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MISZELLEN

POOR KID ON THE BLOC: THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING JORDAN

BY

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I want to relate to you what your King has to put up with in order to provide for the welfare of this country. On our Master's trip to Kuwait, we spent three days there, but the delegation failed to get a single piaster. (...) The Sheikh of Kuwait himself said to our Master: "When do you depart, my brother?" When our Master answered, tomorrow at ten, the Sheikh responded: "Why delay? It is better if you leave earlier." Think of these words and this attitude ...¹

Original Sin

Seventy-one years after Winston Churchill laid the foundations of statehood in Transjordan, complete with ruling dynasty, albeit initially for a trial period of six months, questions continue to arise regarding the identity, the nature, and indeed even the viability of the state project in a territory which historically speaking has never existed as a distinct political entity. Transjordan's sole distinctive feature consisted, in retrospect, of bestriding the pilgrimage route from Syria to Mecca. The demise of Ottoman rule did not leave it with cultural or economic particularities distinguishing it from its neighbors, while its settled population possessed no clearly defined characteristics. The inhabitants of the north and the west associated with Syria, while the population of the south had strong tribal and historical links with the Arabian peninsula.

Yet as part of the settlement which concluded the Great War by dividing the spoils among the Anglo-French victors, both state and regime in Transjordan have proved to be hardy and resilient. Contrary to oft-touted claims and persistent attempts at myth-making, the state's existence has never been seriously threatened, whether by Wahabi raids, or by Israeli expansionist policies. Carved out of territory that was to have become part of the Palestine Mandate its fate nevertheless has become linked to that of the Palestine problem. Fulfilling a variety of functions, first as a receptacle to host and shelter the Palestinians expelled from their homeland in 1948, increasingly as a pro-western buffer separating

¹ From the minutes of a meeting held by Prime Minister Bahjat Al Talhouni, 20.10.1964 with the Minister of Interior, Head of Mukhabarat, Chief of Public Security, and a number of district Governors. Captured Jordanian documents located at the Israeli State Archives, Jerusalem.

the Arab states and Israel, and just as significantly as a buffer between the conservative oil-rich Gulf states and the radical Pan Arab and revolutionary currents sweeping the Arab east in the fifties and sixties, both state and regime continued to present their usefulness to regional actors (e.g., the Egyptian Saudi rupture over the Yemen, the long continuing Iraqi-Syrian feud, the Egyptian-Syrian rupture after Camp David). From an international perspective, no sooner had the umbilical cord which linked Jordan to Britain been severed in 1957, than a hegemonic United States stepped in to take its place. The stability of Jordan was conceived as a necessary part of regional stability conducive to the guaranteed flow of cheap Middle East oil. Luckily for Jordan's rulers, maintenance of such stability was deemed to necessitate, from an American viewpoint, not only supporting the security of the state of Israel, but also the survival of a pro-Western conservative monarchy in Jordan.

Rather than having to struggle against impossible odds in order to guarantee its survival, Jordan has in effect benefitted from the super-power conflict in the region, the oil boom, and first and foremost from the on-going Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It has been able to augment its revenues at regular junctures, initially as a reward for absorbing the overflow of Palestinians after 1948, later as a front line state, and more recently as a result of the Camp David Agreement, and the devastating Iraq-Iran war. In truth, the misfortunes of others have enabled Jordan to thrive and prosper with the King proving adept at turning every Arab debacle to his financial advantage.

In monetary terms, Jordan has been able to rely on aid, grants and loans from a wide variety of donors, including Britain, the United Nations, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and of course the remittances which the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian-Jordanian expatriates deposited in the country annually. Both Jordan's strategic location and its political role continued to possess immense importance to regional and international actors. This has translated itself in generous financial aid and enabled the country to enjoy a level of material well-being not warranted by its resources or productive capacities. The regime's survival and prosperity served a multitude of interests, not least Palestinian and Israeli.

The Mandate Period

A myth has long held sway in Jordanian-related studies to the effect that Abdullah's arrival in Transjordan in 1921 was welcomed by the local tribes. From this it is abstracted that the tribal section of the country's population continues to be the sole stable backbone of the regime, and that the reasons for the state's/dynasty's survival and resilience are to be found in the continued support which the traditional tribal elite extends to the Hashemites. Nevertheless the historical record shows that the most vocal and effective opposition to Abdullah and to the perceived "Syrian rule" which characterized his early years, came from the tribes, who were eventually won over by a dual policy of coercion and co-optation. Indeed their conscription into the army and their employment as a traditional

form of praetorian guard, has made them themselves the elements of coercion. As for co-optation, this as the economic disturbances of 1989 have made clear, is an ongoing process which the regime can ill-afford to ignore.

In the twenties, a number of tribal uprisings were suppressed with British military support, while a tribal elite was created from the higher ranks of tribal society and won over by the conferring of government positions. The lower ranks were incorporated initially through military service in the Arab Legion, which to this day remains a sure path of economic and social advancement for tribal members. Thus it was the state that defined the role, the scope and the importance accorded to the tribes, who as a consequence of the gradual extension of the administrative system came to be increasingly reliant on the state for their very livelihood. Such domestic opposition as did manifest itself during this period was not centered round Pan Arab schemes nor did it aim for the overthrow of Emir Abdullah. Rather, the aim was to wrest greater influence and benefits for the tribal elite, which had developed a large stake in the continuing existence of the regime as their privileged status was closely tied to its survival.

Domestically, the Emir had a free hand, the only constraint being the size of the financial grant accorded by the British Government. Abdullah's interests lay elsewhere however. Transjordan was too small, too poor, too backward. Syria, and increasingly Palestine, appeared to be within reach. Independence, which was granted in 1946, did not greatly enhance Abdullah's position. Britain would not allow him to practice full independence in the conduct of foreign policy or in military matters. As for Syria, it was under French control, and there was little the British could or were willing to do for him, but eventually his subservience and faithful service to them was to be rewarded with the annexation of central eastern Palestine, including the old city of Jerusalem, as part of the ongoing dismemberment.

Both before and after the outbreak of armed hostilities in 1948, Abdullah tried to come to an understanding with the Zionist leadership in Palestine. As has been noted by various scholars, including those who are by no means unsympathetic to Abdullah, the Emir never accepted the possibility of the setting-up of an independent Palestinian state, and when he did send his predominantly British-officered Arab Legion over the Jordan, the intention was by no means the liberation of the Palestinians.² Indeed, the Legion had no plans to cross the lines of the state allotted to the Jews, and its operational activities were limited to those agreed upon in the pre-war understanding between Abdullah and the emissaries of the Jewish Agency, according to the lines approved by British policymakers in Whitehall.³

² The relevant British documents are quoted in the recently published work of the Israeli writer Ron Pundik, *The Struggle for Sovereignty: Relations Between Great Britain and Jordan 1946–51*. Oxford 1994.

³ For the wider picture of negotiations with the Israelis, the best source remains Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine*. Oxford 1988.

Annexation, when it finally took place after the election of the 1949 parliament which gave equal representation to the two banks (proportional to the population, representation was not of course equal), came about only after repeated consultations with the British. Indeed the British thought Abdullah was moving ahead too fast in trying to arrange a peace treaty with the newly established Jewish state. They were much more aware of the need not to antagonize his newly acquired Palestinian subjects, and to win the support of the Arab States for his peace strategy. It was noted by them on more than one occasion that he was unable even to win the support of his own cabinet, thus it often happened that in his emissaries' negotiations with their Israeli counterparts, Abdullah would take the side of the Israelis. It is thus not surprising that his murder in July 1951, while he was in the midst of secret talks with the Israelis, was attributed in some quarters, albeit without substantiating evidence, to the British.

Parliamentary Interlude

The period between the assassination of King Abdullah and the Royal Coup of 1957, which entailed the dismissal of the Suliman Nabulsi government, the proscription of political parties, and the declaration of martial law, was the only period when Jordanians were allowed to briefly experiment with parliamentary politics. For their part, the Throne and the small group of politicians that identified their interests with the continuance of autocratic rule, endeavored to maintain their power by rigging elections and intimidating the opposition. Any opposition whose objective was to obtain a meaningful share of political power was regarded by the regime as subversive and not to be tolerated. Then as now, any attempt to deviate from the traditional image of the kingdom and to have real influence on the decision-making process was perceived as illegitimate.

Nevertheless this brief interlude allowed for successful popular mobilization against the attempts to enrol Jordan in the Baghdad Pact, and in the ascendancy, for the first time in Jordan's history, of a nationalist government, which, aligning itself with the prevailing currents of Pan Arabism under the leadership of Nasserite Egypt, embarked on terminating the provisions of the treaty imposed on Jordan in 1947, symbolized by the expulsion of Glubb and the Arabisation of the Jordanian army. For a regime whose main stalwarts were convinced survival depended on a pro-Western orientation, the reaction was not long in coming. Nabulsi was dismissed, parliament was purged, and the United States was invited to replace Britain as the regime's financial mainstay. Hereafter, Jordan would revert to monarchical absolutism, or what sympathetic observers would prefer to describe as a "benevolent dictatorship with an autocratic elite palace system of power".

Regime Consolidation

Prominent proponents of the Hashemite regime like Wasfi al Tal considered that Jordan faced both a domestic and an external threat, though

both were inextricably linked. Domestically, the Palestinians continued to be an unruly element, and everything had to be done to assimilate them into the state by de-emphasizing their Palestinian identity and transforming them into loyal Jordanian subjects. Externally, Egypt and Nasser's "reckless and adventurous" politics seemed to threaten the independence, even perhaps the continued existence, of Jordan. Moreover, it was understood that relying on the West and supporting Western plans to defend the Middle East from communist subversion were in the traditional regimes best interests.

As part of the effort to foster loyalty to the regime and to create legitimacy, and in order to counter the prevailing winds of Pan Arabism, special emphasis was placed on fostering Islamic values. This led to the development of a special relationship with the Moslem Brotherhood movement,⁴ which alone among political movements in the country was allowed to carry out its activities unhindered more or less right up to the conclusion of the peace treaty with Israel in 1994. Over more than two decades the Moslem Brotherhood movement was able to build a network of mosques, schools, clinics, and other social welfare institutions (reputedly with funds given by the Saudis). This partly explains their spectacular success in the country's first-ever free elections in 1989, and the failure of the secular parties, which had suffered years of harassment and repression, to make a credible showing at the polls.

Throughout this period Jordan's policy rested on the twin pillars of repression at home and anti-Nasserism abroad. Already in 1958, British troops were invited back to Jordan to counter the threat of the Iraqi revolution and the Egyptian Syrian Union, while in 1962, Jordanian officials admitted giving aid to the 1961 PPS attempted coup in Lebanon. On the outbreak of the Yemeni revolution and the subsequent civil war, Jordan in alliance with Saudi Arabia, openly supported the attempts of the deposed Imam to retrieve his throne, while the establishment of the PLO in 1964 was fiercely resisted and portrayed as a Nasserist plot to subvert the unity of Jordan's two banks. Despite having to grudgingly extend recognition of the PLO in the face of an overwhelming Arab consensus, in practical terms the regime succeeded right up to June 1967 in prohibiting its activities on its territory and in denying its officers contact with the large Palestinian population within the Kingdom.

Domestically the years of repression succeeded not only in creating a relative measure of stability, punctured by incidents such as the murder of prime minister Haza al Majali in 1960, the outbreak of pro unity demonstrations in Irbid and other towns in 1963, and the unrest which followed the Israeli raid on the village of Samu' in 1966, but allowed the regime to try to project a liberal image without actually sharing political power or transforming the authoritarian nature of the political order. This accounts for the general amnesty which was declared in 1966, the release of political prisoners and the invitation to exiled political figures to return to the country. Interestingly, sections of the national movement,

⁴ Mary Wilson writes that Abdullah encouraged their activities as a counterweight to secularist groups who were pan-arab in outlook. See *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan*. New York 1987.

representing perhaps more indigenous Transjordanian interests, showed themselves on more than one occasion ready to engage in dialogue with the regime.⁵

The Reincarnation of Transjordan

The immediate and lasting effect of Israel's victory and Jordan's defeat in June 1967 was the loss of the West Bank and the increase of the East Bank's Palestinian population as a result of the uprooting and flight of hundreds and thousands of Palestinians. Geographically at least, the country was now back to its pre-1948 dimensions. Abdullah's nightmare was a reality. Only more so.

Defeat exposed the weakness of the regime. Its very legitimacy was challenged by the establishment of a myriad of Palestinian armed organizations and the ascendancy of what came to be known as the Palestinian resistance movement. This created a situation of dual authority in the country, though Fath as the largest and most important constituent group within the PLO remained ambivalent in its attitude. The challenge to the regime came from the more radical elements on the left. By 1970 the regime felt confident of its ability to reassert its authority. This is accounted for by a number of factors, among them the changed regional situation, Egyptian passivity after its acceptance of the Rogers proposals and the Palestinian organizations' condemnation of this act, and the domestic mistake of the Palestinian movement in not allying itself with a non-existent Jordanian National movement! Without allies, though still enjoying popular support, the Palestinian armed organizations were defeated and expelled from Jordan by 1971. This meant that the PLO was no longer able to mobilize its biggest Palestinian constituency. Soon after, it lost interest, the outcome perhaps of a more intense involvement in domestic Lebanese affairs.

For Jordan's part the next two decades were eventful. Developments followed in quick succession and the events of 1970/71 soon became distant memories. In Syria there was a change of regime with the more pragmatic Assad replacing Salah Jadid; in Iraq the ruling Baathists, as ever strong on rhetoric and short on action, were perennially pre-occupied with internal purges; and October 1973 saw the outbreak of the Third Arab/Israeli war and the re-engagement of the United States in the diplomatic process, leading eventually to Camp David and the first Arab Israeli peace treaty. It was also the period of the oil boom. In the meantime, war had broken out in Lebanon, and in 1976 Syrian forces entered the country in order to forestall the victory of the PLO and its Lebanese allies.

In short the regime in Jordan was no longer isolated in its hostility to the PLO, and despite the Rabat summit resolutions of 1974, Jordan con-

⁵ See Jamal al Shaer, *Siyasi Yatadhakkar*, London 1987, where he mentions meetings with prominent regime figures including the King himself. Also *Mudhakkirat Shaher Yousuf Abu Shahtut 'an Harakat Al Dubbat Al Urdunniyin Al Ahrar 1952-1957*. (Handwritten Mimeograph), for relations between the free officers and the King in an earlier period.

tinued to claim to shoulder the main responsibility for the Palestine problem possessing as it did the largest number of Palestinian refugees within its borders, and the longest cease fire lines with Israel. This was and continued to remain the basis of its begging strategy, and served the regime well in its efforts to raise funds. Both at Rabat and at the Baghdad summit in the aftermath of Camp David, it was promised generous financial remuneration.

The period from the mid seventies to the mid eighties was one of rapid economic growth. Jordan, although not an oil producing state, was one of the main beneficiaries of the oil boom of the seventies. As a result the public sector underwent an expansion which in its turn benefitted the private sector, and contributed to the steady growth of a middle class which was to assume a larger importance during the bountiful years of the Iraq/Iran war. The paradoxical corollary was that it possessed no formal political clout. Meanwhile the defeat and expulsion of the PLO from Beirut in 1982 gradually transformed the PLO itself. Soon the centre of its activity shifted from the Palestinian communities in the host countries to those living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

By the outbreak of the Intifada it can be cautiously asserted that there were no Palestinian politics in Jordan, in the sense of the acting out of a specific Palestinian political role in the Jordanian domestic scene. The Palestinians had become spectators, their focus on events in the occupied territories, and generally supportive of the regime which stood between them and a more chauvinistic Jordanian tendency (characterized by some as the Jordanian Likud as a result of its visceral hostility to things Palestinian.) Indeed with his close relationship with Iraq, which professed to be fighting a war on behalf of both peoples and regimes against the Iranian-fundamentalist threat, the King began to don the mantle of an Arab national leader, a role which had been vacant since Nasser's death in 1970.

The 1990 Gulf crisis and the war which ensued saw King and people, perhaps for the first time ever, pursue a common policy. The King welcomed to Jordan the over a quarter of a million Palestinians who had to leave Kuwait in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of the Emirate, while at the same time refusing to participate in the American-led alliance against Iraq. It is not an exaggeration to assert that the King was never more popular among all his subjects, both Transjordanian and Palestinian as he was in that period. Both the Iraqi challenge to the regional order and to the new international system which had not yet emerged in the aftermath of the collapse of Communist rule in Russia and Eastern Europe, and the forcible American intervention to restore the status quo ante, proved the midwife for the final resolution of the Palestinian Israeli conflict, and perhaps also the Arab Israeli conflict.

Both Jordan and the PLO had staked their bets on Saddam and both had failed. But whereas the PLO was made to submit and acquiesce to humiliating surrender terms, the limited self-rule scheme put forward by Begin at Camp David, Jordan was allowed back into grace with the promise that it will share in the peace dividend that many expect (with active American and Israeli encouragement) as a corollary to the outbreak of peace. The price was the breaking of ranks by becoming the second Arab

state after Egypt to sign a peace treaty with Israel, and the implicit understanding that the country's Palestinian inhabitants were to be permanently settled within its borders.

In retrospect Jordan's survival and resilience owes much to the defeat inflicted by Israel in June 1967. This proved to be a devastating military debacle; moreover it delivered an ideological blow to revolutionary Pan Arabism, and one which has led to the ebb of the previously swelling tides of Arabism. Thus Jordan's birth and survival owe much to the defeat of the Palestinians in 1948 and later to the birth and emergence of a sense of Palestinian selfhood which allowed for the development among Jordanians of a sense of collective territorial identity. Its creation and continued existence was an integral part of the prevailing trends that swept the Arab world.

British policy had early on earmarked this undifferentiated barren and inhospitable waste as a security buffer for Western Palestine. It continued to perform the same role vis-à-vis Israel when the Jewish state succeeded by force of arms to claim the British inheritance. An essential part of this role was the accommodation of the now homeless Palestinians. In this it has also been outstandingly successful. Amman is today the biggest Palestinian city in the world, and the nature of the peace agreement succumbed to by the PLO in the Oslo process, ensures that the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian inhabitants of Transjordan are there to stay. This provides perhaps Jordan's last window of opportunity for soliciting financial aid, a prerequisite for political stability. After all, there is nothing to prevent Jordan from sinking into poverty and joining other developing nations in having to eke out a living by soliciting international charity, in an environment characterized by an increase in the number of regimes whose stability is preconditioned on guaranteeing economic well being domestically. It is here that we can locate the key to the sudden conversion to democratic forms of government which since 1989 have been cautiously implemented by the regime. A changing international and regional environment, a transformation of the conditions that have made Jordanian survival a necessity to so many actors, has led to a search for domestic sources of support, and to a partnership with social forces which hitherto, and despite being economically nurtured by the state, have not been allowed to participate in political power.

Regional and Domestic Politics

Schirin Fathi's study of tribe-state dynamics attempts to show the importance of domestic politics and their contribution to the survival and resilience of the regime. Recognizing that most Middle Eastern states are artificial creations, their imposed borders not corresponding with existing and historically anchored allegiances, she views the state engaged first and foremost in a nation building project. Her tentative judgment is that Jordan has been a success story, though in the book's conclusion she warns that Jordan's "modern institutions might turn out to be a glossy facade covering a political structure that is deeply rooted in tradition".

In what is primarily an anthropological study, the writer makes the

case that tribalism and tribal loyalty play a less significant part in the workings of the kingdom than is commonly believed. The state, according to this perspective, is much stronger, having succeeded in embarking on a process of socio-economic development and having created a bureaucratic structure, it is undertaking a social transformation that has marginalized traditional tribal leadership, and is currently successfully working towards the creation of a popular consensus to facilitate a new assertive and positive identification superseding traditional ingredients. This is facilitated by the structural transformations that have accompanied economic development, first as a result of the oil boom of the seventies and later as a consequence of the Iran-Iraq war. A "new rich" class has been born whose interests mesh with those whom the writer calls *Al Muthaqqafun*, who are professionals, bureaucrats, and merit-oriented individuals, variously described as the salaried new middle classes. Their rise subverts the existing traditional socio-political system.

According to this reading, the new social forces are multiplying and diversifying, and demanding more civil liberties and their related values such as political participation and liberalization. When the first uneasy steps towards the restoration of parliament and the holding of free elections were taken in the aftermath of the outbreak of demonstrations in Ma'an in April 1989, liberalization was forced on the regime as the only option, other than barefaced repression, to diffuse the situation. The economic impasse, ushered in first with the collapse of the Jordanian currency in 1988, was augmented further as a result of the Gulf War, with the return of nearly 300,000 expatriates, and the loss of revenues as a result both of the international embargo on Iraq, and the complete withholding of aid from the Gulf states in response to Jordan's support for Iraq. Rather than a tactical ruse to stem the wave of rising discontent as a result of the state's inability to continue in its role as a "distributor" of funds and thus an attempt to share responsibility by implementing vital and unpopular measures, the writer prefers to see these policies as part of the process of integration, unity and state-building. She does point out, however, the danger of liberalization attempts where "the parameters of political participation are set by the rulers" and thus can be easily reversed at their whim. Today the only challenge to the regime comes from the right, in the shape of a combative Islamic movement that, despite a long partnership with the regime, now poses as a contender for political power.

She is, nevertheless, unable to reconcile her contradictory observations. Jordan is an invented nation. So what! The same can be said for a number of neighboring Arab states. All states and nations are inventions in one way or another. What matters is that a Jordanian identity is being consciously formed. Yet the country remains without "an institutionalized process of decision making", with the King as the system's "unifying essence", and his influence extending into all spheres of the country's political life. While explaining that "the army created the state", she is adamant that "Jordan is by no means a police state, despite the high profile of the security forces, the police, the mukhabarat, and the relatively tight grip they retain", and their role as an internal deterrent (currently one

fourth of the country's manpower is permanently employed in the army). The regime has succeeded in creating a distinction between, and separation of, king and government in the minds of most Jordanians. The King is the symbol of the state and as such is above politics.

Jordanians First

Asher Susser is also interested in the formation of the Jordanian state structure. His study is devoted to the career of *Wasfi al Tal* whom he portrays as the representative of a purely Jordanian politics, and whose story is that of the evolution of the Transjordanian political elite. This is the stuff, we are told, that forms the backbone of the Hashemite regime. Susser is honest enough not to leave us in suspense as far as the larger picture is concerned. The history of Jordan, he opines, is the history of its fight against the Palestinians; it naturally follows that *the life story of Wasfi al Tal is one of struggle against the Palestinians*. Paradoxically, Susser attempts to establish al Tal's nationalist credentials by documenting his activities as a student when he participated in bombing the house of the local district commissioner in his home town as an act of protest against British policies during the 1936 revolt in Palestine. His enlistment in the British Army in 1941 is characterized as further proof of his powerful foresight. He was acquiring the necessary tools for the impending conflict looming ahead. In the aftermath of demobilization, he was recruited in 1946 by Musa al Alami to work for the Arab Office. Finally, in 1948, he enlisted in *Jaysh al Inqadh* rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Nothing here seems to substantiate Susser's claims about an inherent anti-Palestinianism.

Al Tal first rose to prominence during the confrontation over Jordan's accession to the Baghdad Pact, as Director of the Department of Publications, a post directly supervised by the Prime Minister's office. In 1962 he was appointed Prime Minister without ever having held cabinet office, having graduated through various important positions, such as Head of Royal Protocol, and Director of The State Broadcasting System. Susser writes that it was already evident by the mid fifties that al Tal was hostile to Nasser's brand of Arab Nationalism and that he was convinced that Jordan's survival depended on a pro-Western orientation. Yet he makes it clear that even when he was responsible for the Broadcasting System and waged a propaganda war against Egypt, he was not in a position to determine policy. In Jordan, as Susser recognizes, policy is determined by the Palace, meaning the King and his chosen inner circle, whose members are by no means fixed. The role of senior civil servants and cabinet members is merely to execute policy not to formulate it.

If Susser's account is to be believed, and he is undoubtedly a friendly witness, al Tal does not come over as a very savoury character. In the writer's words "... there was no bounds to his capacity for distortion and attempted deception in order to justify the steps taken by Jordan on the Palestine question". Thus in the aftermath of the Israeli attack on al Samou' village in the Hebron region in November 1966, in which a number of civilians and soldiers were killed and which led to widespread

demonstrations in the West Bank and to the demand to arm the frontier villages to enable them to defend themselves against Israeli raids, al Tal held a press conference to defend the Government's actions in which he gave "a distorted picture of the events which had hardly any basis in fact", declaring that the Jordanian Army had "won an overwhelming victory at Samu and inflicted heavy losses on the Israelis". In his conflict with Shuqairy, he did his utmost to tarnish his adversary's reputation indulging in "total fabrication" and did not hesitate "to use the army when necessary to put down challenges to the existing political order". In the run up to the war unleashed by the regime against the Palestinian resistance movement in September 1970, al Tal, working in tandem with the King's uncle Nasir Bin Jamil, created an armed group whose purpose was "to provoke and antagonize the population so as to discredit the fedayeen ...". Although Wasfi al Tal was murdered by Palestinians in the aftermath of the PLO's defeat and expulsion from Jordan, Susser believes that he belonged to a faction within the inner circle of the regime, whose aim was to disengage from the West Bank and to disassociate Jordan from the Palestine question.

Susser's account remains unsatisfactory for more than one reason. Originally published in Hebrew in 1983, with a concluding chapter on the Jordanian political elite added to the English edition, the book suffers from the absence of any archival sources and is totally reliant on information culled from newspapers. It presents what amounts to a potted history of Jordan based on the premise that its history and development is the outcome of a persistent struggle with the Palestinians. Unlike Schirin Fathi's book, the domestic component is totally absent. We are not allowed a glimpse of this elite nor of the way its allegiance was won and retained by the state. Al Tal's policies vis-à-vis the Palestinian majority in the country go unrecorded. Even his relations with the Moslem Brothers, the only political organization allowed to operate freely, are not documented.

Economics is Politics

Laurie Brand's study of the economic imperatives underlying Jordan's inter Arab relations sets itself an ambitious task. The author's aim is to show the falsehood of common perceptions of politics in the Arab world, which she believes remain grounded in the notion that decisions are based on the political whim of a few men. While insisting that she is not putting forward "a crude form of economic determinism", she attempts to demonstrate the primacy of economic factors in analysing foreign policy in developing countries. Within the context of Jordan's inter Arab relations, she tries to show that alignments and shifts in foreign policy cannot be explained by resort to traditional explanations like *balancing* and *bandwagoning*. Positing *budget security* as a vital mainstay of regime security, which she succinctly defines, as maintaining the power of the monarchy and the small elite which profits from its continuing existence (not to be confused with *national security* which is more to do with the preservation of territorial integrity in the face of external threats), she goes on

to demonstrate how foreign policy is pursued to ensure and/or to diversify revenue sources, and to maintain an appropriate level of state revenues. The aim is to enable the regime to maintain its hold on power by continuing to allocate resources to strategic segments of the population.

Jordan's nearly total reliance on external revenues for its survival is seen paradoxically as constituting both the strength and the weakness of the regime. Not having to rely on internal sources of revenue has allowed the state a degree of autonomy from the people in the realm of both political and economic decision making. Yet as became clear in 1988/89, Jordan could not rely forever on massive influsions of external aid to support its "beyond its means distributional lifestyle". The financial crisis of 1988 and the drying up of aid meant the budget had to be cut and revenues had to be raised domestically. This threatened the successful formula which had fostered stability and regime survival for so long: support for the inflated bureaucracy and the Army (both Transjordanian, at least in the popular imagination), and the free hand given to the private sector (deemed to be predominantly Palestinian) to enrich itself.

Brand holds that to put forward a society centred approach requires evidence that sectors outside the state apparatus play an effective role in economic decision making, or at least in influencing these decisions. None exists. She believes that the absence of a civil society, and the weakness of the private sector are important contributing causes attesting to the non existence of "coherent societal articulators of economic interests". Actual power lies in the hands of the King and several key advisers.

The King's first and primary concern is of course maintaining the loyalty of the army and the security apparatus, consequently paying their salaries and providing for the material needs of the tribes which have traditionally shown their loyalty to the throne. Indeed the state in Jordan has been extremely generous, and placed very few financial burdens on its citizens. The standard of living enjoyed by Jordanian citizens, and the services and infrastructure provided by the state bear no relation whatsoever to the level of local productive forces. The government performs (or used to) its role in collecting and distributing external revenues. In exchange for the relatively high standard of living enjoyed by its inhabitants, and the lucrative wealth enjoyed by a small stratum of wealthy people, it demands political obedience, loyalty and stability. The members of the small business class are aware that in large part, they owe their well being to the success of the state in skilfully maximising its regional role, and in the domestic climate maintained by its security apparatus during the years of authoritarian rule and martial law.

By far Jordan's relations with both the Saudis and the Iraqis have been the country's most important in the Arab world. The tremendous Saudi sums granted over a long period of time have constituted the "most secure and extensive form of support" from the viewpoint of Jordan's budget security. In addition, the Saudis in 1975 agreed to cede fourteen miles of strip along the Red sea coast to allow for the expansion of the port of Aqaba. This enabled it to play a significant role in Jordan's economic development and well being during the heady years of the Iran/Iraq war, when it constituted Iraq's vital and only safe port (with Israeli

acquiescence!). Brand admits that in this instance, the most obvious form of "economic statecraft" was the Saudi use of grants and loans. They were investing in their own security, and helping maintain a buffer which in its own right was a bulwark against radical change. Yet from Jordan's point of view, the link with the Saudis was not altruistic. In the instance of withholding support from the American brokered peace at Camp David for example, Brand argues that by joining the peace process at that juncture, the King would have cut his own throat. He had a greater incentive to side with the anti Camp David coalition, for in so doing he was promised one and a half billion dollars annually for the next ten years, much more than the US had been willing to offer. The economic security rationale for remaining outside Camp David, she believes, is compelling.

Jordan's relations with Kuwait were second only to those with the Saudis in terms of aid provided. In addition, nearly half a million Jordan expatriates worked in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the majority of them in Kuwait. Other than the millions of dinars in remittances which they deposited annually in Jordan, the very fact of their employment abroad relieved the pressure on the labour market in the country and helped keep unemployment levels down. Here again the use of economic statecraft is self evident, though primarily on the Kuwaiti side. Kuwait was investing in its own security, and in fact co-operation in security matters was an important part of the bilateral relationship. Jordan's volte-face in 1989, by which date Kuwait had stopped being a major aid donor, merely illustrates that for such a policy to continue to yield benefits the flow of funds must also continue. Kuwait's response after liberation, in vindicatively punishing Jordan by refusing to allow the return of Jordanian "guest workers", and pressuring other Gulf states to withhold aid from Jordan, indicates Kuwait's persistence in using economic statecraft in the conduct of its foreign policy.

Syria's fluctuating ties with Jordan present the writer with a more difficult knot to unravel. Throughout the period reviewed, Syria pursued a seemingly radical nationalist line, and remained closely associated with the rival superpower. But more important it could not extend any financial aid to Jordan. If anything, as a confrontation state, it was itself in competition with Jordan in vying for Gulf state funds. Brand argues that this was indeed what constituted their common interest. Because of their dependence on substantial aid from the Arab oil producers, it made sense for them to make common cause to court the Gulf states with a united front. After the 1974 Rabat Conference decision to extend aid to the frontline states for instance, both countries believed that a united front would have more success in persuading the oil producers to part with their money. While from the Syrian side there was the added impetus of its rivalry with Iraq, and the need to thwart isolation, the twists and turns of Jordanian policy can only be understood as a function of the search for financial security. In the pursuit of this aim the King was embarrassingly shameless, and could and did change track effortlessly. Thus alone in the Arab world, he publicly offered whole hearted support for the entry of the Syrian army to Lebanon in the summer of 1976, while in

the late eighties his alliance with Iraq propelled him to support the Iraqi stance of extending support to Syria's enemies in Lebanon. It was reliably reported at the time that military material destined for General Michele Awn in Lebanon, was allowed to cross Jordan's borders. Previous to that in 1986, in an attempt to placate the Syrians, the King admitted in a public speech that Jordan had knowingly sheltered members of Syria's Moslem Brothers movement, which was then engaged in a campaign of armed violence against Assad's regime.

The establishment of the Arab Co-operation Council in February 1989 formalised a Jordanian, Egyptian, Iraqi axis that had been evolving throughout the 1980's, if not earlier. Jordan had indeed thrown its lot with Iraq as far back as 1979, and the King was one of the few Arab leaders to extend public support for Saddam's adventure against the Islamic Revolution in Iran. In the ensuing long war, Jordan was totally identified with Iraq, and when in 1988 Iran accepted UN resolution 598, the King travelled to Baghdad in person to congratulate Saddam on his great victory. Iraq reciprocated in two ways; by putting pressure on the Gulf States to give financial aid to Jordan, and by itself extending financial aid of all sorts, covering projects from the building of mosques and old peoples homes to the financing of the expansion of the port facilities at Aqaba. Indeed by the early 1980's, if not before, Iraq had become Jordan's largest export market. Denied access to the Persian Gulf as a result of the war with Iran, Iraq turned to Jordan, where the private sector, with government encouragement was eager and willing to serve as a commercial agent to accommodate Iraqi needs. Jordan's highways, transport fleet, and port system were modernised and extended to meet Iraq's voracious demand for imports.

Despite the absence of diplomatic relations between Cairo and Baghdad in the aftermath of Camp David, Egypt for its part extended important support for Iraq's war effort against Iran. This took the form of war materials and manpower (at one time there were a million Egyptian labourers in Iraq). Aqaba, under the watchful eye of the neighbouring Israelis served as the main transmit point for this Egyptian Iraqi traffic. This facilitated Jordan's own ties with Egypt, which had rapidly recovered after a short break in 1979. Already by 1982, Egyptian labourers in Jordan were exempted from residence laws and from having to obtain work permits. Full diplomatic relations were restored in 1984, Jordan becoming the first Arab state to do so even before the lifting of the Arab league ban on the restoration of ties.

Increasingly the cost of the war with Iran and the decrease in oil income reflected itself in Iraq's inability to continue its generous support of the Jordanian economy, and in 1988 Jordan's export credit scandal, inextricably linked to Iraqi business practices led to the collapse of the Jordanian currency and the ensuing economic disturbances of April 1989. Yet this did not lead to a shift away from Iraq. Jordan's economic dependence had become too strong to allow it much room for manoeuvre. As a matter of fact, the ensuing period witnessed an intensification of meetings and consultations between Iraqi and Jordanian leaders. 1990 was a year of heightened political activity. Saddam visited Amman in

January and a joint Iraqi-Jordanian position on the middle east peace process was declared in the aftermath of the visit. Later in the year an announcement was made that Iraq and Jordan were to form joint military battalions and a joint air squadron, while Hussain himself paid a number of visits to Baghdad in February, March and May. There might have been other secret meetings which were not publicized. As opposed to the view that the Jordanian-Iraqi-Saudi axis that emerged in 1979 aimed at balancing Syria and warding off the threat of the Islamic revolution emanating from Iran, Brand suggests that economic considerations were paramount. Put crudely, Iraq possessed the financial capacity and the political weight to play the role of Godfather. Jordan was in dire need of one.

Legitimacy and Democracy

Disappointingly the section dealing with developments since the Gulf crisis is notable for its brevity. The whole episode is covered in a mere eighteen pages. Brand attempts to explain the King's behaviour in not supporting the coalition, and she is hard put to make sense of the King's actions within her chosen framework of the primacy of financial considerations. In fact she uses the economic crisis which had undermined the ability of the regime to maintain its generous subventions to both the public and private sectors, to explain the creation of a new environment in Jordan, one in which popular opinion assumed an important role. The public display of opposition to the proposed austerity measures recommended by the IMF had forced the regime to retreat. It adopted a *survivalist strategy* by launching a process of political liberalisation, with the aim of defusing the discontent while looking for ways to improve the economic situation. In effect the regime was pursuing a policy of *sharing the blame* and with no small measure of success. By the time of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, the political system in the country had undergone a significant transformation. Free speech, political activity, and elections, had replaced parts of the former authoritarian system. The King, deprived of the tools of financial control, was unsure of the solidity of the traditional bases of regime support, and wisely chose to be sensitive to public pressures. Brand is of the opinion, that even with massive Gulf financial assistance (which for all intents and purposes had dried up) it is not certain that he would have been able *to muster and sustain the repression needed* to silence his pro-Iraqi population into acceptance of a pro-coalition stance had he chosen to follow that path. Thus indirectly *budget security* considerations lay at the core of the regime's rationale for choosing to stay outside the anti-Iraq coalition. One can take the argument further and suggest that the King's headlong rush into signing a peace agreement with Israel despite the opposition of perhaps the larger part of *popular opinion* among his subjects, was predicted on the hope that the United States, and perhaps even the Gulf States, would come to the regime's rescue.

There is the danger of course of broadening the concept of security to such an extent that it stops being a useful analytic tool. In her zeal to call attention to a hitherto neglected aspect of policy formulation, Brand

overstates her case and is guilty of the very economic reductionism she tries to distance herself from. No room is left for chance, or even human imperfections and foibles, let alone political preferences. This is rational choice at its most formidable. In her rush to factor in *budget security* as a primary ingredient, she tends to confuse the politics of regime survival with those of a conception of policy rooted in the national interest. Her narrative leaves little room for an analytic distinction between the needs of a small social layer clustered round the Monarchy, and those of the four million people who make up the population of Jordan. Is Jordan still nothing more than a security preference managed by an exiled Hijazi family who are bankrolled by various external interested parties? Has the nation building project failed to produce a distinct and specifically Jordanian national identity similar to what has taken place in neighbouring states who are no less *invented* yet whose legitimacy is not in question? Brand appears to confuse the continued existence of the state with that of the Monarchy. Without it, there is no Jordan. If correct at some past historical stage, this is no longer so. From this perspective, Jordan's establishment and continued survival owes everything to external factors. It was a regional necessity, and Abdullah and his progeny were the hired help brought in to carry out the task. Yet this very contingency has provided its existence with a degree of legitimacy which has grown, not diminished, with the passage of time and events. The unfolding peace process, which leaves no room for the establishment of Palestinian Statehood and an *ingathering of the exiles*, puts to rest any claims denying the country's legitimacy. Of all the decisions made by the British at the conclusion of the First World War, this one continues to demonstrate its correctness. There can be no peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without the existence of an Arab state on the other bank of the Jordan. In the long run, it matters little who is in control. The Hijazi notables have served their purpose, and it is this realisation perhaps that has impelled the King, in an effort to preserve his dynasty, to distance the throne from day to day politics and to associate it with the idea of the state, which is above and beyond politics.

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