
Jordan and the Arab Spring: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

This article aims to make a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of the Arab Spring on the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In particular, it tackles with the question of how the Hashemite regime could survive the Arab Spring. Furthermore, it aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly debate about the resilience of Arab monarchies by trying to find out if the survival of the Hashemite monarchy during the Arab Spring has more to do with factors endogenous to the regime or exogenous to it. After analysing the main challenges and opportunities that the Arab Spring created for Jordan, this article argues that challenges that the Hashemite regime faced during this period either disappeared or are outbalanced by the opportunities it enjoyed, and these opportunities originated from both exogenous and endogenous factors.

Key Words

Jordan, Arab Spring, King Abdullah II, Hashemites, Arab monarchies.

Introduction

Unlike many Arab republics, Arab monarchies have not experienced any regime changes since the revolutionary currents started to sweep through the Arab world in 2011.¹ This situation drove scholars to write extensively about the main factors that make Arab monarchies resilient.² While some explanations underscore factors that are endogenous to the regimes, like legitimacy and institutional advantages enjoyed by monarchies;³ others emphasize factors that are more exogenous to the regimes, like the oil rents and allies (both foreign and domestic) that help monarchical regimes to survive.⁴

Among Arab monarchies, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is surely one of the most vulnerable because of its small size, poor economy, fragmented society and uneasy neighbourhood. Yet, in spite of all these vulnerabilities, Jordan so far has succeeded to remain an island of security and stability in a sea of revolution, turbulence and war. Since independence, the Hashemite regime survived two inter-state wars against Israel in 1948 and 1967, a number of coup attempts in the 1950s,

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a civil war between 1970 and 1971, and civil unrest in 1989. Under King Abdullah II,⁵ the Hashemite regime still hangs on, in spite of the destabilizing effects of the recent revolts in the region. Accordingly, considering its immense vulnerabilities, taking a closer look at the performance of the Hashemite regime during the Arab Spring has surely much to contribute to the ongoing scholarly debate about the resilience of Arab monarchies.

Between 2011 and 2013, Jordan witnessed periodic demonstrations protesting the government, demanding political and socio-economic reforms, and on some occasions, calling for the downfall of the regime.

This paper aims to make a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of the Arab Spring on the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In particular, it deals with the survival of the Hashemite regime in the course of the Arab Spring by focusing on the main sources of stability and instability for the regime during this period. It can be argued that the Arab Spring posed the most serious threat that King Abdullah II has faced since he ascended the throne in 1999. Between 2011 and 2013, Jordan witnessed periodic demonstrations protesting the government, demanding political and socio-economic reforms,

and on some occasions, calling for the downfall of the regime. Furthermore, political, economic and social costs of the ongoing conflicts in Jordan's neighbourhood put an extra burden on the shoulders of the regime. Although these developments do not equate with the mass anti-regime demonstrations in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Libya, they were severe enough to destabilize the tiny kingdom. That said, this article argues that the Arab Spring created very important opportunities for the Hashemite regime as well, which eventually outbalanced the above-mentioned challenges. Moreover, it contends that these opportunities are products of both exogenous and endogenous factors.

In the following sections, firstly, the main trajectory of popular protests and the regime's reform efforts in Jordan since 2011 are outlined. Secondly, a detailed analysis of the destabilizing effects of the Arab Spring on the Kingdom is made. In this respect, the study focuses on the rise of Islamism (both in its moderate and radical forms) in the region and its implications for Jordan; the Kingdom's deepening economic crisis; and soaring unrest among the East Banker population. In the third section, the article concentrates on the advantages that the Hashemite regime enjoyed thanks to the Arab Spring. These opportunities can be classified as increased foreign assistance; dissuading effects of regional turmoil on Jordanian public, and empowerment of the King's

image as a pro-reform figure fighting against the forces of the *status quo* within the regime. Lastly, in conclusion, an overall assessment of the main challenges and opportunities that the Arab Spring created for Jordan is made, and the reason opportunities seem to be more dominant as of 2014 is explained.

Protests and Reforms

On 14 January 2011, the same day that the Tunisian President Zine al Abidine ben Ali fled the country, protests criticizing poverty, unemployment and corruption were launched in major Jordanian cities including Amman, Karak, Irbid, Salt and Maan.⁶ In fact, the political atmosphere in the country had already been tense due to debates surrounding the November 2010 elections, which had been boycotted by the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood (JMB) due to its objections to the Election Law, and which produced a largely loyalist parliament.⁷ In the January protests the major demand of the protestors was the resignation of Prime Minister Samir Rifai. This was Jordan's first "Day of Rage" and it was organized by "The Jordan Campaign for Change" (Jayeen), an alternative reform coalition formed by urban pro-reform activists in early January 2011. Traditional opposition movements like the JMB, the Baathists and leftist parties joined the protests in the following weeks and called for both

political and economic reforms in the Kingdom.⁸ Their inclusion increased both the number of protestors and the pressure on the government.

Political reform demands shared by all segments of the opposition included establishment of a truly parliamentary political system in which the government is drawn from the elected parliamentarians rather than appointed by the King, and in which the parliament actually legislates rather than simply implementing the initiatives of the government and the King. In addition, they wanted a more democratic Election Law, which would not include the current single non transferrable vote (SNTV)⁹ system. Furthermore, they also called for more freedom of expression, fewer roles for the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) in public life, a more independent judiciary, and an end to widespread corruption.¹⁰

The first critical move of the new government was to appoint a 52-member National Dialogue Committee (NDC) in March 2011 in order to open a dialogue with representatives of various political parties, professional associations and civil society organisations about political reform matters in the Kingdom.

The government's first response to the protests was the introduction of some aid packages and salary increases, yet it was not successful in easing the unrest.¹¹ On 1 February 2011, the King finally bowed to the major demand of the protestors and sacked the government of Samir Rifai. In his place, he appointed Marouf Bakhit, an ex-general and former prime minister, and charged him with forming a national dialogue for genuine political and economic reforms.

The first critical move of the new government was to appoint a 52-member National Dialogue Committee (NDC) in March 2011 in order to open a dialogue with representatives of various political parties, professional associations and civil society organisations about political reform matters in the Kingdom.¹² The JMB refrained from joining the Committee because of its "limited remit, which excluded constitutional reforms."¹³ The establishment of the NDC, however, did not appease the protestors. On 24 March 2011, a pro-reform sit-in was organized in Amman's Dakhiliyya Square by the "Youth of March 24", a newly formed opposition movement consisting of mainly urban youth activists. The major demands of the protestors were essential political and economic reforms for a truly free and social democracy. On the second day, the sit-in grew stronger with support from other opposition movements like Jayeen and the JMB. However, an attack against

the protestors by regime supporters, which resulted in one dead and over 100 injured, dissuaded the protests over the following weeks.¹⁴

Nearly one month after these deadly clashes, the King ordered the establishment of the Royal Committee to Review the Constitution (RCRC) on 26 April 2011 in order to appease the opposition with the promise of genuine reforms. The RCRC's task was to revisit the entire Constitution while taking into consideration the recommendations that would be submitted by the NDC in June 2011.¹⁵ On 14 August 2011, the RCRC submitted its recommendations for constitutional changes on 42 articles. The following month, nearly all amendments were approved by the Parliament and the Senate with minor alterations and subsequently signed by the King on 30 September 2011.

The major amendments to the Constitution included, above all, creation of a Constitutional Court with "oversight on the constitutionality of the applicable laws and regulations" (Art. 58) and an independent commission "to supervise the parliamentary electoral process and to administer it in all of its stages" (Art. 67). The new provisions also limited the government's ability to issue temporary laws in the absence of the parliament (Art. 94) and obliged it to resign in case of the Parliament is dissolved (Art. 74). Finally, the King's ability to postpone parliamentary elections indefinitely was

removed with the amendments (Art. 73).¹⁶ Predictably, the amendments fell short of the expectations of the opposition figures who have been calling for a truly parliamentary government and reduction in the power of the King.¹⁷

In October 2011, the King reshuffled the cabinet once again and this time Awn al Khasawneh, a former judge of the International Court of Justice in The Hague, replaced Marouf Bakhit as the new prime minister. Bakhit had been under great pressure from the public and the parliament since his involvement in a corruption scandal that had been revealed in the press in September 2011.¹⁸ Khasawneh's appointment was received optimistically among the opposition mainly because of his strong international career and untarnished reputation.¹⁹ Yet, his duty lasted barely more than six months. Although he was keen in carrying out genuine political reform and fighting corruption, he came to be at odds with the King, the GID, and some parliamentarians over his proposed reforms, which were accused of favouring the JMB.²⁰ Eventually, he was forced to resign on 26 April 2012 and Fayez al Tarawneh, a former prime minister and conservative political figure, replaced him.

The main task of Tarawneh's government was to prepare a new Political Parties Law and Election Law, which entered into force in June 2012 and July 2012 respectively. The new Political

Parties Law encouraged formation of stronger and bigger political parties based on political rather than tribal affiliations. Furthermore, the Interior Ministry's authority to licence new political parties and government's oversight of them has been limited by the new law. Overall, the new Political Parties Law was considered "progressive" by the opposition.²¹ The new Election Law, however, fell too short of expectations. The major changes it brought were firstly, a mixed electoral system in which 27 of 150 seats would be allocated to the national level (known as the national list) and the remaining seats to the constituency level. Secondly, the female quota was increased from 12 to 15 seats by the new law. The opposition did not welcome the new law because it allocated very few seats to the national level (only 18 %), it did not annul the SNTV system at the constituency level, and it left the gerrymandered electoral districts intact.²² Accordingly, harsh criticism and protests against the new Election Law followed, while the opposition threatened to boycott the upcoming general elections.²³

Disregarding the opposition's dissatisfaction with the electoral reforms, the King inaugurated the general election process in October 2012 by dissolving the Parliament and reshuffling the government for the fourth time since 2011. Abdullah Ensour, a veteran politician and former deputy prime minister, was appointed prime minister

with the task of preparing the country for general elections. The road to the elections was not that smooth though. On 13 November 2012, when the new government decided to lift the fuel subsidies as an IMF guided austerity measure to fight the high budget deficit, angry protests swept across the country.²⁴ Rage increased day by day, as protestors shouted anti-regime slogans and damaged public property. Two people were killed and several injured in deadly clashes between the police and protestors.²⁵ It took several days before calm returned to the country.

The King promised to consult the parliamentary blocs before the appointment of the new prime minister, although no such provision exists in the Constitution.

The election schedule was not affected by the violent riots of November 2012. Once calm prevailed, the King tried to restore the election atmosphere and revive the public's interest in the reform process with an interview he gave to Jordanian newspapers, and with two discussion papers published on his official website.²⁶ In his remarks, the King promised to consult the parliamentary blocs before the appointment of the new prime minister, although no such provision exists in the Constitution.

Finally, the first general elections in the Kingdom after the outbreak of the Arab Spring took place on 25 January 2013. Despite the boycott of the JMB-affiliated Islamist Action Front (IAF) and numerous leftist and nationalist parties, voter turnout was higher than in the previous two elections. In 2013, 56.6% of registered voters went to the polls, compared with 53% in 2010 and 54% in 2007.²⁷ Moreover, voting process in the elections, which were presided over by the newly formed Independent Electoral Commission, was considered free and fair by national and international observers.²⁸ Although around 70% of the MPs were newcomers, the vast majority of the new parliament were loyalists without party affiliations.²⁹ Overall, the election process was portrayed as a victory for the King and defeat for the boycotting opposition, above all the JMB.³⁰

In line with the King's previous comments, the Chief of the Royal Court held consultations with MPs throughout February 2013 in order to specify the name of the new prime minister. While the MPs were unable to reach a consensus on the name, the King finally decided to appoint the incumbent Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour as premier one more time.³¹ His 19 member cabinet, the smallest in Jordan's recent history, was sworn in on 30 March 2013, and won a vote of confidence on 23 April 2013 with a narrow majority (55%).³²

The primary challenge that the Arab Spring created for the Hashemite regime has been the rise of Islamism, both in its moderate and radical forms, in the Arab world.

In the following months, the number of pro-reform protests in Jordanian cities decreased tremendously, mainly due to the deepening crisis in Syria and its growing human and economic burden on Jordan. Additionally, disappointment with the ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) government in Egypt in July 2013 contributed to limiting the pro-reform rallies of the JMB.³³

Challenges

The Rise of Islamist Movements

The primary challenge that the Arab Spring created for the Hashemite regime has been the rise of Islamism, both in its moderate and radical forms, in the Arab world. Although the Hashemites always enjoyed a certain degree of religious legitimacy as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, this has never made the pro-Western kingdom completely immune to Islamist challenges. The historical tacit alliance between the Monarchy and the JMB against leftist, nationalist and Nasserist movements had already been damaged with the

Israeli-Jordanian Peace in 1994.³⁴ The JMB still remains the largest and the most organized opposition movement in Jordan, though mainly operating within the legal limits of the Monarchy. That said, the rise of Islamist movements in the wake of the Arab Spring created a regional conjuncture that tremendously increased the JMB's self-confidence. The election victories of the MB-affiliated political parties in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt, consolidation of the MB in post-conflict Libya, and the re-emergence of the Syrian MB in the struggle against the Assad regime were marks of a MB ascendancy in the region.

Amman initially responded to the advance of the MB in the region by mending its ties with HAMAS, which was expelled from the Kingdom shortly after Abdullah became King in 1999. By receiving a delegation of HAMAS, headed by its political leader Khaled Mashal, twice in 2012, Amman sought to accommodate the rising popularity of the MB in the region and persuade the JMB to support the reform process in Jordan and to participate in the upcoming elections.³⁵ However, thanks to this regional conjuncture, a more self-confident and ambitious JMB participated vigorously in weekly demonstrations, generally avoided the regime-led reform projects and boycotted the first post Arab Spring elections in January 2013. More importantly, as a former spokesman for the Jordanian

government, Samih Maaytah, noted, the group shifted its goals from “[achieving] reforms to pursuing power, particularly since the Brotherhood succeeded in Egypt and Tunisia”.³⁶ Some JMB figures went as far as declaring that an “Islamic state would soon be established” in Jordan.³⁷ Although the JMB never officially called for the downfall of the regime, the King clearly showed his distrust of the movement by accusing it of receiving commands from the Egyptian MB, of disrespecting the Jordanian constitution, and of aiming to overthrow the regime eventually. He called the JMB “wolves in sheep’s clothing” and stressed that he would not allow it to “hijack the cause of democratic reform in the name of Islam”.³⁸

The arrest of several JMB members, including its deputy head Zaki Bani Irshid, in Autumn 2014, demonstrates that the regime has started to adopt a tougher stance against the movement.

The fortunes of the JMB were reversed with the overthrow of the Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi in a *coup d'état* headed by General Abdul Fattah al Sisi in July 2013. While warmly embracing the new Egyptian government, the Jordanian regime

increased its pressure over the JMB, with a harsh media campaign against the movement.³⁹ Meanwhile, a serious divide broke out within the JMB between the moderate figures (doves) and the hardliners (hawks), who were still controlling the movement. The moderates’ launch in October 2013 of the “Zamzam Initiative” against the hardliner leaders, with subtle support of the Jordanian government, further weakened the JMB.⁴⁰ The arrest of several JMB members, including its deputy head Zaki Bani Irshid, in Autumn 2014, demonstrates that the regime has started to adopt a tougher stance against the movement.⁴¹ Unlike Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates however, Amman has not gone as far as imposing a total ban on the movement, believing this would only serve to radicalize the JMB. It seems that the Monarchy prefers to keep its relations with the JMB at the lowest possible level so that the latter would neither control the government nor challenge the regime.

Perhaps a more alerting consequence of the Arab Spring for the Hashemite regime has been the rise of radical Islamism in the region and its possible repercussions for Jordan. It is believed that there are at least 2,000 Jordanians fighting in Syria among the ranks of Salafist Jihadist groups like the Al Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Their eventual return to Jordan is considered a serious threat against the

stability of the Kingdom.⁴² The growing popularity of radical Islamist currents, particularly in impoverished Jordanian cities, was clearly observed in summer 2014, when pro-ISIL demonstrations were held in Maan and Zarqa, apparently hailing the group's recent territorial gains in Iraq.⁴³ Amman has responded to the recent rise of radical Islamism by taking extra security measures at home and on its borders, by exploiting the friction between Al Nusra and ISIL,⁴⁴ and lastly by carrying out airstrikes against ISIL targets in Syria as part of the US-led anti-ISIL coalition.⁴⁵ The threat posed by Salafist Jihadist groups in neighbouring Iraq and Syria and their supporters (both actual and potential) inside Jordan does not seem likely to disappear in the near future.

Deepening Economic Crisis

The second negative consequence of the Arab Spring for Jordan was its deepening economic crisis. Throughout 2011, the government tried to quell the protests by introducing several subsidies, salary increases and grant programs. In the first two weeks of the protests, for instance, a US\$ 550 million package of subsidies was introduced.⁴⁶ In September 2011, the government even sacked the Central Bank Governor, Faris Sharaf, whose insistence on fiscal austerity measures was jeopardizing the government's welfare projects.⁴⁷ All these

projects eventually increased the burden on the national budget and destabilized the Kingdom's economy.

There were also some critical economic losses due to factors out of Jordan's control. The Kingdom was badly affected by interruptions in the flow of cheap Egyptian natural gas to the Kingdom due to several terrorist attacks on the pipeline in the Sinai Peninsula after the Egyptian Revolution. Egyptian gas was covering nearly 80% of Jordan's electricity production and its disruption forced the Jordanian government to resort to more expensive short-term alternatives, dramatically increasing losses of the state-owned National Electricity Power Company.⁴⁸ Due to the fact that the flow of Egyptian natural gas had not as of 2014 resumed to pre-revolution levels, the Jordanian government began considering other long-term cost-effective energy alternatives, such as Israeli natural gas, nuclear energy, renewable energy resources, and oil shale.⁴⁹

Another burden on Jordan's economy has been the ongoing crisis in Syria. Apart from blocking Jordan's trade route to the north, the crisis has brought a serious refugee problem for Jordan, which is already home to over two million Palestinian and 30,000 Iraqi refugees. According to the UN Refugee Agency, as of 2014, the number of registered Syrian refugees in Jordan reached 610,000, of whom more than 80% live in cities.⁵⁰

Accommodation, food, water, health, education, employment and other basic needs of the Syrian refugees, which account for 10% of the total Jordanian population, put a heavy burden on the country's already limited resources. It is reported that, as of March 2014, the government has spent around US\$ 1.5 billion for Syrian refugees. More than half of this amount was covered by Jordan, and the rest was funded by international donors.⁵¹ Additionally, sporadic riots of Syrians in the Zaatari refugee camp, which is home to over 80,000 refugees, has to a certain extent deteriorated the security situation in the country.⁵²

The Jordanian economy is still suffering from the negative consequences of the Arab Spring revolts and remains highly dependent on foreign aid and loans for fiscal stability.

As a result of all the above-mentioned factors, the Jordanian budget deficit's ratio to GNP (excluding foreign grants) rose sharply from 7.7% in 2010 to 12.6% in 2011 and then gradually fell to 9.7% in 2012 and 8.1% in 2013.⁵³ The deadly riots of November 2012 against IMF-imposed austerity measures clearly demonstrated the social and political

costs of fiscal discipline in Jordan. Overall, the Jordanian economy is still suffering from the negative consequences of the Arab Spring revolts and remains highly dependent on foreign aid and loans for fiscal stability. Although dependency and vulnerability have always been main features of the Jordanian economy, these figures clearly show that the Arab Spring exacerbated this situation even further.

Growing Unrest among East Bankers

The third challenge that the Hashemite regime faced during the Arab Spring was the extensive mobilization of urban and rural East Bankers against the political and economic system. East Bankers are the native population of Jordan, later outnumbered by Palestinians who came to Jordan and become Jordanian subjects as a result of the successive Arab-Israeli wars of the 20th century. Since they have always been the powerbase of the Hashemite regime and the main source of personnel for the bureaucracy and the security apparatus,⁵⁴ the East Bankers' growing disaffection and possible mobilization against the regime is generally considered the most threatening scenario of instability in Jordan.⁵⁵ Considering the decades-old mutual mistrust between the Monarchy and the (mostly lower and middle class) Palestinian majority, loss of East Banker support may have devastating results for the Hashemite regime.

The disenfranchisement of East Bankers had already started in the 1990s with the introduction of neoliberal economic policies that generally favoured urban upper classes (mostly Palestinian) and disfavoured the rural classes and public employees (mostly East Banker).⁵⁶ During the reign of King Abdullah II, neoliberal policies gained more vigour, and eventually a young generation of (mostly Palestinian) businesspersons started to be politically relevant.⁵⁷ This gradual ethnic and class based drift within the power elites of the Kingdom has caused growing discontent among the East Banker population and encouraged their active participation in the Arab Spring protests. Above all, it has become common among many East Bankers to associate the widespread corruption and economic hardships in the country with the largely Palestinian urban elite.⁵⁸

One of the most important signs of the East Banker population's dissatisfaction with the regime was the famous petition of the National Committee of Military Veterans addressed to the King in May 2010, nearly one year before the outbreak of the Arab Spring. In this petition, the veterans expressed their concerns regarding the neoliberal economic policies, widespread corruption, and the growing influence of Palestinians in the Kingdom.⁵⁹ Moreover, in February 2011, 36 figures from prominent East Banker tribes issued a statement in which they

directly accused Queen Rania, who is of Palestinian origin, of "building power centres for her interest".⁶⁰

Most of the new opposition movements that were formed in the course of the Arab Spring also had a greater East Banker composition, although they are neither ethnic nor anti-Palestinian movements.

Perhaps the most remarkable symbol of the East Bankers' dissatisfaction with the current regime is the still ongoing unrest in the southern city of Maan. The impoverished city has witnessed sporadic bloody riots and clashes between the security forces and local population since 2011.⁶¹ Even more alarming for the regime is the growing popularity of Salafist jihadist groups like ISIL among the younger Maanis, who are marginalized by poverty and state repression.⁶² At this point, it is important to note that Salafism is particularly appealing for tribal East Banker Islamists, who consider the JMB as a Palestinian-oriented organization.⁶³

Most of the new opposition movements that were formed in the course of the Arab Spring also had a greater East Banker composition, although they are neither ethnic nor anti-Palestinian movements. For instance, Jayeen and the Youth of March 24, two of the most

remarkable new opposition movements, were composed of mainly urban East Banker reformists.⁶⁴ More crucially, during the Arab Spring, Jordan also witnessed the mobilization of the East Banker tribal youth in the rural areas for economic and political reforms. This trend was collectively called “Hirak”, and it encompassed nearly 40 autonomous tribal youth movements from across the country.⁶⁵ Hirak protesters became quite famous with the high tone of their criticism of the regime. Some of them violated redlines of the Hashemite regime not only by ridiculing King Abdullah but also by proposing his half-brother and former crown prince Hamzah as the new king, arguing that he would get along better with the East Banker tribes.⁶⁶ Despite lacking a grand organization and coordination, Hirak represented the widespread dissatisfaction of younger generations of rural East Bankers.

Opportunities

Soaring Foreign Aid

The first opportunity that the Arab Spring created for Jordan was the increasing amount of foreign aid. The political turbulence caused by the Arab Spring in the region helped the Hashemite regime considerably to tap additional political, economic and military assistance from foreign actors who have an interest in Jordan’s stability.

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As a moderate, pro-Western kingdom which has a peace agreement with neighbouring Israel, Jordan has received enormous assistance from the Western countries. The United States, the primary foreign donor of Jordan, has raised its financial assistance steadily since 2011. The total amount of Economic Support Fund allocated to Jordan rose from US\$ 362 million in 2011 to US\$ 460 million in 2012, to US\$ 564.4 million in 2013 and to US\$ 700 million in 2014.⁶⁷ Additionally, the US administration provided a total amount of US\$ 2.25 billion in loan guarantees to Jordan on two separate occasions in 2013 and 2014,⁶⁸ and more than US\$ 388 million toward the needs of Syrian refugees in Jordan.⁶⁹

The US augmented its military cooperation with Jordan as well. In December 2012 a US task force of “planners and other specialists” was sent to Jordan to help the Jordanian Army defend its border with Syria. This was followed by the deployment of a US Army headquarters element of

200 personnel in April 2013 to “detect and stop chemical weapons transfers along Jordan’s border with Syria”. Lastly, in June 2013, after participating in a military training exercise in Jordan, the US administration left “a Patriot missile battery and its associated support systems, F-16 fighter aircraft, and various command and control personnel” in Jordan in order to support the Jordanian Army.⁷⁰

The European Union is the other major Western power assisting Jordan during this period. In addition to its €223 million assistance in the framework of European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument Assistance between 2011 and 2013, the EU decided at a meeting between Jordan and the EU Task Force in February 2012 to provide Jordan with an additional €70 million from the Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth Programme.⁷¹ At the same meeting, the EU members also pledged to give Jordan nearly €2.7 billion as loans and grants until 2015.⁷² Lastly, as of May 2014, the EU Commission has channelled to Jordan €246.4 million in response to the Syrian refugee crisis.⁷³

Along with Western states, the IMF and World Bank have provided tremendous assistance to Jordan. The IMF’s US\$ 2.05 billion loan in August 2012 was complemented with World Bank loans and grants, which have amounted to US\$ 700 million since 2011.⁷⁴

Apart from Jordan’s Western allies, some regional countries that deem the Monarchy’s collapse as a red-line for their own security have extended a hand to the Kingdom as well. Here, Saudi Arabia’s effort to keep the revolutionary fervour away from fellow Arab monarchies is most striking. Riyadh’s US\$ 1.4 billion grant in cash to Jordan was vital in covering the Kingdom’s budget deficit in 2011.⁷⁵ Moreover, the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) offered membership to Jordan and Morocco in May 2011, apparently as a sign of Sunni, pro-Western Arab monarchies’ solidarity against the revolutionary currents of the Arab Spring.⁷⁶ Although the GCC membership was not realized due to internal GCC opposition, the body decided in December 2011 to offer Jordan US\$ 5 billion in development aid over the next five years, delivery of which began in 2013.⁷⁷ Lastly, in January 2013, Saudi Arabia decided to send aid worth US\$ 10 billion to help Syrian refugees inside Jordan.⁷⁸

Israel is also quite anxious about the stability of the Jordanian monarchy, with which it has had a peace agreement since 1994. Israeli officials stated to their European counterparts that the stability of the *status quo* in Jordan is a red-line for them.⁷⁹ King Abdullah tried to maintain this tacit alliance by levelling down his criticism of Israel. The Israelis, in turn, allowed Amman to host exploratory talks between Israel and the

Palestinian Authority in January 2012, in part to help the King to improve his image and position.⁸⁰ Although bilateral relations were not upgraded officially during the Arab Spring, Israel continues to see Jordan as a buffer state against the rising turbulence and radical Islamism in the region. As an example of this, in July 2014, Israel clearly stated that it is ready to help Jordan by all means in case of an ISIL-led attack against Jordan.⁸¹

As the revolutionary fervour caused by the swift regime changes in Tunisia and Egypt gradually dimmed due to the ongoing political instability in those countries and prolonged bloody inner conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, the majority of Jordanians became more appreciative of the relative security and stability they enjoy in the Kingdom.

Overall, Jordan seems to buttress both its economy and strategic position mainly thanks to Western and regional powers, which have high stakes in the Kingdom's stability and security. As of 2014, Jordan seems to have maintained economic stability to a certain extent, yet it remains highly dependent on external aid, which reached US\$ 1.6

billion in 2013.⁸² It is also reported that the Jordanian government manages to benefit from the Syrian refugee crisis by exaggerating the total number of Syrians in Jordan in order to tap more aid from the international community.⁸³

Dissuading Effects of the Conflicts in the Region

Another important advantage that the Hashemite regime enjoys thanks to the Arab Spring is the dissuading effects of ongoing instability and insecurity in Jordan's neighbourhood. As the revolutionary fervour caused by the swift regime changes in Tunisia and Egypt gradually dimmed due to the ongoing political instability in those countries and prolonged bloody inner conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, the majority of Jordanians became more appreciative of the relative security and stability they enjoy in the Kingdom.⁸⁴ This feeling was further beefed up with recent advances of ISIL in Iraq.

Actually, in contradiction with the republican regimes in Libya, Egypt, Syria and Iraq, the Hashemite regime in Jordan does not have a reputation of brutal repression against political dissent.⁸⁵ Once the Arab Spring broke out, rather than blocking the protests completely, the regime hastened to make amendments to the Public Assemblies Law in May 2011 to abrogate the necessity to get permission prior to demonstrations.⁸⁶ More

importantly, the security forces received strict orders from the King not to use excessive force against the demonstrators—though three people died during the protests nonetheless.⁸⁷ Moreover, after many incidents of clashes between reformist and loyalist demonstrators in 2011, regime officials even pressured the latter to cancel their protests on some occasions to prevent clashes, as was the case on the eve of big JMB protests in Amman in October 2012.⁸⁸

Consequently, comparisons with neighbouring countries has generally had moderating and even dissuading effects on popular protests in Jordan, and thus, the number of protests has diminished sharply from 2013 on.⁸⁹

The King's Image Management

Lastly, the Arab Spring created a unique opportunity for the King in terms of image management. Throughout the Arab Spring, King Abdullah portrayed himself as a committed reformer fighting against the powers of the *status quo*. He underlined on numerous occasions that there are certain centres of power (in his words, the “old guards”) within the regime that are resisting reform. These conservative political elites, according to the King, have penetrated very critical institutions like the GID, and have been subverting his reform efforts for some time.⁹⁰ When the Arab Spring came, the King remarked, the Monarchy was able

to “overcome this resistance to change and forge ahead with accelerated, more comprehensive and ambitious reform.”⁹¹ With this discourse, the King sought to create a “reformist King” image among the public.

Yet, for the King, defending “comprehensive and ambitious reform,” does not necessarily mean that it should be swift. In contrast, he has emphasized that more time and effort is needed for the empowerment of the middle class and the development of nation-wide political parties, which are considered two vital elements of a liberal parliamentary democracy.⁹² Otherwise, it will result in chaos and instability. Regarding the political parties, he says that “the vision is for Jordan to have two to five political parties, ideally representing left, right and centre.”⁹³ Considering the fact that the IAF is the most organized and powerful political party in Jordan, what the King aspires for is the development of other political parties that can compete with the IAF in nation-wide parliamentary elections and prevent the monopoly of the JMB in power in case of genuine political opening up. Apparently with the same rationale, Western governments seem to be content with the King's incremental approach to reform in Jordan.⁹⁴ Hence, the King is able to portray himself as a pro-reform figure, while at the same time trying to convince the public that reforms should proceed slowly.

In this atmosphere, the regime's gradualist approach to political reform, which has won the consent of its Western allies, further diminished the possibility of the JMB's coming to power.

Furthermore, during the Arab Spring, King Abdullah took advantage of being an "individual monarch" by making frequent cabinet shuffles in the name of reform. Such moves are more difficult to make in the "dynastic monarchies" of the Gulf, where the key government posts are occupied by family members of the ruling dynasty.⁹⁵ Using the prime ministers (and the cabinet) as a safety valve by sacking them frequently is a well-known tactic of the Hashemite monarchy to defuse public anger in times of crisis since the political opening up of 1989.⁹⁶ By changing the prime minister four times in two years, King Abdullah seems to have employed this tactic quite actively and successfully during the Arab Spring. Consequently, this tactic further helped the King save his pro-reform image.

Conclusion

When all factors are taken into consideration, it seems that the Arab Spring brought more advantages to the Hashemite regime than disadvantages.

This is not to say that the Jordanian regime is completely immune to the revolutionary fervour. To the contrary, as a small and vulnerable state with a fragmented society, Jordan will always be exposed to the potential destabilizing effects of developments in its neighbourhood, over which it has almost no control. However, taking a closer look at the particular case of the Arab Spring, it seems that the major challenges that the Jordanian regime faced during this period either disappeared or have been outbalanced by the opportunities it enjoyed.

The rising violence and instability in the neighbourhood simply increased the value and legitimacy of the Jordanian regime in the eyes of the Jordanian public.

First of all, regarding the Islamist challenge, the Jordanian regime seems to be quite confident mainly due to the steady weakening of the JMB since the ouster of the Egyptian MB from power in 2013, which resulted in a serious divide within the movement. In this atmosphere, the regime's gradualist approach to political reform, which has won the consent of its Western allies, further diminished the possibility of the JMB's coming to power. It can be argued that the JMB's status as a legal opposition

movement lowers its chances to directly challenge the regime. Being aware of this situation, the Monarch is not willing to impose a total ban on the movement.

As for the radical Islamist movements like Al Nusrah and ISIL, they appeal to only a small minority of the Jordanian population in certain cities, remain divided among themselves, and are unlikely to defeat the Jordanian Army, which, unlike the Syrian and Iraqi Armies is still a strong, professional and unitary force backing the regime. Furthermore, the US and Israel will certainly be eager to intervene in case the Jordanian Army fails to stop these movements.

Secondly, regarding the deepening economic problems, it should first be noted that ever since its independence in 1946, Jordan has generally suffered economic hardships and refugee crises and been dependent on external resources. Therefore, the economic hardships and the refugee crisis that the Arab Spring caused are neither a new phenomenon for the regime nor something it cannot deal with. Moreover, it is not difficult to predict that foreign assistance will continue to flow into Jordan in increasing amounts, since major Western and regional actors still give utmost importance to its stability.

Thirdly, regarding the growing unrest among East Bankers, the regime now seems to be at ease mainly due to the ongoing infighting in Syria and

instability in Egypt. Almost none of the East Bankers desire their country to be dragged into a fierce infighting like Syria, and thus, they eventually turned out to praise the stability they enjoy in Jordan and to refrain from further protests. The rising violence and instability in the neighbourhood simply increased the value and legitimacy of the Jordanian regime in the eyes of the Jordanian public. At this point, it should also be noted that the ongoing tense situation in Maan, which witnessed a number of deadly riots during 2014, cannot be generalized to the whole country. Overall, as the regional turmoil does not seem likely to end in the foreseeable future, the Jordanian regime will continue to benefit from this conjuncture for a long time.

The long term sustainability of Jordan's stability is still questionable since it is highly dependent on external factors, namely the regional conjuncture and foreign assistance.

In view of above, it can be easily argued that the Hashemite regime successfully dealt with the main instabilities caused by the Arab Spring and remained as an island of stability and security in a turbulent region. However, the long term sustainability of Jordan's stability is still questionable since it is highly

dependent on external factors, namely the regional conjuncture and foreign assistance. Thus, regarding the academic debate about the resilience of Arab monarchies during the Arab Spring, Jordan's experience shows that the two main factors in the regime's survival, namely increasing foreign assistance and dissuading effects of conflicts in the region, are exogenous to the Monarchy. Yet, factors endogenous to the regime do have relevance as well. As an individual monarch, King Abdullah successfully took advantage of the Arab Spring

not only by using the successive Prime Ministers and cabinets as a safety valve against potentially destructive public anger, but also by portraying himself as a pro-reform figure struggling against the *status quo* powers within the regime. These tactics are more related with the institutional structure of the Hashemite regime rather than external factors, and not shared by most of other Arab monarchies. Therefore, the Hashemite monarchy's survival was a result of both exogenous and endogenous factors.

Endnotes

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