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# Middle East Brief

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## Jordan 2011: Uneasy Lies the Head

Prof. Asher Susser

Jordan in early 2011 is in the throes of a serious domestic crisis. Only twice before in the country's entire history has the monarchy been challenged to a similar degree. In the mid-1950s, King Hussein barely survived the unrelenting onslaught of the Nasserist revolutionary tide, and in the early 1970s, Jordan just pulled through, at the very last moment, from the frontal assault of the Palestinian fedayeen, backed by a Syrian invasion, in the civil war that became known as "Black September." In between, in the early 1960s—when Hussein was still embattled by Nasser's regime in Egypt, which had yet to exhaust its exportation of subversive revolutionary fervor—the young king, taking his cue from Shakespeare's King Henry IV, Part II ("Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown"), published an autobiography entitled *Uneasy Lies the Head*.<sup>1</sup>

Hussein's characterization of his predicament could equally apply today to his son and heir, King Abdullah II. Egypt is once again the source of inspiration for political revolution. Now, however, the revolutionary spirit was kindled by the masses, who sought the overthrow of the regime built by Nasser and his successors, as King Abdullah braced himself for the immediate and longer-term fallout from Cairo's Liberation (*Tahrir*) Square in the streets of Amman.

In the annals of contemporary Arab revolutionary upheaval, Jordan is a case unto itself. It is neither Tunisia nor Egypt, where massive sit-ins and demonstrations eventually led to the overthrow of rulers who had been in power for decades; nor does it take after the ruthless repression of Syria,

June 2011  
No. 52

Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain. Jordan's opposition has sought far-reaching reform within the system rather than its overthrow, and the regime has a mainstay of popular support, which serves at once to legitimize the regime and to deter the opposition. Jordan has no doubt had its share of domestic difficulties, both economic and political. But both the regime and the opposition have drawn on a reservoir of moderation, which appears to have allowed for a relatively peaceful *modus vivendi* and for a gradualist, evolutionary approach to reform in place of revolution.

## Jordan's Domestic Unease

The force and intensity of the protests in Jordan, which amounted to weekly demonstrations of no more than a few thousand people in downtown Amman after Friday prayers, did not compare with the whirlwind of events that have shaken Egypt and other parts of the region. But they were surely cause for much concern for King Abdullah and his government—particularly in light of the combination of potentially destabilizing trends that have been at work in Jordan in recent years.

Like other Arab states, Jordan faces structural economic difficulties that have resulted in high levels of poverty and unemployment, recently exacerbated by rising food and fuel prices. What has made matters worse from the regime's point of view is that in recent years the original Jordanians of the East Bank, the longstanding bedrock of the regime, have had reason to express serious misgivings about Jordan's domestic politics, and some cracks have begun to appear in the edifice of the East Banker political elite.

Beginning in the 1970s, a functional cleavage came into being in Jordan whereby the original Jordanians governed and were the unchallenged masters of all spheres of political influence, while the Palestinians in the kingdom, constituting half or more of the entire population, dominated the economy and the private sector. When Jordan's economic troubles forced the government to reduce its spending, it was the original Jordanians who generally suffered the consequences more severely than their Palestinian compatriots, who were far less dependent on government largesse.

Over the years, a militant and influential ultranationalist movement has emerged in the kingdom devoted to the eradication of Palestinian influence and of real and perceived Palestinian economic advantage. Efforts by King Abdullah to introduce political reforms were often stymied by the conservative East Banker elite, who feared that a more liberal regime would allow for the greater integration of Palestinians into the kingdom's politics, at their expense.

The Jordanians concurrently developed an obsessive fear of what they called the "alternative homeland conspiracy," a supposed Israeli design to establish a Palestinian state in Jordan instead of in the occupied territories. They accordingly had a vital interest in the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza and not in Jordan. Jordanian nationalists were extremely suspicious of Israel's intentions, and some were especially quick to criticize King Abdullah for not being vigilant enough on behalf of the kingdom's national interest in reducing Palestinian influence in the country.

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## Expressions of Opposition

In May 2010, unusual rumblings of disapproval were directed against the monarchy from the very heart of the East Banker establishment. An unprecedented petition, intensely critical of the monarchy, was published by the organization of army veterans, representing some 140,000 ex-servicemen, including senior officers of the highest rank. They warned of a possible solution to the Palestinian question being promoted by Israel that would entail the forced emigration (*tahjir*) of Palestinians from the West Bank and the massive long-term resettling (*tawtin*) of Palestinian refugees in Jordan.

This “Zionist plot,” they intimated, had supporters in the kingdom, mainly Palestinian, who openly advocated refugee resettlement and proportional political representation—which would be advantageous to the large Palestinian population—and who enjoyed excessive influence by virtue of the appointment of Palestinians to sensitive positions in the highest ranks of the administration. The army veterans called for a series of practical measures to forestall these designs against the kingdom, and to restrict Palestinian sway in the country to a bare minimum.<sup>2</sup>

The petition was an extraordinary example of opposition from within the inner sanctum of the East Banker elite. Generally speaking, according to various local sources, as 2010 drew to a close, there was considerable “political anxiety” in Jordan. In addition to strategic concerns about the stagnant Arab-Israeli peace process and the impact of the global economic downturn, Jordanians were also becoming more concerned regarding the level of domestic corruption in the country, which had morphed into a “culture of corruption that [was] socially sanctioned and condoned.” Corruption was deemed to be rampant, as it filtered down from the “high profilers” to “all levels of government.” Jordan’s underdeveloped political system was said to be in urgent need of reform. The country’s under-representative parliament and its largely subservient media, which were “micromanaged by the government,” resulted in an absence of avenues for popular expression and participation and led in turn to occasional outbreaks of violence on the part of those seeking redress.<sup>3</sup>

But in the fall of 2010, irrespective of any such residue of “political anxiety,” all seemed like business as usual in the Hashemite Kingdom. The regime periodically generated expectations for reform. Parliamentary elections were held at more or less regular intervals, and frequent cabinet replacements or reshuffling repeatedly created an illusion of imminent change that never fully materialized. The

modus operandi of governance in Jordan was in effect an endless process of treading water that had reinvented itself for decades, continually offering an array of essentially meaningless cosmetic reforms.

The Chamber of Deputies had been dissolved by King Abdullah in November 2009, only halfway through its term. Elected in November 2007, in elections that had been some of the most blatantly fraudulent in Jordan’s history,<sup>4</sup> the outgoing Chamber had enjoyed little public credibility. New elections were held in November 2010 in accordance with the existing election law, which was based on a voting system that was tilted against political parties and reflected an unfair distribution of constituencies in favor of the rural tribal vote. It was heavily weighted against the urban constituencies that were predominantly Palestinian and significantly supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood and their political party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF). Since the law was custom designed to ensure the election of docile and conservative parliaments, the IAF boycotted the election, and the Chamber of Deputies that was elected was, as could be expected, filled to the brim with stalwart conservative supporters of the regime.

Prime Minister Samir al-Rifa’i, who had been in office since December 2009, was entrusted by the King at the end of November 2010 with forming another cabinet. In late December the new government received an unprecedented resounding vote of confidence of 111 to 8 from the 120-member Chamber of Deputies.<sup>5</sup> This was a vote of arrogance and detached disregard for the general public that the deputies would live to regret. They soon became the target of ridicule and scorn, vented on websites and by bloggers and the general public. Their unbridled confidence in the government lost them the confidence of the people.<sup>6</sup> With steadily rising prices for fuel and food and high unemployment, especially amongst the younger generation, the political system appeared to be in a state of cognitive dissonance. While domestic disaffection, even from within the ranks of the establishment, was becoming increasingly vociferous, Jordanian democracy was being exposed as a sham, with the men at the helm, ostensibly in a position of unlimited power and manipulative control, complacent enough to continue as always with the vacuous politics of routine deception.

It was precisely at this juncture, however, at the conclusion of yet another cycle of cosmetic change, that the crisis in Tunisia broke, rapidly followed by the breathtaking events in Egypt culminating in the overthrow of President Mubarak on February 11, 2011.

## The Whirlwind of Regional Upheaval

All of a sudden, in a revolutionary moment, the Jordanian leadership was at a loss for both words and deeds, as local tension mounted against the background of the popular uprisings elsewhere in the Arab world. The trouble started in early January in the especially underprivileged rural periphery south of Amman, which had generally been the focus of social unrest in recent years. In demonstrations and riots in places like Dhiban in the Madaba Governorate just south of Amman and the towns of Karak and Ma'an farther south, protesters decried unemployment, price hikes, newly imposed taxes, and general economic distress and called for the removal of the Rifa'i government.<sup>7</sup>

There were signs of acute concern in the leadership as it now appeared that the monarchy could no longer get by with just the traditional recycling of half-measures. On January 10, King Abdullah directed the government to take "immediate and effective steps to mitigate the impact" of the severe economic conditions on the people's standard of living,<sup>8</sup> and on the next day the government announced an aid package reducing taxes on fuel and raising subsidies on basic foodstuffs.<sup>9</sup> But these steps did not mollify the opposition; instead, protests, mainly in downtown Amman and in other towns as well, continued and in fact steadily gained momentum. The IAF, the most powerful and well organized party of the opposition, usually spearheaded the protests, alternating at times with some less clearly defined secular youth groups. On January 20, the government announced another, more generous, aid package, which included a cost-of-living allowance for civil servants, members of the military, and pensioners and provided subsidies for some basic consumer items.<sup>10</sup> Despite these palliative measures, however, a set pattern of usually peaceful weekly demonstrations after Friday prayers developed in late January and continued through February and March, regularly drawing a few thousand protesters.

The protesters condemned the neoliberal economic policies of the government and decried the privatization of state enterprises and the corruption that came with it; they called for the dismissal of the government, for the dissolution of Parliament (whose credibility was at rock bottom), and for new elections to be held under a revised election law.<sup>11</sup> Though emboldened by the uprisings in other Arab countries, they did not call for the overthrow of the regime. But the opposition was now determined to obtain real and not cosmetic reform that would include amendments to the Jordanian constitution.

On February 1, King Abdullah acceded to popular demand and dismissed Prime Minister Rifa'i. He was replaced by

Marouf Bakhit, a former major general and ambassador to Israel who had served a previous term as prime minister (2005–7). For most of the opposition, however, Bakhit was not the answer. Charged by the King with rapidly implementing "real political reform" and "reinforcing democracy,"<sup>12</sup> Bakhit was the prime minister who had overseen the "forged elections" (*intihabat al-tazwir*) of 2007. As the IAF immediately pointed out, Bakhit's public image was hardly that of a real reformer.<sup>13</sup>

As the crisis pressed on unabated, the regime put out feelers to the Muslim Brotherhood, the most powerful and by far the best organized of Jordan's opposition movements. Shortly before his dismissal, Rifa'i had conversed with the Brotherhood leadership; the King himself had entered into dialogue with the organization in early February, just a few days after Bakhit's appointment and following years of estrangement. Bakhit even invited the Brotherhood to join his cabinet. The Brotherhood, however, were not interested in cooperation with Bakhit—not only because of who he was, but because, as they explained, he was appointed by the King and not elected by the people.

The Muslim Brotherhood had made demands for constitutional reform as far back as 2005, at a time when political reform was being intensively discussed. Circumstances had changed radically since then, however, and the Brotherhood were unquestionably encouraged by the pervasive atmosphere of popular revolution that appeared to be sweeping through the entire region.<sup>14</sup> The Brotherhood and other opponents of the regime, both from the Left and from the nonaligned younger generation of protesters, now all sought formal limitations on the monarch's prerogatives. Governments, they argued, as in Western-style constitutional monarchies, should be directly responsible to Parliament and not to the King. It was the majority in Parliament, they contended, that ought to choose the prime minister from one of its number rather than the King; and the upper house of Parliament, the Senate, should be elected by the people and not appointed by the King, as was the case at present.

While the Muslim Brotherhood were spurning the regime's offer of participation in the government, Abdullah was dealt an even more painful blow from within the traditional establishment. On February 5, a group of thirty-six tribal figures published a harshly critical statement against the monarchy, similar in many respects to the statement issued by the military veterans the previous May. The statement spoke of a "crisis of governance" in Jordan and called for stern action against the pervasive corruption by means of which certain "power centers [an oblique reference to the Queen, and to other Palestinians]

are plundering the country.” The signatories demanded true democratic reform that would put an end to the present system of injustice and oppression, according to which governments were appointed by the King instead of being elected by the people. They categorically rejected the policy of privatization of state assets—which, they complained, was at one and the same time a main cause both of corruption and of national indebtedness, as the public coffers were “looted” by the practitioners of unbridled criminality. As Tunisia and Egypt showed, they argued, the power of the people was invincible, and if the regime did not move in the right direction, the immunity enjoyed by the monarch might “not be extended.”<sup>15</sup>

The regime reacted with a combination of rage and panic. Government hackers deleted the statement from the Jordanian website that published it, only to provoke another mini-furor over freedom of expression.<sup>16</sup> The regime followed with a campaign to intimidate foreign journalists and particularly to discredit Randa Habib, the long-time AFP correspondent in Jordan, who had first given the story embarrassing international exposure.<sup>17</sup> On February 10, the Royal Court issued a special statement denouncing her reporting as the “unprofessional” dissemination of “untrue allegations” about the Queen, based on the unsubstantiated gossip and hearsay of unrepresentative tribal personalities. The regime even threatened AFP with legal action.<sup>18</sup>

The complaints raised by the tribal figures were said to be quite common in Jordan. But the authorities did their utmost to prove them false and immediately organized massive expressions of loyalty to the King that were widely publicized in local media. Three thousand public personalities from all walks of life and the leaders of no less than seventy-five tribes signed statements reiterating their pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*) and loyalty (*wila'*) to the Hashemite monarchy and rallying round (*iltifaf*) the King.<sup>19</sup> The establishment press was similarly mobilized to denounce the “enemies of the homeland,” who shamefully served the cause of foreign agencies and institutions in an effort to erode the inherent loyalty of the people to the Hashemite throne.<sup>20</sup> In March, as the protests continued, huge demonstrations of tens of thousands of regime loyalists were organized in Amman and other towns to suggest that, comparatively speaking, the opposition had no more than marginal popular appeal.

## Opponents and Allies—and Measured Reform

The major activists in the protest movement were the longstanding opponents of the regime, such as the Muslim

Brotherhood, the professional associations, and an array of more than a dozen smaller Arab nationalist and leftist political parties. The protest also gave birth to a variety of new organizations claiming to represent the secular-liberal younger generation. These included the Jordanian Campaign for Change (*al-hamla al-Urdunniyya lil-taghyir*), nicknamed “Jayeen” (“We are coming”); the Youth for Change Movement (*harakat shabab min ajl al-taghyir*); and the 24th of March Youth Movement (*harakat shabab 24 adhar*), which combined various new opposition factions led by a group of leftists and Islamists, and by others who were new to political activism. It was never quite clear exactly who these groups actually spoke for, or what real organizational structure or following they possessed.

Working in the monarchy’s favor against this motley array of opponents was a powerful constituency of loyal supporters, albeit one somewhat less cohesive than it had been in the past. At a moment’s notice they would come out in large numbers to express their loyalty in what was invariably a noteworthy demonstration of effective mobilization by the regime. But that the regime could mobilize 3,000 public figures and the leaders of 75 tribes to publicly reaffirm their loyalty, and on more than one occasion summon tens of thousands of demonstrators to do the same, was not solely a function of organizational prowess on the part of the government, nor could it be attributed to coercion; rather, such rallies amounted to impressive displays of genuine popular support.

Even the critics of the monarchy from within the East Banker elite were not ideological anti-monarchists. Most Jordanians, including most of those in the opposition, sought to preserve the monarchy as a unifying symbol of stability and continuity. The Shura Council of the IAF went so far as to reaffirm the party’s belief in the legitimacy of the Hashemites, even noting that it was a religious duty to preserve the stability of the kingdom.<sup>21</sup> The opposition, however, was split between the critics from the East Banker elite, on the one hand, and the Muslim Brotherhood and many Palestinians, on the other, who had very different views about reform.

The Brotherhood and many Palestinians sought amendment of the election law in a way that would allow for fairer and more proportional representation. They called for the allocation of seats to constituencies according to the relative size of their respective populations, a demand that was intended to put an end to the lopsided representation accorded the rural periphery. The Brotherhood also supported the idea of a split vote, whereby voters could cast one vote for their constituency representative and another for a statewide party list based on proportional representation.<sup>22</sup> As the biggest and best

organized party, the Brotherhood would obviously benefit from proportional representation, as would the presently underrepresented Palestinians.

Such notions of proportional representation were strongly opposed by the East Bankers generally, however, and by critics of the monarchy amongst them in particular. The critics actually suspected the monarchy of surreptitiously endorsing the idea. Not all opposition parties shared the IAF's enthusiasm for a constitutional reform that would most probably give the largest party in Parliament the power to choose the prime minister. Such a change suited the interests of the IAF, but not of the other, smaller parties who had very narrow popular bases, if any at all.

In warding off the opposition, Abdullah professed a willingness to seriously engage in reform—the extent of which, however, he would seek to control. In his letter to Marouf Bakhit designating him as the new prime minister, Abdullah had urged the revival of the reformist National Agenda that the conservatives had stymied in 2006, and in particular he instructed the government to draft a new election law that would be the outcome of inclusive and “comprehensive national dialogue”—and that would also enhance the role of political parties.<sup>23</sup> Both directives looked like concessions designed to appease the opposition, however—especially the IAF, which sought fairer representation and more party-oriented, rather than tribal, politics.

The weekly Friday protests gradually morphed into a mostly uneventful routine, but for a while, they did help bring about an atmosphere of greater liberty and freedom of expression. Teachers, long denied the right to form a union, demanded and obtained that right. Journalists demonstrated against intrusive government control of the media; students protested government control in the universities. King Abdullah regularly reaffirmed his commitment to speedy political reform, to a freer press, to nonintervention by the government in the universities, and to a generally liberalized political system.<sup>24</sup> But in the more independent press and from within the opposition, the regime was frequently criticized for dragging its feet and playing for time, or alternatively for being obstructed by the reactionary forces of corruption within the political elite.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, on March 14, more than two months after the crisis began in Jordan, the government announced the formation of a fifty-two-member National Dialogue Commission. The Commission was to be headed by the Speaker of the Senate and conciliatory former prime minister of Palestinian origin, Tahir al-Masri, and included representatives of the various political parties and inclinations in the Jordanian

body politic.<sup>26</sup> The Commission was given three months to complete its deliberations.

The IAF, which had previously threatened the government with a protracted campaign of civil disobedience,<sup>27</sup> immediately announced that it would not participate in the activities of the Commission, which it regarded as flawed from its very inception: Its agenda related solely to reforming legislation regarding elections and political parties and did not extend to constitutional reform. The Commission's critics generally argued that it did not represent all segments of society: It underrepresented Palestinians and members of the opposition and did not, therefore, give promise of true reform. In their analysis, the Commission was just another device to waste time. Even when the Commission subsequently announced that it would add possible constitutional amendments to its agenda, the Muslim Brotherhood would not relent. Only a royal commission, they argued—with an unrestricted purview, appointed by and answerable to the King and entirely independent of the government—would suffice.<sup>28</sup>

But the Islamists had overplayed their hand. The regime, which had been especially conciliatory to the IAF and the Brotherhood, was now incensed. The Islamists also had poor timing. March 14 was the day the Saudis invaded Bahrain and seemed to have begun to turn the tide of the regional upheaval. As the months went by from January through March and into early April, there was no discernible change of any sort, and frustration on both sides began to set in. The regime's patience with the opposition was wearing thin as the protesters increasingly focused on the most provocative issue of constitutional reform, which was designed to clip the wings of the monarchy. The regime now responded with an occasional, albeit camouflaged, resort to brute force.

The first indication of what was possibly in store was an incident during the Friday demonstrations of February 18. A protest rally in downtown Amman was attacked with belts, sticks, and stones by “a group of thugs (*baltajiyya*),” who arrived at the rally from a parallel demonstration by regime loyalists and proceeded to injure eight people. Though the use of force was immediately denounced by the government, it was widely believed that the violence was deliberately instigated by the domestic security services, for which the government was naturally held responsible.<sup>29</sup>

Far more serious were the events of March 24–25. Deliberately escalating the level of provocation, the 24th of March Youth Movement organized an ongoing sit-in at an encampment at a major downtown intersection in Amman. The symbolism of their action, following in the footsteps of Egypt's Youth of 25 January, who had spearheaded the sit-

in protests in Cairo's Liberation Square, was obvious—and the regime's response was decidedly violent. Hundreds of regime supporters, aided and abetted by the gendarmerie forces at the scene, descended on the protesters at their downtown encampment on the second day of their sit-in, on March 25, with rocks and clubs. The assault resulted in the death of one of the protesters (who the police said had died of heart failure) and the injuring of more than one hundred people, including scores of security personnel.

Jordanians seemed to have been genuinely appalled by the events. The various fault lines of Jordanian society had burst into the open as hundreds of East Banker regime loyalists clashed with hundreds of protesters from the opposition, who were largely Islamists and Palestinians. (Many were both.) The media were awash with talk of internal strife (*fitna*) and chaos (*fawda*) and even of civil war (*harb ahliya*), and also accused the government of deliberately overstating the Palestinian identity of the protesters (who actually included many non-Palestinians) in order to incite East Bankers against them.<sup>30</sup> The opposition demanded the resignation of the Bakhit government, but the King and the prime minister responded with an uncompromising stand of their own. King Abdullah did not even acknowledge that demand and only reiterated his routine appeals for the preservation of national unity, while Bakhit and the pro-government media unhesitatingly blamed the protesters—the Muslim Brotherhood in particular—for having provoked the clashes in the first place.<sup>31</sup>

The message to the protesters was unmistakable: The monarch's prerogatives were off the table. Already in early March, during the confidence debate in the Chamber of Deputies (which Bakhit won by 63 votes to 47, a far more modest majority than Rifa'i's notorious 111), the prime minister had ruled out any constitutional reform. There were higher priorities at this time, he explained, such as the organization and development of Jordan's democratic structure.<sup>32</sup> In a letter to Bakhit on March 22, King Abdullah referred to many areas of necessary reform, but made no mention of constitutional change. On the contrary, he spoke only of the need to "protect the state and the constitution."<sup>33</sup>

At the end of March, after the violent events of the 25th, Parliament was even more unequivocal than the King in "totally rejecting" the notion of constitutional reform, accusing those who supported the idea of seeking the "dissolution (*taftit*) of the Jordanian state."<sup>34</sup> The regime's line in the sand was plain for all to see. On the one hand, there could be substantial reform in the legislation that governed elections and political parties—extending, as the King subsequently conceded, to amendments to the

constitution, if necessary for the redrafting of these two laws.<sup>35</sup> In late April, Abdullah appointed yet another commission, The Royal Commission for Constitutional Review, to propose amendments to the constitution, but only in accordance with recommendations that would be made by the National Dialogue Commission appointed earlier for the revision of the election and political parties laws.<sup>36</sup> In other words, change was feasible within the framework of the existing order, but the regime would not allow any tinkering with the monarch's powers—that is, with the framework itself.

The ebb and flow of the regional revolutionary tide had had its effect, then, on Jordan as well, with the regime and the opposition alternating in drawing encouragement or suffering discomfiture as the fortunes of the revolutionaries rose or fell in other arenas. Since the euphoric apogee of the overthrow of Mubarak on February 11, for the most part the revolutionaries elsewhere in the Arab world had made few gains. Curtailed by the military in Egypt, ruthlessly confronted in Syria and Yemen, thwarted for months by Qaddafi's men in Libya (despite foreign intervention there on the rebels' behalf), and quashed in Bahrain by a Saudi-led invasion, the Arab upheaval was by and large being contained, at least for the meantime. The Hashemites were given a breather; the opposition was surely disheartened. The power of the masses was not unstoppable after all—or so it seemed, at least for now.

April and early May went by uneventfully in Jordan except for one serious, isolated clash between Islamist radicals (variously described as *salafis*, *jihadis*, or *takfiris*) and security forces in Zarqa, injuring scores of people on both sides, after Friday prayers on April 15. These radicals, however, had an agenda of their own and were unrelated to the Muslim Brotherhood or any of the other opposition groups, which remained very much on the defensive. Moreover, the demands of these radicals were not about democratization or political reform; these had no place in their ultra-fundamentalist Islamist worldview. Rather, what they sought was nothing less than the creation of a state ruled by the Sharia. Theirs was an all-out confrontation with the regime, which they could not win. For the moment, all they wanted was for their some two hundred prisoners to be released, a demand they probably knew had no chance of being fulfilled.

The protests had petered out as the opposition adopted a wait-and-see approach in anticipation of the regime's promised package of reforms.<sup>37</sup> The first round of Jordan's mini-upheaval was over, with the regime ahead on points and still firmly in the driver's seat. What round two held in store remained to be seen.

## Whither Jordan?

Can the Hashemites weather the storm again? They have a substantial support base, some cracks notwithstanding, and therefore have a better chance than most countries to work out a new domestic modus vivendi based on carefully calibrated reform. Will the King show the necessary leadership? Will the East Banker elite rally, as it always has, to the monarch's side? Will the United States, or the Saudis in their stead, lend the required external support? Though nothing is ever guaranteed, the answer to all of the above (except regarding the position of the United States, which is hard to predict) is probably affirmative.

One should not underestimate the resilience of Jordan and of the Hashemite regime—as has so often been done in the past. Seasoned observers proclaimed over half a century ago that the days of the Jordanian monarchy were numbered. Those experts were wrong, and it is they, instead, who are long gone.

King Abdullah II is presently facing the most serious challenge of his reign, but Jordan, as opposed to Egypt, Yemen, and even Tunisia, is small in population and thus more manageable than most countries in the region. It has relatively large security forces and a powerful military, supported by what remains, by and large, a cohesive, determined, and loyal East Banker political elite: In their mind they are fighting for their political patrimony, and they do not have the slightest intention of giving in. Moreover, they face an opposition that, though determined, is far from cohesive, and has not been able to muster the force to really threaten the regime. And although it demands substantial reform, even that opposition has not, thus far, called for the overthrow of the monarchy.

How Jordan ultimately fares amidst the current turmoil will depend mainly on the continued cohesion and determination of the East Banker elite. The general trajectory of the popular Arab upheaval will, no doubt, have its impact on Jordan. But on the basis of past experience, one should not rush to write off the Hashemites.

## Endnotes

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# Middle East Brief

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Prof. Asher Susser

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