and stable region might yet emerge, but for now most of the embers remain dark, though hope remains. According to Ryan, "some commentators

in the Western media were already lamenting the speed at which the Arab Spring had turned to Islamist winter. The young secular protestors who had lit up televisions screens from London to New York earlier in the year had been hijacked, they said, by religious zealots who would now build oppressive theocracies.”¹³

Jordan did not escape the protesting and turmoil throughout the region. However, as Noueihed and Warren note, “demonstrations were never as large as those in Tunisia and were certainly not comparable to the mass protest rallies in Egypt’s Tahrir Square. They also differed in focus, calling for reform but not for regime change or revolution.”¹⁴ Jordan’s protests, while a regular occurrence in Amman, never grew large or violent, nor did the monarchy respond with violence in any attempt to suppress them. Instead, the king wisely pushed preemptive reforms to placate the opposition and once again preserve stability.

The major actions King Abdullah II took in response to Arab Spring protests consisted of replacing the country’s prime minister, who was widely viewed as having failed to address severe economic problems, and establishing the National Dialogue Committee (NDC) in March 2011.¹⁵ The NDC was “charged with revising the electoral law and the Political Parties Law, and amending the constitution.”¹⁶ In essence, the king pushed an agenda of continued gradual reform. He assigned the NDC responsibility to lay the groundwork to eventually allow popular election for all positions in the parliament, versus the pre-Arab Spring framework in which the king appointed the upper house and the people only voted for candidates for the lower house. These concessions did not suffice to quell all dissent from opposition parties; however, the monarchy achieved its goal of maintaining stability, at least temporarily.

The peaceful character of these protests and the monarchy’s response in promising reform replays a familiar process in Jordanian politics. As Helfont observes, “Since acceding to

the throne in 1999, [King Abdullah II] has ordered several major nation-wide reform programs, each tasked with strengthening democratic institutions, empowering civil society, and instituting durable economic improvements. However, these initiatives ... have all failed to make a significant impact on Jordan's political and economic landscape."¹⁷ The monarchy faces the difficult task of attempting to please many competed interests, with not only his polarized domestic subjects, but also his irritable neighbors. Therefore, analysts must weigh the king's domestic political moves against external judgements, particularly from Western allies and Saudi Arabia. Too much immediate and truly democratic reform would potentially shift power from his greatest base of traditional support in the East Bank, the native Jordanians. The recipients of such benefits would be the Palestinian Jordanians from the West Bank, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, and the brotherhood's political arm, the Islamic Action Front (IAF). Jordan's two most important benefactors also hold differing opinions – Saudi Arabia is staunchly against democratic reform while the United States loudly encourages it. Still, through shrewd leadership, sound decisions and diplomacy, the monarchy continues to give and take as required to keep the peace and keep its alliances intact.

With complex problems facing it from nearly every angle, the Hashemite Monarchy still managed to emerge from the Arab Spring relatively unscathed. Certainly, the king made concessions; however, as with previous demonstrations, the monarchy controlled the extent to which the country's political landscape would change. Dissent and dialogue continue, but angry crowds do not riot in the streets and even its most ardent opponents have not called for regime change. Authoritarian dictators in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya collectively had ruled their countries with an iron fist for 100 years and yet were toppled. Political scientists argue that the

Jordanian leadership maintained power in part because the institution of the monarchy provides a focal point of social cohesion and legitimacy that restrains the desire to rebel.

Monarchs rule eight countries in the Middle East. With the exception of Bahrain, seven of eight survived the Arab Spring with relative ease. Bahrain, represents an exception as the “only Shi’a-majority population Arab monarchy ruled by a Sunni Muslim royal dynasty.”¹⁸ Not surprisingly, it experienced severe unrest which required extensive support from Saudi Arabia, which included sending in Saudi security forces to help quell the rebellion.¹⁹ According to Zoltan Barany, all of the monarchies except Bahrain share four major factors that enabled their leaders to weather the storm with remarkable ease.²⁰ First, as previously mentioned specifically with regards to Jordan, protestors called for reform, not revolution.²¹ Barany reports that “instead of calling for the abolition of the royal regimes, activists sought a shift from absolute to constitutional monarchies.”²² Second, protestors were neither well-organized nor robust.²³ Third, by the time protests reached the monarchies, participants had already seen the chaos, death and destruction that rebellion had created in Lybia and Yemen, and therefore chose instead to keep their protests peaceful and only call for reform.²⁴ Therefore, “security forces avoided the overreaction seen in several Arab republics and performed their tasks effectively without causing excessive casualties.”²⁵ Despite these similarities, notable differences separate the experiences of these monarchies.

The oil-rich Gulf monarchies had the luxury of essentially being able to buy their way out of trouble. According to Pollack et al., “as the tempo of the uprisings escalated, the Gulf states indulged in a massive distribution of direct subsidies to their populations and other large-scale social spending – the political equivalent of hush money, intended to quell demands for greater political participation and social freedoms.”²⁶ While this worked well for countries like the

United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, states on the other end of the spectrum did not have this option. Barany explains, “in Morocco and Jordan...rulers needed to rely on political skills because their resources were inadequate to purchase sociopolitical tranquility, even if they were financially assisted by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf kingdoms. Both continued their decade-long practice of promising major political reforms while in reality making only modest concessions.”²⁷ While the rich Gulf countries shelled out subsidies, this alone does not explain how they escaped more strident demands. The protests remained restrained all across the board in the monarchies, except for Bahrain. Barany also noted, “compared to the full-blown uprisings elsewhere in the Arab world, two of the Gulf Cooperation Council’s member states (Qatar and the UAE) were essentially unaffected by turmoil while two others (Oman and Saudi Arabia) faced only minor demonstrations.”²⁸ As an example of the economic boon that the rich states dispersed to their citizens, Kuwait gave every citizen \$3,500 in February 2011, declared all basic food items would be free until March 2012, and the parliament passed a \$70 billion budget programming future subsidies and salary increases for government employees and the military.²⁹ In spite of this, after a demonstration in which protestors and even some members of parliament stormed a government building, Kuwaiti’s Sultan felt such pressure that he replaced his prime minister and some other cabinet members.³⁰ While these monarchies used money as a tool to survive the season of protest, it does not suffice to say how they emerged in good standing.

Democracy in the Middle East inarguably carries a different meaning than it does in the United States. From a Westerner’s viewpoint, democracy is freedom and liberty for all, essentially the only form of government worth supporting. To many people in the Middle East who have watched fellow Arabs in other states try to implement democratic reforms and suffer destructive results, democracy does not inspire the same enthusiasm. Monarchs boldly point

these facts out to critics in the West and to their own citizens. In the 1950s, “the removal of kings in Egypt, Iraq, Syria or Libya ultimately gave rise to military regimes coated in a veneer of republicanism and iced with leaders like Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi or Hosni Mubarak who all hoped to create their own dynasties. Political repression, mass jailings and heavy-handed surveillance had failed to protect those men from the upheaval of 2011.”³¹ The results of the rebellions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen at first glance offer no reason to call living under a king any worse than a failed attempt at democratic reform. According to Noueihed and Warren, “the popularity of religious parties in 2011 and 2012 raised another terrifying spectre. Like the Nazis in 1932, some now argued, Islamists might embrace democracy until it brought them the desired amount of seats in parliament, then they would cancel polls and declare an Islamic state.”³² Liberal democratic reformists in Egypt paved the way for Mubarak’s overthrow, only to find themselves persecuted again as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood took control of the country. The fact that the Egyptian military eventually stepped in to remove President Mohammed Morsi only makes these problems more intractable. Thus what began as a movement of common citizens calling for democratic reform fell to a government of Islamist control, and then to deeper repression by the military regime following.

The world watches as the results of the Arab Spring continue to play out, and wonders whether 2011 represented an anomaly or a precursor of much greater turmoil yet to come. Globalization and the information age will continue to impact whether or not the ruling families of the monarchies can maintain power. According to Noueihed and Warren, the balance hinges on several key factors, such as “their reserves of legitimacy and goodwill, the strength of domestic demands for change, the depth of their pockets, the external pressures they have to face, and how the new-look regimes shape up. Like all the authoritarian regimes that fell in

2011, the Arab monarchies suffer underlying social, economic and political imbalances that have the potential to tip over into serious upheaval unless handled with utmost care.”³³ Handling with care accurately describes how the Hashemite Monarchy, under much tougher conditions, has been able to maneuver through many challenges including the Arab Spring.

The second major factor enabling Jordanian leadership to retain power through the Arab Spring is that the king and his supporting coalition, by virtue of its self-confidence, identity and extensive experience made better decisions in response to the external events that triggered bigger, more sustained protests elsewhere. Without the luxury of expansive wealth to throw at the problem, King Abdullah II and his coalition had to make concessions where applicable, but they could stand firm when necessary. According to Barany, “not having the financial resources to purchase social peace, King Mohammed VI of Morocco and King Abdullah II of Jordan responded to demands for reform with tactics they have long mastered: manipulation, co-option, and minor concessions masked as major reforms. They projected willingness to compromise and carefully calibrated the actions of their coercive agencies to avoid the clumsy overreaction of other rulers in the region.”³⁴ The demonstrations were remarkably small in Jordan – a mere 7,000 to 10,000 people gathered at the largest of them, all on March 24 and 25, 2011.³⁵ Barany elaborates, “the protests in Jordan started as, and for the most part remained, sit-ins after the Friday prayers ... according to a Jordanian poll, 80 percent of respondents did not support the protests, 55 percent thought they led to chaos, and 15 percent viewed them as unnecessary and useless.”³⁶ While protests remained peaceful and relatively small compared to other Arab countries, Jordanian leadership still astutely took measures to ensure it did not underestimate potential ramifications.

In a rather ironic turn, the protestors actually got a small taste of what the regime has had to do to maintain the peace in a polarized country. One of the primary reasons the protests remained so small was the simple fact that, in spite of more citizens wanting reform, they could not agree among themselves on a single agenda. Barany described, “the demonstrators were urban intellectuals, tribal-based people from the south, and members of the ... IAF ... which is well integrated into Jordan’s political landscape. The deep social divide between Transjordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin effectively limited the protests because few Palestinians would join demonstrations that, to a considerable extent, were directed against their ostensibly disproportionately large influence on the state.”³⁷ While Transjordanians enjoyed a larger role in the public sector with parliamentary positions, Palestinian Jordanians had become more successful in the private sector. Neither side trusted the other enough to join forces in any meaningful way during the protests.

Allowing protestors to demonstrate peacefully – but under close watch – constituted one of the most critical strategies the Hashemite monarchy employed. The regime has applied this strategy effectively since the early 1990s.³⁸ According to Barany, both the Moroccan and Jordanian regimes “allowed peaceful demonstrations under heavy police presence. When rallies threatened to become too unruly, when the organizers were not known to the authorities, or when the location of the protests was inconvenient – for instance, a demonstration could not be contained to a certain area or it could paralyze a business or government district – both regimes clamped down with security forces and progovernment thugs (baltagiya) causing a number of casualties.”³⁹ However, the Jordanian authority’s response remained carefully measured throughout, to ensure it did not incite further protests and violence – as had happened in other countries.

In addition to carefully managing responses to protests with his security forces, King Abdullah II acted quickly to engage protestors' concerns. He publicly demonstrated flexibility and promptly addressed their demands.⁴⁰ Barany relayed, "he promised \$500 million to increase public sector salaries, raised the minimum wage, augmented fuel subsidies, removed unpopular prime ministers (three in fifteen months), met with leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, visited strategically important constituencies, and formed a committee to prepare a new electoral law and to consider constitutional reforms."⁴¹ In one of his most strategic publicity moves, he also won support by detaining his former chief of the intelligent service, who was widely regarded as highly corrupt.⁴²

In June 2011, the NDC presented 42, mostly minor, amendments to the constitution, which included provisions to establish a constitutional court, restrict the government's power to issue temporary laws, limit extrajudicial trials, create an election oversight committee, and restrain the power of the shadowy State Security Court.⁴³ However, Barany said, "other than losing the ability to indefinitely postpone elections, no restrictions were placed on the king's authority."⁴⁴ This should not necessarily be surprising. The basis of the protests called for reform, not regime change. Additionally, the Hashemite Monarchy played the game – with 42 examples of reform – while retaining its power, in the belief that this offered the best means to secure stability for the country.

While Jordanian leadership made wise moves to avoid a revolution during the Arab Spring, Ryan said between 2011-13, "it did see political instability in the form of five different prime ministers and six different governments ... The Hashemite regime has historically maintained stability by using a strategy of coopting elites by bringing them into the ruling system. Prime ministers and governments (all royal appointees) are reshuffled periodically ... so

that many share a sense of having a deep stake in the status quo.”⁴⁵ The king’s strategy of creating allies across the political spectrum assisted the monarchy in maintaining stability.

The legitimacy of a monarchy and astute political moves by the Jordanian regime set the table for the government’s success in moving through the Arab Spring with relative ease, but the country still required support from external sources. The monarchy received and continues to receive critical aid from its Western allies and fellow Middle Eastern monarchies, most prominently, Saudi Arabia. Many of the policies the kingdom has adopted, which created domestic strife from certain sectors of the population, represent efforts to garner financial support from outside patrons, money the country so desperately needs to take care of its citizens. According to Ryan, “defusing potentially revolutionary pressures from within was part of the regime’s strategy, but equally important was using foreign policy to ensure that the kingdom would have powerful backers to help it survive.”⁴⁶ Jordan has long enjoyed extensive support from the United States – politically, economically and militarily. Ryan continued, “Jordan has been a strong ally of the United States since the earliest days of the Cold War. During the long reign of King Hussein, Jordan positioned itself as a conservative anti-communist bulwark in the region, making itself a key recipient of U.S. foreign aid. This aid has been vital to the kingdom, as it is not blessed with oil or other lucrative natural resources.”⁴⁷ With constant turmoil in the West Bank, a raging civil war to the north in Syria, and Iraq in a state of disarray to its east, Jordan can only look safely to the south.

Looking internally reveals economic issues due to lack of resources and the growing burden of supporting refugees fleeing its neighbors, while domestic pressures from the Palestinian Jordanians, the Transjordanians, the Muslim Brotherhood and the IAF abound. Ryan summarized, “this chronic insecurity, combined with the lack of natural resources, has led the

regime to place a premium on retaining powerful allies. Maintaining and deepening its relationship with the United States remains a top foreign policy goal.”⁴⁸ Jordan’s fragile stability remains heavily dependent on both economic and military foreign aid.”⁴⁹

As one of only two Arab nations to officially sign a peace treaty with Israel, Jordanian leadership guaranteed itself two things: continuous support from the West and continuous struggles from within its borders along with varying degrees of animosity from its neighbors throughout the region. When King Hussein signed the treaty in 1994, he did so knowing that economic and military support from the United States and Europe represented the most important strategic avenue to enable his country’s survival. Surprisingly, signing the treaty did not negatively affect relations with the regime’s primary in-country opposition – the Muslim Brotherhood.

According to Patel, since its inception, “the Brotherhood was allowed, even encouraged, to expand throughout the Kingdom when it offered an alternative to pan-Arab and leftist movements that the monarchy considered a greater threat than political Islamism.”⁵⁰ The Brotherhood accepted this strategy and reciprocated by avoiding any forceful, direct challenge to the monarchy. Patel continued, “the Brotherhood never challenged the legitimacy of the Hashemite regime, including during the 1970-71 Jordanian Civil War and after the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty of 1994. The consistency of this relationship differentiates the Jordanian Islamic Movement from its sister movements elsewhere, where periods of persecution and suppression by regimes impacted Islamists’ organization, leadership, strategy, and habits of thought and behavior.”⁵¹ The sources of Muslim Brotherhood doctrine do not give confidence that this policy of accommodation and pragmatism will continue in the long term, but in Jordan, it has

certainly worked thus far. Another key aspect of the regime's agenda to garner international support has been to establish a rational, tolerant approach to religious and political differences.

In addition to being just one of two Arab countries to sign a peace treaty with Israel, Jordanian leadership has also embraced the Christians within its population. This could be viewed as another astutely political move but with neighbors like it has, it speaks volumes. His Royal Highness Prince El-Hassan bin Talal is the uncle of King Abdullah II and the founder of "the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies, an Amman-based institution that engages in the interdisciplinary study of religion and religious issues, 'with particular reference to Christianity in Arab and Islamic society.'"⁵² According to El-Hassan, "Jordanian Christians (and Jordanian Muslims for that matter) are part of a society with a long tradition of mutual respect. In the twentieth century, this respect has been renewed and extended thanks to An-Nahda, or as it is known in English, the renaissance movement, which is the basis of Hashemite political thinking."⁵³ Jordan's progressive nature in pursuit of peaceful relations is astounding, considering the challenges the country faces in its own neighborhood, but the Hashemite Monarchy continues to challenge status quo measures in the Middle East. These actions earn points with the West, but Jordan has also wisely established strong relations with many other states.

As a fellow Sunni monarchy, Jordan has enjoyed benefits of support from a coalition of predominantly Gulf coast states, even though, like Morocco, it differs from them due to its lack of oil resources. When the Arab Spring burned in high gear in 2011, Saudi Arabia invited both countries to join the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in order to enhance solidarity against the building storm. Jordan jumped at the opportunity but as things cooled down, so did the vigor of the invitation. Nevertheless, Ryan said, "Jordan had so often turned to the wealthy GCC states to

bail it out of difficult economic situations, that it had a vested interest in the stability and survival of its sometime-allies in the GCC.”⁵⁴ Jordan looked at its relations with the GCC in terms of a common threat in an ever-expanding power in Iran. According to Ryan, “given its dire economic straits and strategic and security concerns regarding Syria, Iraq and Iran, Jordan gratefully grasped the possibility of joining the GCC.”⁵⁵ While it remains to be seen even five years later whether or not Jordan will become a member of the GCC, Saudi Arabian economic support has been vital to its security.

It is interesting to note that its sour relations with Qatar and Qatar’s close ties with the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood seem to present the strongest roadblock to GCC admission. Ryan said, “Jordanian-Qatari relations had been problematic for years, oscillating between periods of rapprochement and recrimination. Since Qatar maintained strong ties to Jordan’s large Muslim Brotherhood organization, and hence ties to the single largest opposition group in the kingdom, Jordanian-Qatari relations were at all times tenuous, with Jordan by far the more vulnerable party.”⁵⁶ This illustrates the precarious diplomatic context in which the Hashemite Monarchy must continue to balance. It would be difficult to argue that Qatar would have the same antagonistic approach to relations with Jordan had the Hashemite Monarchy not signed the peace treaty with Israel. Qatar, itself, houses the largest U.S. base in the Middle East, so its problems clearly do not lie solely with Western influence.

Looking ahead, the Hashemite Monarchy survived the Arab Spring with relative ease, in comparison to most of its neighbors. However, as strained relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and the traditional Jordanians in the East Bank have demonstrated, along with the standing issues from the Palestinian Jordanians in the West, tough times may yet lie ahead. The monarchy’s long-standing strategy of promising major reform and then delivering only easily

manipulated minor changes could very well prove insufficient in future struggles to quell dissent and retain power.

Government of the people, by the people, and for the people remains a perfect phrase to describe the United States' incredibly successful approach to government; however, the obvious key element in the phrase is the "people." American leaders must give serious thought to the diverse character and conflicting passions of the important sectors of Jordanian society and consider the delicate balancing act the government constantly executes when determining how to approach relations with Jordan in the future. Determining what the Jordanian people actually want and can sustain stands as the first and foremost question requiring an answer in order to establish policy. The author received training at Fort Polk, La., prior to a deployment in Afghanistan to live with and train Afghan security forces. During training, one of the instructors shared a story about a civil engineer project in a village. The Army devoted funds, troops to do the work and security to protect them in order to build a well to prevent the women in the village from having to walk a mile to the nearest water source. After completing the project, they had to return the village when they found it had been destroyed twice – both times the obvious assumption was the Taliban had done the damage. As it turned out, the walk to and from the river and the time spent there provided needed reprieve for the women in the village and they were the ones destroying the well. Therefore, the United States must invest the time to know what the Jordanian people actually want before deciding to "give" it to them.

The Hashemite Monarchy faces challenges from every angle. In order to help Jordanian leaders sort out what their people want, first and most importantly, the United States must continue to push Israeli and Palestinian authorities toward a peace treaty. According to Pollack et al., "one of the paradoxes of the events of 2011 is that they made peace between Israel and the

Palestinians both more necessary and more difficult ... Removing Israel from the list of Arab grievances would help Israelis and Arabs alike, but that can only come from a final resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.”⁵⁷ Until this treaty is established, the monarchy will be trapped trying to placate polarized opposites within its own borders. Much of its own internal disputes derive from the problems between Palestinian Jordanians and Transjordanians. Outside its borders, the lack of a widely accepted peace treaty between Middle Eastern nations and Israel emboldens even moderate countries such as Qatar to question the legitimacy of the Jewish state and therefore shun Jordan for its moderate approach. With Egypt, the only other Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel, still reeling from the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Jordan might become the only Arab nation publicly pursuing peaceful relations. Pollack et al. argued “because of the unrest, Israel and the United States have placed an even higher emphasis on Jordan’s ability to maintain its peace treaty with Israel and its stable relations. Whether Jordan will be able to continue to do so in the absence of a credible peace process is a question that is relevant for the first time since 1994.”⁵⁸ Implementing the long-awaited “two state” solution seems to only grow in importance after decades of unrest.

In addition to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Western powers need to engage with Russia to bring peace to Syria and Iraq. Jordan absolutely cannot be expected to continue to house countless refugees on a budget so limited it cannot address already prevalent domestic concerns. Nor can it be expected to be able to maintain security on its borders when credible threats come in from virtually all sides. With major economic problems already in place, the Syrian civil war forces Jordan to deal with an economic, social and political burden playing host to hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees.⁵⁹ According to Ryan, “during the first three years of the Arab Spring, when Jordan’s economy remained dismal and the political reform

process incomplete and highly contested, the Syrian civil war threatened to drag the kingdom into a conflict it was desperately trying to avoid.”⁶⁰ The rise of the Islamic State (IS) has also driven up costs as Jordan has been forced to reinforce its borders due to the serious security threats to the north and to the east. On June 6, 2016, a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb killing four Jordanian soldiers, a police officer and a civil defense officer, in addition to wounding 14 other people at a border check point. This prompted Jordan to close its last entry points to Syrian refugees.⁶¹ Ryan stated, “by the end of 2013, Jordan – a country of 7 million – was already hosting more than 600,000 Syrian refugees. The Zaatari refugee camp had become the fourth-largest “city” in Jordan.”⁶² While admirable, and critical to pleasing Western allies, Jordan cannot be expected to maintain this level of support while facing the severe economic problems it has dealt with since its birth.

The costly effects of the Syrian civil war extend beyond caring for refugees and increasing security. Domestically, the monarchy’s constituents have vastly differing opinions on both what should be done in Syria and what, if any role Jordanians should play in it. The war presents yet one more divisive issue in a country with more than enough of them already. Ryan explained, “many secular leftists backed Assad, arguing that the crisis was a Western-led conspiracy against the leading state in the ‘resistance’ to Israeli and Western imperial ambitions. Yet Jordan’s large Islamist movements, ranging from the long-established Muslim Brotherhood to a smaller but resurgent Salafi movement, called for the ouster of the Assad regime. Other Jordanian Islamists called for direct support for the rebel movement in Syria.”⁶³

The influx of refugees brings additional impact to Jordan’s economy and stability through the work force and has also negatively impacted the tourism industry. According to a 2015 European Commission social dialogue study, the country’s unemployment rate is moderately

high at 12 percent, but the report specifically labeled youth unemployment numbers as “alarming.”⁶⁴ Large numbers of unemployed youth have spelled major trouble in many countries in the region previously – look no further than many of the Arab Spring participants. The commission’s report states, “unemployment is high, especially among the youth and well-educated, and continues to grow, also due to the influx of refugees in the (informal) labour market. The labour participation rate of women in particular is at a record low (13%), and even in comparison to the other MENA countries is extraordinarily low.”⁶⁵ Instability in the region directly contributed to a 75 percent decrease in tourism and investments as well.⁶⁶ Already struggling economically, violence and unrest in Syria spilling over into Jordanian borders adds a burden Jordan has no capacity to bear.

Nevertheless, the monarchy remains cautious in its actions due to potential implications internationally. Syria’s President Assad has already publicly threatened the country for perceived interference in what he deems a sovereign internal issue, warning the monarchy it was “playing with fire.”⁶⁷ Ryan continued, “Jordan’s defensive moves to shore up its border also increased its internal and external security dilemmas in two ways. First, how to increase defenses without unintentionally provoking Syria; and second, how to ensure external security without raising the ire of internal opposition.”⁶⁸ As always, the regime constantly weighs options to maintain a delicate balance between opposing courses of action.

The Hashemite regime has long mastered the diplomacy of keeping the peace and maneuvering through complex and delicate situations; however, the rise of IS and the Syrian civil war test even its abilities to maintain stability. Ryan described the situation in this manner, “as it tried to deal with the internal and external pressures ... the Jordanian regime attempted, as usual, simply to weather the storm. But it faced intense pressure from Assad to stay out and

from its own allies (especially Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United States) to do more.”⁶⁹ The monarchy must continue to open dialogue with opposing camps internally to try to gain domestic support. Additionally, it must continue to work with its allies, particularly the United States and Saudi Arabia, to ensure it receives adequate economic and military aid.

Investing American capital in Jordan provides a critical avenue in which to ensure that Jordan maintains strong relations with a much-needed US ally in the MENA region. Even as the current US Presidential Administration shows signs of restructuring the budget to send less aid overseas in order to focus on homeland security and infrastructure, the need to continue to provide strong monetary support to Jordan remains clear. Additionally, unlike the \$1 trillion spent in Afghanistan—with mixed results at best—the Jordanian government makes excellent use of the aid it receives.⁷⁰ In 2015, Jordan earned honors as the Millennium Challenge Corporation’s “best country in implementing projects from the corporation’s grants.”⁷¹ As a strong US ally since the early years of the Cold War, Jordan has earned continued economic support.

Therefore, the United States must continue to work toward an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal, step up its efforts to bring an end to the violence in Syria and Iraq, and continue to support Jordan as the monarchy gradually works toward reform. According to Lesch and Haas, “Americans should have both realistic expectations about what is possible in the region and humility about their ability to effect change ... states in the Middle East and North Africa, even ones that have recently held reasonably competitive elections after overthrowing a dictator, are unlikely to become stable liberal democracies anytime soon.”⁷² The reality going forward paints a picture of unrest yet to come and critical steps both the United States and Jordan must take in order to foster stability in the region.

With the United States and Saudi Arabia, arguably Jordan's two biggest benefactors, at odds over political reform versus status quo as the country moves forward, both supporters must let the monarchy make the decisions it needs to make to foster continued stability. Various US administrations have erred in this arena in the past. As Ahmed illustrates, "the United States, convinced that it had to choose between a Muslim dictator and a Muslim religious leader, invariably found the former more attractive than the latter when it saw a rising tide of Islamic fanaticism."⁷³ This strategy has tasted little success. A royal monarchy may not be the liberal democracy American leadership would like to see in a perfect world, but efforts to force such governments on Afghanistan and Iraq – countries neither suited nor asking for it – have failed. In fact, as Ahmed continues, "as Americans struggle to either help the Muslim world or to control it, the situation only seems to grow more chaotic and to continually echo the past."⁷⁴ US leaders would be wise to learn from past mistakes and realize that Jordan may represent the best solution to bridge the growing gap between MENA and the West.

In sum, Jordan's leadership weathered the storms of the Arab Spring for three primary reasons: the institution of the monarchy provides a focal point of social cohesion and legitimacy that restrains the desire to rebel; the king and his supporting coalition, by virtue of its self-confidence, identity and extensive experience made better decisions in response to the external events that triggered bigger, more sustained protests elsewhere; and finally, the monarchy received critical support from its Western allies and fellow Middle Eastern monarchies, most prominently, Saudi Arabia. Time and time again, the Hashemite Monarchy has skillfully walked a political tight rope to keep the peace between wildly different camps within and external to its borders. King Abdullah II has proven himself adept in negotiation and compromise. The kingdom will need all its considerable political skills in years to come as tough times certainly

continue. According to Ryan, “it would be difficult to exaggerate the security challenges to Jordan today, yet many liberal and progressive reformists fear that the regime’s security concerns will derail Jordan’s own already limited and incomplete political reform process.”⁷⁵ Tough times remain ahead for Jordan, but if history has shown nothing else, it certainly tells one at least two things: the Hashemite Monarchy understands how to manage internal and external conflict and strife, and its leaders have repeatedly proven themselves as masters of finding a way to strike compromise in order to maintain stability in the country.

End Notes

¹ I wish to thank Dr. Jonathan Zartman for his thoughtful comments and suggestions. All errors found herein are my own.

² Dr Curtis R. Ryan, “Jordanian Foreign Policy and the Arab Spring,” *Middle East Policy* Vol XXI, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 144.

³ Dr Nur Köprülü, “Jordan since the Uprisings: Between Change and Stability,” *Middle East Policy* Vol XXI, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 113.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵ Jason Wessel, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan: A History of Modern Islamic Fundamentalism*, (Salt lake City, University of Utah, May 2009), iv.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

⁸ Lin Noueihed and Alex Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring: Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 251.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁰ Ryan, “Jordanian Foreign Policy,” 144.

¹¹ Dr. Curtis R. Ryan, “Oasis or Mirage? Jordan’s Unlikely Stability in a Changing Middle East,” *World Politics Review* (15 Jan 2015), Retrieved from Internet at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/14867/oasis-or-mirage-jordan-s-unlikely-stability-in-a-changing-middle-east>.

¹² Noueihed and Warren, *Battle for the Arab Spring*, 4.

¹³ Ryan, “Jordanian Foreign Policy,” 144.

¹⁴ Noueihed and Warren, *Battle for the Arab Spring*, 4.

¹⁵ Pollack et al., *The Arab Awakening* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 171.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁷ Samuel Helfont and Tally Helfont, “Jordan: Between the Arab Spring and the Gulf Cooperation Council,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (Winter 2012): 85.

¹⁸ Zoltan Barany, “After the Arab Spring: Revolt and Resilience in the Arab Kingdoms,” *Parameters* Vol 43, no. 2 (summer, 2013): 89.

¹⁹ Noueihed and Warren, *Battle for the Arab Spring*, 140.

²⁰ Barany, “After the Arab Spring,” 90.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

²² *Ibid.*, 90.

²³ *Ibid.*, 90.

- ²⁴ Ibid., 90.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 90.
- ²⁶ Pollack et al., *The Arab Awakening*, 69-70.
- ²⁷ Barany, "After the Arab Spring," 90.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 90.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 92.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 92.
- ³¹ Noueihed and Warren, *Battle for the Arab Spring*, 244.
- ³² Ibid., 263.
- ³³ Ibid., 245.
- ³⁴ Barany, "After the Arab Spring," 95.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 95.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 95.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 96.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 95.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 96.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 97.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 97.
- ⁴² Ibid., 97.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 97-98.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 98.
- ⁴⁵ Ryan, "Jordanian Foreign Policy," 145.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 145.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 146.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 146.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 146.
- ⁵⁰ David Siddhartha Patel, "The More Things Change, The More They Stay The Same: Jordanian Islamist Responses in Spring and Fall," *Rethinking Political Islam Series* (August 2015), Brookings Institution: 1.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 1.
- ⁵² Prince El-Hassan bin Talal, interviewed by Daniel Pipes and Hilal Khashan, *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol VIII (2001): 1.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 1.
- ⁵⁴ Ryan, "Jordanian Foreign Policy," 148.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 148.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 148-149.
- ⁵⁷ Pollack et al., *The Arab Awakening*, 48-49.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 169.
- ⁵⁹ Ryan, "Jordanian Foreign Policy," 145.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 145.
- ⁶¹ Rana F. Sweis, "Jordan Closes Border to Syrian Refugees after Suicide Car Bomb Kills 6," *New York Times*, 22 June 2016, sec. A8.
- ⁶² Ryan, "Jordanian Foreign Policy," 149.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 150.
- ⁶⁴ Arnout De Koster, Eric Oechslin, Mohamed Trabelsi, and M. Said, "Social Dialogue in Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan: Regulations and Realities of Social Dialogue," European Commission, November 2015, 78.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 81.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 80.
- ⁶⁷ Ryan, "Jordanian Foreign Policy," 149.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 150.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., 150.
- ⁷⁰ Derek S. Reveron and Kathleen A. Mahoney-Norris, *Human Security in a Borderless World* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2011), 19.
- ⁷¹ "Jordan receives award from Millennium Challenge Corporation," *Jordan Times*, 22 November 2015, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-receives-award-millennium-challenge-corporation%E2%80%99>.

⁷² David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, ed., *The Middle East and the United States*, 5th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2013), 524.

⁷³ Akbar Ahmed, “*Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization*,” (Brookings Institute Press, Washington D.C.), 230.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁷⁵ Ryan, “Jordanian Foreign Policy,” 150.

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