A HISTORY OF JORDAN

Though a small state, Jordan has frequently found itself at the centre of conflict and crisis in the modern Middle East. It has been a central protagonist in the wars of the region, notably the 1948 and 1967 Arab–Israel wars, and has also been at the forefront of peace-making, signing a separate peace with Israel in 1994. Philip Robins’ survey of Jordan’s political history begins in the early 1920s, continues through the years of the British mandate, and traces events over the next half century to the present day. Throughout the latter period the country’s fortunes were closely identified with its head of state, King Hussein, until his death in 1999. In the early days, as the author testifies, his prospects were often regarded as grim. However, both King and country survived a variety of existential challenges, from assassination attempts and internal subversion to a civil war with the Palestine Liberation Organisation. In the 1970s and 1980s the country emerged as an apparently stable and prosperous state. However, King Hussein’s death, the succession of his son, Abdullah II, and the recent upheavals in the region have plunged the country back into uncertainty. This is an incisive account, compellingly told, about one of the most important countries in the Middle East.

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For my daughter Isabel
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Acknowledgements

It is well over two decades since I first went to Jordan, initially to live and work as a journalist and then to return to undertake doctoral research under the supervision of the redoubtable Tim Niblock. Since 1986, when I ceased to reside in the country, I have been a frequent visitor, most recently to conduct my current research into the field of illegal drugs. During this long association with the country I have talked with several hundreds of people, Jordanians, Palestinians and expatriates, many of them numerous times over. With hardly an exception, they have been kind and generous with their time, hospitality and insights. My thanks are due to each one of them. While to mention any by name is hard on the others, there are certain people whose assistance compels special mention. Nigel Denby, Paul and Jane Dracott, Keith and Janet Fraser-Smith, Tony and Alison Harpur, Declan and Liz Mannion, Alastair MacNeil, Dina Matar, Hana Muasher, Peter and Fenella Raftery, Mike and Maureen Ryan, and Alison Woods were all pivotal figures in my life at different times during my various stints in Jordan, and many remain close and valued friends. Debts of gratitude are particularly owed to Nasser Abu Nab, Lamis Andoni, Jalal Azzeh, Ian Chandler, Hiyyam Fakhoury, Yusuf al-Khadra, Rami and Ellen Khoury, David Oston and Sheila Oston, Rana Sabbagh, Jamal and Mary Sha’ir, Murawid and Ruth Tell, Ara Voskian, P. V. Vivekenand and Nidal Zayaddin for providing me with humour, sanctuary and good company. During the early days I learnt a lot about Jordan from associates who became more than just good contacts, and whose conversation was especially valuable and rich in insight, particularly Asad Abdul Rahman, Bill Burns, Alan Charlton, Fahd al-Fanek, Abdullah Hasanat, George Hawatmeh, Saji Salamah Khalil, Ahmad Mango, Marwan Muasher, Isam al-Tal and Tariq al-Tell. More recently Bassam Asfour, Ibrahim Izzedin, Musa Keilani, Sir John Moberly, Salameh Ne’matt, Amal Sabbagh, Asher Susser and Suhail al-Twal have continued to remind me how much understanding there is still to be done.
Of course, romance and Jordan is not a new thing. I am pleased to say, though, that, unlike for some others, romance in Jordan for me found a personal rather than political fulfilment, as it was while working there that I met my wife, Helen. For that reason alone, this book would have been a labour of love.

Though in many ways a product of more than 20 years of working on Jordan, the book was written after I joined the Middle East Centre (MEC) at St Antony's College in the mid-1990s. I would like to thank Eugene Rogan, Avi Shlaim and the other fellows and members of the Centre for their stimulation and support, not least in the field of Jordan studies. Graduate students, both past and present, have helped turn the MEC into a centre of excellence as far as the study of Jordan is concerned. I should like in particular to thank Yoav Alon, Paul Kingston, Paul Lalor, Robert Satloff, Lawrence Tal, Tariq al-Tell and Basma Talal for convening and taking part in the numerous discussions of Jordan, past and present, in which I have been involved at the Centre. Lastly, I would also like to thank the staff of the MEC, not least the librarian, Mostan Ebtihaj, for her cheerful help in providing the necessary research sources to support my work, and the archivist, Debbie Usher, who was especially helpful in securing the bulk of the photos contained within this work.

As for the book itself, I would like to thank Marigold Acland for commissioning it, for her patience in its preparation, and for her well-judged promptings during its writing. I would also like to thank Amanda Pinches and Karen Hildebrandt for their help in bringing the book to publication, and to Roger Bourke for his editing. With respect to the manuscript, Mary Wilson was kind enough to read it in its entirety. I am especially grateful to her, both for her detailed specific comments and her general observations. Helen also read the manuscript and made many judicious comments and suggestions based on her knowledge of the country. I am also especially grateful to Ahmad Khalidi and Tony Reeve who read and commented on specific chapters. As is usual on these occasions, I am happy to own up to responsibility for the final version.
Chronology

1867
Ottoman control is reimposed upon the lands of Transjordan

1906
The Hijaz Railway reaches Amman

1920
April: The San Remo conference establishes the mandate system, of which Transjordan is to be part
August: British High Commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel announces the creation of autonomous administrations in Transjordan
November: the future ruler, Amir Abdullah bin Hussein, arrives in Maan in the south

1921
Cairo conference under Churchill gives Abdullah jurisdiction over Transjordan

1923
September: The Adwan ‘revolt’

1924
August: Abdullah accepts the Ultimatum on British administrative supervision
October: Hijaz falls to the Saudis

1925
November (2nd): Hadda Agreement signed with the Saudis

1925–7
Druze Rebellion in southern Syria

1928
February: Agreement signed between Britain and Abdullah recognises the Amir as head of Transjordan
April: Organic Law, effectively a constitution, passed, establishing a Legislative Council
July: First meeting of the oppositionist Transjordan National Congress

1930
November: Major John Glubb establishes the Desert Patrol

1933
March: Legislative Council passes a consolidated land tax

1936–39
Revolt by the Arab population in Palestine

1939
Glubb replaces Peake as commander of the Arab Legion
Alec Kirkbride replaces Cox as British Resident

1941
Middle East Supply Centre established
Chronology

April: Rashid Ali al-Kailani coup in Iraq; Arab Legion participates in its suppression

1945

Arab League established, with Transjordan as a founding member

1946

May (25th): Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan proclaimed

August: Secret meetings begin between Abdullah and the Jewish Agency

1947

November (29th): UN General Assembly passes partition plan

1948

March (15th): Anglo-Jordanian treaty signed

May: Britain terminates Palestine mandate

May–June: First phase of the war: Jordan holds Arab Jerusalem

July: Second phase of the war: Jordan forfeits Lydda and Ramle

October–January (1949): Third phase of the war: Israel attacks Egypt rather than Jordan

October: First National Palestine Congress convened in Amman prepares the way for annexation

December: Jericho Congress opts for unity of the West Bank with Jordan

1949

April (3rd): Israeli–Jordanian armistice concluded

1950

April (25th): Jordanian parliament passes unification resolution

1951

July (20th): King Abdullah assassinated in Jerusalem

September (6th): Prince Talal proclaimed king

1952

January (1st): New, liberal constitution ratified

July (23rd): Nasser leads Free Officers’ coup in Egypt

August (11th): King Talal abdicates on the grounds of ill-health

1953

May (2nd): King Hussein formally accedes

1954

October (16th): General election subject to gross interference

1955

New municipal law adopted

December: After sustained rioting, Jordan decides not to join Baghdad Pact

1956

March (1st): Glubb Pasha dismissed as head of the Arab Legion

October: General election results in largely radical parliament; leader of National Socialists, Suleiman Nabulsi, invited to form government

July–November: The Suez crisis
<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>January (19th): Arab Solidarity Agreement struck, whereby Arab states would replace Britain as Jordan's paymaster. January: Eisenhower Doctrine against Communism unveiled. March (14th): Anglo-Jordanian treaty abrogated. April: Following reports of army unrest, the king sacks the Nabulsi government and faces down the disturbances at the Zarqa army camp. Martial law follows the convening of the 'Patriotic Congress', an attempt to rally the opposition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>November (13th): Israel undertakes devastating raid on Samu.</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>February and March: Nationalist revolutions in Baghdad and Damascus respectively.</td>
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<td>1965</td>
<td>March (21st): Jordanian and Palestinian fighters face down the Israeli army at the Battle of Karamah.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Chronology

ʻBlack Septemberʼ defeat for Palestinian guerrillas in a civil war

1971
July: Remainder of Palestinian guerrillas driven out of Jordan
The Allon Plan symbolises Israel's preference for the 'Jordanian option' with regard to the future of the West Bank

1972
March (15th): Hussein unveils his United Arab Kingdom vision for East Bank–West Bank relations

1973
September: Jordan warns Israel of imminent Arab attack
October: Jordan participates belatedly in October (6th–26th) War on the Syrian front

1974
Army unrest over food prices results in establishment of the ministry of supply
October: Rabat Arab summit recognises the PLO as representative of the Palestinians, at Jordan's expense
November: Parliament suspended in light of Rabat resolution

1976
Arafat and Hussein meet at Cairo Arab summit, marking the start of a post-civil war, post-Rabat thaw

1977
PLO body reverses policy on regime change in Amman

1978
April: National Consultative Council established while parliament in abeyance
September (17th): Camp David Accords signed, envisaging role for Jordan
November: Baghdad Arab summit pledges $1.25 billion a year to Jordan in return for steadfastness

1979
December: Sharif Abdul Hamid Sharaf appointed prime minister

1982
June: Israeli invasion of Lebanon
September (1st): Reagan peace plan is unveiled

1983
Jordanian Central Bank provides revolving credit line to maintain trade with Iraq
March: Parliament restored; Islamist successes in by-elections

1984
November: PLO's national council meets in Amman

1985
February (11th): Peace process coordinating agreement forged with PLO

1986
February: Peace process agreement collapses in recrimination
August: Jordan unveils still-born development plan for the West Bank

1987
April: King Hussein and Shimon Peres conclude London Agreement on peace process
December: First uprising begins in Palestinian territories
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<td>1988</td>
<td>July (31st): King Hussein cuts administrative and legal ties with the West Bank</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>February: Jordan is a founder member of four-state Arab Cooperation Council</td>
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<td>February: Jordan’s foreign debt default becomes public</td>
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<td>April: Jordanian government begins to implement IMF programme</td>
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<td>April: Riots break out in Maan, spreading to a number of towns</td>
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<td>November (8th): Jordan holds free and fair elections; Islamists the winners</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>August (2nd): Iraq invades Kuwait; King Hussein embarks on controversial ‘mediatory’ role</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>January: Muslim Brotherhood join coalition government</td>
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<td>June: National Charter adopted</td>
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<td>October: Jordan takes part in Arab–Israeli peace summit in Madrid</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>November: Jordan holds its first multi-party election since 1956</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>October (26th): Israel and Jordan sign peace treaty</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>August: King Hussein initially supports Saddam Hussein’s defecting sons-in-law</td>
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<td>October: Jordan hosts second of four regional economic conferences as part of its effort at normalisation</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>September: Israeli agents bungle assassination of Hamas leader in Amman</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>January: Month of high drama ends with King Hussein changing the succession from his brother Hasan to his eldest son Abdullah</td>
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<td>February (7th): King Hussein dies; King Abdullah II succeeds; Hussein’s second-youngest son, Hamzah, declared to be crown prince</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>September: Second Palestinian uprising begins</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>March–April: A US-dominated coalition precipitates regime change in Baghdad through war</td>
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Map 3. Jordan and the Middle East