Geographical Overview | **Middle East and Turkey**

The Situation in Jordan: An Overview

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The political management of Jordan's Arab Spring was marked, on the internal level, by the triggering of crisis "fuses" consisting of six changes of government in three years (2011-2014), that is, as many as in the first twelve years of King Abdullah II's reign (1999-2011). In contrast, keeping the Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nasser Judeh, in his post since February 2009, a minister who has thus held office under the successive administrations of six Prime Ministers (Nader al-Dahabi before the Arab Spring, Samir al-Rifai during it, and since then, Marouf al-Bakhit, Awn al-Khasawneh, Fayez al-Tarawneh and Abdullah Ensour I and II) is probably meant, in this period of strong turbulence on the regional level, to reassure Jordan's key allies – the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia – that its foreign policy will remain unchanged (EIU, 2011, p. 12).

Jordan, Regional "Shock Absorber"

For the United States, Jordan's commitment to peace in the region has long constituted a useful function in the international system, a guarantor of its national security: a peace that was embodied, in the wake of the 1993 Oslo Israeli-Palestinian Accords, by the treaty concluded with Israel in 1994 and whose maintenance constitutes a guarantee of security for Amman, Tel-Aviv and their American ally. "Shock Absorber" is how Sharif Abdul Hamid Sharaf, former Prime Minister (1979-1980), qualified the function carried out by Jordan in the Israeli-Arab conflict at the time. Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Jordan took in hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who acquired Jordanian nationality within the framework of the Unification of the Two Banks of the Jordan, proclaimed in 1950 and in effect until 1988, when Jordan disengaged from the West Bank (occupied by Israel following the 1967 Six-Day War). Its buffer state function was undeniable following the armed intervention of the US-led coalition in 2003 leading to the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime: the number of Iraqi refugees in Jordan is estimated at some 500,000 people (who are not necessarily registered nor have official status with the UN High Commission for Refugees – UNHCR). There are similar consequences of the conflict raging in Syria since the spring of 2011, the number of refugees in Jordan (idem in terms of their HCR status) estimated, three years later, at nearly 600,000 people (equivalent to approximately 10% of the country's population).

Dependence on Foreign Financial Aid

This influx of Syrian refugees weighs heavily on Jordan's resources and has increased the demand for foreign financial aid, on which it depends greatly – recalling the pertinence of Laurie Brand's work (1994, p. 26) regarding the links, in this semi-rentier State, between foreign politics and budgetary security, understood, as she states, in terms of the reproduction of the conditions necessary for the leading coalition to continue paying the bills, pre-emptively anticipate the development of the opposition or cultivate sufficient

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internal support to enable coercive power against such groups. Which means, in a budget situation subject to strong constraints insofar as both revenue and expenditure, that the State needs to procure foreign aid –a problem more broadly related to the regime's political economics.

Economic Liberalisation and the Regime's Political Economy

In this regard, the Arab Spring in Jordan was marked by dissent among the regime's traditionally loyal bastions, comprised of the country's "native" population, i.e. the "Transjordanian" population, that is, those originally from the East Bank or Transjordan. While explicitly echoing the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, the Jordanian Spring, far from appearing out of nowhere, emerged in the wake of a dozen years of political and economic reform (or attempted reform) put forth by King Abdullah II as of his accession to the throne in 1999 (Muasher, 2011).

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The neo-liberal economic reforms have particularly affected the Transjordanian sector of society, traditionally receiving redistributive public benefits in a neo-patrimonial, clientelist economy. Insofar as Jordanians of Palestinian origin (Palestinian Jordanians), who fell back on the more lucrative private sector and who are thus less dependent on the redistribution of government revenue, they have been less severely hit by the economic liberalisation (including privatisations), even tending to benefit therefrom; in any case, this is what their Transjordanian compatriots perceive. The Jordanian crisis, however, cannot be reduced to simply the rift between Transjordanians and Palestinian Jordanians; it is likewise internal to the Transjordanian sector, marked by a clientelist redistribution crisis between the elite and the general population, inadequate or unsatisfactory because it is poorly distributed in terms of repercussions for the latter and decried as "corruption" (Ryan, 2010; Vogt, 2011).

Political Liberalisation? What Is It that "the People Want"?

On the political level, the reforms implemented by the King have remained essentially cosmetic. The Jordanian political establishment does not consider them particularly in their interest, whether it be the strictly Transjordanian sector driven by rentier conservatism or "liberals," associated, erroneously or not, with the Palestinian Jordanian elite, who would have preferred the continuation of an authoritative form of government, believing it would allow liberal economic reforms to be undertaken more quickly, in particular privatisations.

In terms of reform, what exactly is it that "the people want," to take the currently famous protest slogan *(al-sha'b yurîd…)* used in different countries during the Arab Spring? "It wants" change, but at times in completely opposing directions (Ryan, 2011; Susser, 2011). Among the Transjordanian sector, for instance, there are two main trends. On the one hand, there is a protest movement comprised primarily of young activists new to the political arena who consider that, whereas the economic liberalisation programme has gone too far insofar as privatisations, political liberalisation has not progressed at all. On the other hand, there is a conservative, Transjordanian nationalist protest movement that, while sharing certain of the pro-reform movement's socio-economic grievances, wishes at the same time to retain its traditional privileges and maintain the underlying clientelist structures. On the political level, they fear domination by the Palestinian Jordanian sector.

The interests of the Palestinian Jordanian sector are defended by the Islamist opposition, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) the political wing of the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The leading political force among the traditional opposition, it does not seek a regime change but rather an in-depth reform with a view to its greater inclusion via a rebalancing of political forces. The electoral law benefits and over-represents the conservative, clientelist Transjordanian vote loyal to the regime, to the detriment of a more "political," dissenting (Islamist) vote

LEBANON WITH NO PRESIDENT AND TWO MILLION SYRIAN REFUGEES

Since 25 May, Lebanon has been without a President. With the two parliamentary blocs – 'March 14' and 'March 8' – unable to reach an agreement, there could be no quorum for electing a successor to the outgoing President Michel Suleiman. It is not the first time that this small Middle Eastern republic has experienced a presidential vacuum. In 2007, the assembly deputies were unwilling to accept a compromise candidate to succeed the former Head of State, General Emile Lahoud. An international conference in Doha eventually led to the commander-in-chief being voted in as a last resort, despite constitutional impediments. Once again, an international decision, taken mainly from Saudi Arabia and Iran, will be needed to help the country's feuding factions – Sunnis and Shiites, and their divided Maronite Christian allies – to choose a new Head of State for the republic. Another general, the commander-in-chief or even General Aoun may be elected to the post. The latter, a prominent Maronite politician, has been tireless in his aspirations for the presidency, which, according to an unwritten 'national pact,' is always assumed by a member of this highly influential and ancient Christian community. It is not easy to draw a clear picture of a country like Lebanon, thanks to its great variety of lifestyles, distinctive nature and the intricate way in which foreign powers interfere in its affairs. For over half a century, its territory has served as an arena for the conflicts of the Middle East, and now, in particularly, the ferocious war being waged in Syria.

"The problem with Lebanon – as one of its deputies clearly stated – is that it is not a democracy, but rather an oligarchy governed by a handful of local leaders that serve the interests of the regional powers, who are responsible for the country's fate." According to the Constitution, it is the Council of Ministers, under the authority of the Prime Minister, which provisionally adopts the responsibilities of the Head of State, although it is hard to tell what its prerogatives are, for example, when it comes to signing decrees. Do all ministers have to sign or just the head of government for pressing issues of major importance?

Lebanon is like a chicken with its head cut off, running about like a madman with no idea where he is going. There is no quelling the vitality of its people, however, who are once again absorbed by the World Cup and are only too used to the anomalies of its political elite, which monopolises the command of its 18 faith communities. In Beirut, the summer has begun without the desperately needed wealthy tourists from the Gulf, and with two million Syrian refugees continuing to share the people's daily lives. The situation is eating at the country's fragile politics and economy, not to mention its effect on the already scarce water supply. Offering refuge to its neighbours was an unavoidable, monumental error. Not doing so, on the other hand, would have been a dreadful crime.

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particularly emanating from the Palestinian Jordanian sector.

Reform of the Electoral Law (2012)

Beyond the political response embodied by the rapid succession of premiers, the King attempted to provide an institutional response by setting up a National Dialogue Committee and a Royal Committee to revise the Constitution. Contrary to the successive administrations of Prime Ministers Marouf al-Bakhit and Awn al-Khasawneh, that of Fayez al-Tarawneh succeeded in reforming the electoral law in July 2012.

The electoral system was modified, going from a single, non-transferable vote to a mixed single-vote and party-list proportional representation system, giving each voter one vote based on electoral districts and another based on national party lists. But opposition parties consider these amendments insufficient because on the whole, the system of tribal, clientelist voting loyal to the regime is maintained. The King seems to have shot his bolt with Jordan's 16th parliamentary legislature: in October 2012, he dissolved Parliament and entrusted Abdullah Ensour to form a new government with a view to holding early legislative elections in January 2013.

The January 2013 Legislative Elections

The results of the January 2013 legislative elections, despite the IAF's boycott, reveals the impact – however limited – of the changes in the electoral law: the number of Palestinian-Jordanian and opposition representatives rose slightly – partially the result of the greater weight granted by the new election system to the party vote based on national party lists.

Since December 2012, King Abdullah II has published various discussion papers on his vision for democratic reforms. It was in his second paper, published in January 2013, that he presented the new system for designating the Prime Minister, which would henceforth be done by him in consultation with Parliament. It is in this new framework that Abdullah Ensour was reappointed Prime Minister, heading the new government emerging from the elections after a narrowly-passed motion of confidence in April 2013 before it experienced a cabinet reshuffle four months later.

Israel – Jordan – Palestine

In July 2013, the United States relaunched Israeli-Palestinian mediation with a view to negotiating a final status. Results are slated for within nine months, a timeline to which King Abdullah II has undertaken to hold, reiterating his support for a peace solution based on two States, the independent Palestinian State wishing, according to the terms dear to the Jordanian leadership, to be built on "national Palestinian territory," recalling the firm rejection of any solutions to the conflict between Israel and Palestine where Jordan, as the *Jordanian* State, would bear the brunt, while a sector of the Israeli political spectrum toys with the prospect of making the latter the "substitute homeland" of the Palestinian people. The absence of a final resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been hampering progress on the Red Sea – Dead Sea Canal, designed to stem the latter's evaporation and assuage the water stress from which the region suffers. The situation seemed to start moving forward again upon Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority's conclusion of a regional accord in December 2013. But relations between Jordan and Israel have been tense since Israeli soldiers shot the Jordanian judge, Raed Zuaiter, at the King Hussein (or Allenby) Bridge border crossing in March 2014. The incident fuelled the generalised climate of "anti-normalisation" of relations with Israel and led to calls for the repeal of the unpopular peace treaty. Finally, in this delicate context of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the Jordanian Members of Parliament did not implement their threat of submitting a motion of no-confidence to Parliament if the administration did not take tangible measures against Israel.

Conclusion: A Resilient Regime "Useful" on the Regional/International Level, but Greatly Shaken on the Home Front

The role of regional shock absorber played by Jordan by taking in hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees has been further asserted since the spring of 2013, when the American armed forces were allowed in to defend its border with Syria – confirmation of the useful function carried out by the regime, in particular in the eyes of its American ally. Despite the unprecedented crossing of certain red lines during anti-government protests (in particular the November 2012 riots) demonstrating that the Transjordanian tribes' traditional allegiance to the State's Hashemite leadership is not unconditional, no political force of any weight has demanded a change of regime. This means there is strong underlying resistance to change, which can only prolong an unstable balance between a pro-reform opposition and disgruntled conservatives reluctant to accept reforms liable to undermine their traditional privileges.

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