

**Jordanians, Palestinians,
and the Hashemite Kingdom
in the Middle East Peace Process**

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& The
Hashemite
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UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS
Washington, D.C.

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United States Institute of Peace
1200 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036

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First published 1999

Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standards for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Abu-Odeh, Adnan.

Jordanians, Palestinians, and the Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East peace process / Adnan Abu-Odeh.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-878379-89-5 (hardback). — ISBN 1-878379-88-7 (paperback)

1. Jordan—Foreign relations—Palestine. 2. Palestine—Foreign relations—Jordan. 3. Palestinian Arabs—Politics and government. 4. Jordan—Politics and government. 5. Nationalism—Jordan. 6. Nationalism—Palestine. I. Title.

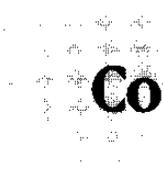
DS154.L6.P19A28 1999

327.569505694—dc21

99-35751

CIP

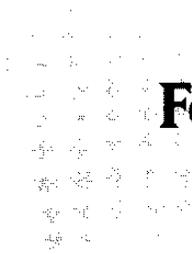
*This book is dedicated to all who believe that sharing
is not only a social value but also a cardinal pillar of
peace-making and peace-maintaining*



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Foreword

King Hussein's funeral in February 1999 attracted statesmen from around the world. Arab leaders stood alongside Israelis; President Clinton and an ailing President Yeltsin were present; and so was Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat, a long-time rival of the Hashemite monarch. The presence of these statesmen was not only a tribute to a long-ruling monarch whose statesmanship was widely appreciated. It was also testimony to the wide range of friendly relations that Jordan as a state has been able to knit with countries near and far.

With a small population and few natural resources, Jordan has had to count on its human resources and its geostrategic position to gain stature and support on the world scene. King Hussein was masterful at keeping his throne in the face of multiple threats, ruling his country in a generally benign, patriarchal fashion, and convincing many in the Middle East region and abroad that a stable and well-governed Jordan was in their interest.

While many observers and writers have reflected on Jordan's strategic role and King Hussein's special qualities, few have looked inside the kingdom to examine the distinctive feature of the country, the fact that it is an amalgam of two closely related, but different, populations, the original Transjordanian inhabitants, and the more recent Palestinian arrivals. To an outsider, this distinction may seem to be a minor one. After all, both

groups speak the same language, practice the same religion, and have the same general appearance. But they do not have the same history, nor do they have the same political identity.

Adnan Abu-Odeh is uniquely qualified to address the delicate matter of Jordanian-Palestinian relations and how they have been shaped by the evolution of the conflict with Israel. He is a Palestinian from Nablus, but identifies himself today as a Palestinian-Jordanian. During the traumatic days of 1970 when King Hussein ordered his army to drive the Palestine Liberation Organization out of Amman, Abu-Odeh was one of the few Palestinians to remain in the king's camp. As minister of information, adviser at the Royal Court, and Jordan's ambassador to the United Nations, Abu-Odeh represented Jordan over the next two decades, while always remaining aware of his Palestinian origins.

An entire generation of Western scholars and journalists came to know Adnan Abu-Odeh as one of the Jordanian officials who could help explain Arab politics generally, and the details of Jordan's circumstances in particular. His special quality was frankness, psychological insight, an analytical mind, and a sense of humor. These are all qualities that come through in his book, *Jordanians, Palestinians, and the Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East Peace Process*. With the ascension of King Abdullah II to the throne, Abu-Odeh has returned to the Royal Palace as adviser to the new monarch, which makes the views he expresses in this book of particular importance as Jordan begins a new political era.

The themes found in this insightful study involve an intertwining of the histories of three peoples, Zionists (later Israelis), Palestinians (those who lived west of the Jordan River during the British mandate), and Transjordanians (those, mostly of tribal origin, who lived east of the Jordan River during the British mandate). Nationalist sentiment developed among each of these groups early in the twentieth century. But when the British era came to an end in 1948, two states were provided for these three peoples. Thus began the entangling of Palestinian and Transjordanian political identities.

Abu-Odeh reviews this early history with the eye of an insider, someone whose own life was affected by these events. And yet he tells the story with a degree of objectivity that is rare in such accounts. He sees things with a discriminating eye, and some of his interpretations are novel, but one never feels that he is grinding a political axe. He is trying to explain and to help his readers understand. Of course, he has a point of view. He believes that Palestinians and Transjordanians are fated to live together on

the East Bank and should do so cooperatively. He worries about exclusivist ideologies, whether of the Zionist, Palestinian, or Transjordanian variety.

Some of the most insightful moments in this book come in the latter chapters, as Abu-Odeh tells the story of the troubled relationship between Jordan and the PLO. The 1967 war changed so much for Jordan and for the Palestinians. King Hussein lost the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The PLO, under Arafat's leadership, emerged as a competitor for the loyalty of Palestinians everywhere, including in the Hashemite Kingdom. During my first trip to Amman in early 1970, it was impossible to travel around the city without a PLO escort. The PLO was close to running a state within a state, and eventually King Hussein was impelled to act in September. "Black September," as Palestinians termed the military crackdown ordered by the king, scarred relations between the two peoples for years to come.

Throughout much of the 1970s and 1980s, King Hussein was seen by Israelis and Americans as the likely negotiator for the West Bank. The PLO disputed this claim, and the Israelis were never able to produce an offer that was sufficiently attractive to make it worthwhile for Jordan to risk Arab ire by negotiating on behalf of the Palestinians. Indeed, from 1974 onward, all Arab states, including Jordan, formally subscribed to the notion that the PLO was "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."

A turning point in the story of Jordan's relations with the Palestinians came in 1987–88 with the *intifada*, or uprising. During this youth revolt against the Israeli occupation, it became clear that few Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza who had grown up under Israeli occupation had any sense that Jordan spoke on their behalf. Indeed, even the PLO had to work hard to be acceptable to this new generation of activists. Toward the end of August 1988, King Hussein drew the inevitable conclusion. He publicly announced that Jordan would no longer make any legal or political claim to the West Bank. Henceforth, Israel should address itself to the Palestinians and their representative, the PLO, for any negotiations concerning that territory. The kingdom that had been constructed by Hussein's grandfather would return to the modest dimensions of the Transjordan first envisaged by Winston Churchill at the Cairo Conference in 1921.

This change in the legal definition of Jordan raised questions about the status of Palestinians residing in Jordan. They had citizenship and political rights, but some Transjordanians looked at them as foreigners, and in some state institutions, especially the army, it was rare to find Palestinians

at senior levels. Abu-Odeh is frank in addressing the problems that arose in this period as Transjordanians and Palestinian-Jordanians tried to work out their new relationship.

Throughout these domestic struggles, the Hashemites had the historical advantage of being a supranational symbol. Neither Transjordanian nor Palestinian by origin, King Abdullah and his offspring, as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, could claim the loyalty of diverse tribes and of Arabs and Muslims of various origins. Indeed, Abdullah had originally hoped to expand his small kingdom to both the north (Syria) and west (Palestine) and thought of himself as a pan-Arabist. With time, his grandson, King Hussein, saw his role in more modest terms, but he never ceased to present himself as an Arab patriot, even if his geographical base of power might be limited.

Now Jordan has to face the future without its founding leaders and without the West Bank. King Abdullah II will not be able to avoid the issues raised in this book. Many have already noted that his wife, and Jordan's new queen, is Palestinian. Perhaps this provides a hint, as does Abu-Odeh's return to the Royal Palace, that Jordan's new king intends to make of Jordan a modern state open to all of its citizens, Transjordanians and Palestinians alike. And then, if the peace process regains momentum, one might even imagine Israel, a new Palestinian state, and Jordan showing how in this small region three peoples can live in peace and without the debilitating constraints of narrow-minded ethnic and national identities. But that is for the future, a future that Adnan Abu-Odeh, if I know him, is thinking about with his usual creativity.

William B. Quandt
University of Virginia



Preface

The end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union, among other factors, have had a positive impact on peacemaking in the Middle East. During the Cold War era, the rivalry between the two superpowers dominated the world scene. Regional problems, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, were seen in the context of this larger rivalry. Threats to national and regional security springing from ethnic, religious, or national differences were perceived to be minor, and the Arab-Israeli conflict was seen simply as the result of a Jewish state being surrounded by hostile Arab states.

With the end of the Cold War, however, these “minor” issues have become the primary threats to security and stability in many areas of the world. The Balkan War represents just one example. In the Middle East, the peace process since the Oslo Declaration of Principles (DOP) in 1993 has scored tangible accomplishments on both the Israeli-Palestinian and the Israeli-Jordanian fronts. The concerned parties, along with the United States (as facilitator) and the world at large, have focused their attention on the intentions and capabilities of Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian leaders—on what they have already achieved and on what hurdles they might face as the peace process continues. However, the strength of the opposition to the peace process has by no means diminished. The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel in November 1995 was

an early indication of the difficulties and dangers of trying to make peace in the region, and in the years since then Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian leaders have developed increasingly divergent opinions on how the peace process should advance.

This book looks at the relationships between Transjordanians and Palestinians within Jordan. These relationships, greatly affected by the DOP and the Israeli-Jordan Treaty of Peace of 1994, still represent an unresolved issue in Jordan's political makeup. In the last few years, they have become the focus of debate between activists in the Transjordanian and Palestinian-Jordanian communities—a debate that has been widely covered by the Jordanian press. King Hussein himself became embroiled as an arbiter in the debate in November 1995; at his death in February 1999 (shortly before this book went to press), the views of the opposing sides were as far apart as ever. The arguments used by each side indicate that despite the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, the peace process in Jordan itself has a long way to go before the refugee problem is satisfactorily solved.

This book examines the origins and development of the symbiotic relationship between Transjordanians and Palestinians, tracing the dynamics that have been triggered over the years and discussing the validity of each side's apprehensions. Finally, it suggests a broad outline for establishing a practical relationship that will help cement the long overdue peace in the Middle East rather than threaten what has already been accomplished.

* * *

This book is not meant to be another book on the history of Jordan and Palestine, although the first eight chapters are mostly a historical narrative, while the other three chapters are mostly analytical. The focus in the book is on the Transjordanian-Palestinian dynamic, which could not be traced clearly in isolation from specific historical events that generated and sustained this dynamic throughout the last eight decades in this century.

Inevitably, this book devotes considerable attention to the Hashemite kings of Jordan, who, more than any other individuals, have shaped the development of Jordan and its people. No individual, however, no matter how powerful he or she might be, can dictate so complex and potent a relationship as that between Transjordanians and Palestinian-Jordanians. Thus, although King Hussein exercised unparalleled influence over his kingdom for more than forty years, his passing has altered neither the driving forces nor the defining characteristics of the Transjordanian-Palestinian relationship as it emerged after the fedayeen episode in Jordan

between 1968 and 1971. In terms of that relationship, therefore, the new king faces the same challenges as those that confronted his father.

* * *

On the eve of World War I, the territory of today's Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was part of the Ottoman Empire. Administratively, it was part of the province of Damascus. After the war, the territories west and east of the Jordan River came under British domination. On July 24, 1922, the League of Nations conferred upon Britain a mandate over Palestine including the territory east of the Jordan (Transjordan). Britain, however, was able to obtain approval from the League of Nations for excluding Transjordan from the provisions of the Palestine mandate relating to the Jewish national home, thus separating the two entities, Palestine and the Emirate of Transjordan. Thereafter, the people of the latter came to be known as Transjordanians. In 1946, when the Emirate of Transjordan obtained its independence from Britain, it became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Its people came to be known as Jordanians. In 1950, when the eastern part of Palestine was united with the Hashemite Kingdom, the former was named the West Bank of Jordan and the latter the East Bank. Both banks combined formed the new Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and the people on both banks became Jordanians.

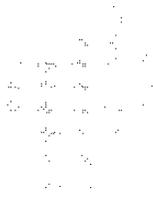
This brief historical review is intended to help explain why, especially in the chapters that focus on current debates about national identities, this book uses the following terms:

Transjordanians: Jordanian nationals of Transjordanian origin.

Palestinians: The Arab people of Mandatory Palestine.

Palestinian-Jordanians: Palestinians who became Jordanian nationals after the unity of the West and East Banks in 1950.

Jordanians: Jordanian nationals irrespective of their origin.



Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the United States Institute of Peace for the fellowship it offered me for 1995–96, during which year much of this book was written. I would like to thank my colleagues at the Jennings Randolph Program for International Peace for their encouragement, especially Joe Klaitz for his support and the intelligent critique he shared with me over the course of my writing. I am indebted to the editor, Dr. Nigel Quinney, for his patience and fine professionalism. I thank Dr. Ma'en Al-Nsour for being a great research assistant without whose generous help this book would never have been finished on time.

I am no less grateful to the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars for granting me a six-month fellowship to finish my project. I especially thank Dr. Samuel F. Wells, Jr., the deputy director, for his generosity and encouragement.

Also, I wish to express my gratitude to the Center for Strategic and International Studies for hosting me for three months in Washington, D.C., during which time I was able to work on the last phase of my book and to finalize it for publication. In particular, I would like to thank Ambassador Richard Fairbanks for his guidance and support and Judith Kipper for her continuous encouragement and intelligent insight, which contributed greatly to the production of this book. I am also indebted to Dr. Murhaf Jweijati for his research assistance and patience when my project was undergoing some fundamental changes.

I would like to thank my son Sa'ad for exhibiting unusual patience in helping me prepare the final computerized drafts of the manuscript; without

his assistance, I would have felt even more the paralysis in front of computers that typically afflicts people of my age. I would also like to thank my daughter Lama, whose relentless critical insights and unyielding challenges made the writing of this book even more pleasurable.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Khawla, for putting up with all my anxieties, obsessions, and unending demands with her usual grace and irony.

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Jordan and Its Neighbors