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Abstract

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Oasis or Mirage? Jordan's Unlikely Stability in a Changing Middle East

[Curtis R. Ryan](#) Thursday, Jan. 15, 2015

The uprisings beginning in late 2010, known as the Arab Spring, shook the Middle East to its foundations. Yet the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan appeared to be a virtual oasis of calm in the midst of turmoil. In a volatile neighborhood, Jordanian stability remains nothing short of remarkable. But is Jordan an oasis or a mirage?

Neither characterization seems entirely accurate: Jordan's stability and security are not figments of the imagination, especially considering the revolutions, civil wars and endemic terrorism that seem to have afflicted most of the country's neighbors. Yet the calm may not be sustainable, as Jordan confronts its own continuing struggles over reform and change; faces seemingly countless threats in terms of its internal and external security; and attempts to deal with its own economic crises and challenging energy needs.

But even as Jordan confronts its domestic challenges, its regional setting presents an even deeper challenge. Jordan's political geography, in short, [seems to make every problem more difficult](#).

To the north, Syria's civil war rages on, while to the east, Iraq has seen rampant terrorism since the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 and intermittent insurgencies rising against the government in Baghdad. In both Syria and Iraq, large swaths of territory are now controlled by the self-declared Islamic State (IS, or as it is known in Jordan, Daesh), which ultimately has designs on Jordan too.

To the west lie Israel and the Palestinian territories. While Jordan has maintained a peace treaty with Israel since 1994, it remains a cold peace at best—between the two countries' governments but not their societies. Last summer's Gaza war and other recent events have only made it that much harder for the Jordanian regime to maintain the treaty in the face of increased domestic anger over Israeli actions against Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem.

To the south lies the only seemingly peaceful border, with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. But even as Jordan edges ever closer to the Saudis as allies, many Jordanians fear increased Salafi or Wahhabi influence on domestic politics. The rise of IS and the increasing activism of Jordan's own Salafi movement have only added to those fears.

This report will examine several key areas of concern in Jordanian politics, including foreign policy and regional relations, internal struggles over political reform, as well as social divisions, refugee crises and economic challenges facing the kingdom today.

Security, Alliances and Regional Relations

Unlike many regimes elsewhere in the world, Jordan's security concerns aren't hypothetical. A revolutionary version of the Arab Spring may not have emerged from within Jordan, but the revolutions, uprisings and civil wars of the country's neighbors have increasingly pressed at its borders.

Certainly the most urgent security threat to Jordan is the rise of IS in parts of both Syria and Iraq. More alarming for Jordanians was the spread of the movement to Jordan's very borders, as IS militants took multiple posts on the border with Syria and then claimed territories across the Iraqi border as well, in Iraq's Anbar province. Jordan responded by reinforcing both borders with additional forces and armored units.

The kingdom also strengthened its already extensive ties with the militaries of the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as with their respective intelligence services, the CIA and MI6. Early in the Arab Spring, before the rise of IS, Amman had already permitted the deployment of several hundred U.S. troops in northern Jordan, along with U.S. F-16 fighter jets and Patriot missile defense batteries. All of this was originally agreed upon with the threat of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's military—and especially his chemical weapons—in mind. Today, those same forces, now augmented by an additional squadron of six French fighter jets, are positioned against IS rather than Assad.

But in 2011 and 2012, at least, it was retaliation from Assad that the Jordanian regime feared most—specifically, retaliation for Jordanian support for “moderate” rebel forces aligned against the Assad regime. While details have been kept deliberately nebulous, some units of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) are believed to be receiving training and perhaps arms in Jordan.

That in many ways encapsulates Jordan's precarious position as the Syrian civil war spiraled out of control: It has tried to provide support to one side without being perceived in Damascus as doing just that. The kingdom has been under considerable pressure from its major allies—the U.S. and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—to do more. But unlike the U.S. and the GCC states, Jordan shares a border with Syria, so the potential costs of any failures are a more immediate concern. Perhaps with that in mind, the Jordanian government has consistently called for a political, rather than a military, solution to the Syrian conflict.

Jordan has therefore tried to maintain as low-key an approach as possible toward the Syrian war, although it is clearly not a neutral or disinterested party. But even four years into the war, and despite anger in Damascus over Amman's position on the conflict, Jordanian-Syrian relations remain unbroken. At one point, the Jordanians grew tired of Syria's vocal ambassador openly criticizing the Hashemite regime and [abruptly sent him packing](#). But neither country cut off relations, and both regimes feel threatened by the rise of IS.

More broadly, the Arab Spring, from the initial democratic protests to the civil wars and rise of IS, has rearranged regional alliances and alignments. For a small country like Jordan, alliances are a key factor in foreign policy and have been nothing less than the guarantors of national and regime security throughout the existence of the Hashemite Kingdom. Jordan has maintained intimately close relations with the United Kingdom and the European Union more generally, and especially with the U.S. Its military and intelligence services have close connections to their U.S.

counterparts, and Jordan is one of the top recipients of U.S. foreign aid. The relationship is even close at a personal level; Jordan's King Abdullah II and U.S. President Barack Obama are friends, and the king is a frequent visitor to the U.S.

It is in regional terms, especially in inter-Arab relations, that we see more fluctuation and realignment over the years. Upon ascending the throne in 1999, King Abdullah made the repair of ruptured inter-Arab relations a priority. Jordan had been cut off from the main Arab sources of oil and aid due to its stance in 1990 over the Persian Gulf War. The Jordanians had actually adopted a neutral position, warning against the destabilizing effects of a war in the Gulf. But the defeat of Iraq by a U.S.-led coalition had destroyed Jordan's main import and export trade partner, and wealthy oil monarchies like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait cut off Jordanian aid and oil and deported hundreds of thousands of Jordanian and Palestinian workers. The political and economic blow of that era has haunted many officials since, and King Abdullah has made it a priority to strengthen regional ties while trying to alienate no one.

From 1999 onward, Jordan restored its ties to the Arab Gulf monarchies and has tried to strengthen them ever since. In 2011, as regimes fell in Tunisia and Egypt, the six monarchies of the GCC—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—began to play a more active foreign policy role, and even extended membership invitations to two more monarchies: Jordan and Morocco. Neither was a Gulf state or a rich oil economy, but both were predominantly Sunni Arab states led by relatively conservative monarchies with extensive ties to Western powers.

Those invitations seem to have vanished at present, as the initial period of alarm passed. But new and different security threats have since emerged, so Jordanian security cooperation with these states remains extensive, and aid from the GCC has been vital in helping Jordan navigate the economic difficulties resulting from the Arab Spring.

In 2012, as the Muslim Brotherhood rose to power in Egypt and Islamist forces seemed to be experiencing a resurgence across the region, Jordan and the GCC states alike grew worried about what these trends meant for them. In Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood remains a legal and active organization, and it has been part of public life since the foundation of the state itself in 1946. The Brotherhood remains the largest and best-organized opposition group in Jordanian politics, and while it is a force for conservative Islamism, it is not a militant or jihadist organization. It has therefore maintained a kind of understanding with the monarchy over the years—sometimes in a fairly cooperative relationship of “loyal opposition,” sometimes in cold detachment. The latter mood better captures the regime-Islamist relations since the Arab Spring.

The Brotherhood has boycotted the last several rounds of Jordanian elections and has been harshly critical of the regime-led reform process. Inspired by the successes of Islamist movements across the region, the movement seemed to feel in 2011-2013 that its time had come.

But with the sudden reversal of fortune for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in July 2013 through an unusual combination of mass demonstrations and military coup d'état, their Jordanian counterparts were in shock. The Hashemite regime, in contrast, seemed both relieved and overjoyed. Within 24 hours of the regime shift in Egypt, Jordan made clear its support for the

new secular regime of Gen. Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, arranging an immediate royal visit. King Abdullah was the first world leader to arrive in Cairo after the regime change, backing the el-Sissi government and creating a warming in Egyptian-Jordanian relations that has continued ever since.

Since 2013, an inter-Arab alignment of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE has grown steadily closer. These states have not just cooperated in foreign policy, but also to some extent in domestic policy. Each of these three key Jordanian allies has moved harshly against the Muslim Brotherhood, declaring the organization illegal, with Egypt in particular making positively draconian moves. Yet Jordan has, so far, avoided pressure from its allies to do the same. In contrast to their allies, the Jordanians have not moved against the Muslim Brotherhood itself. The organization remains active and legal, as it has throughout Jordanian history. But the relationship between the regime and the Brotherhood also remains cold and distrustful, with each seeing the other as having engaged in a kind of betrayal.

Yet foreign policy may actually deepen the rift even further. Alliances and alignments are seen as so central to Jordanian foreign policy, and to Jordan's security and economic interests, that criticism within domestic politics of Jordan's key allies is now an arrestable offense. This was underscored in December 2014, when Jordanian security forces arrested the outspoken deputy leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Zaki Bani Irshayd, not for statements or actions against the regime, but for Facebook posts harshly criticizing the UAE for its suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood. Irshayd was put on trial under Jordan's recently strengthened counterterrorism law, which criminalized actions or comments that "harm" Jordan's foreign relations. In January 2015, three more Muslim Brotherhood supporters were tried for harming relations with Egypt after criticizing the el-Sissi regime.

Jordan's revamped counterterrorism law also criminalizes online activity that is deemed to be supportive of militant or terrorist organizations. In addition, it was [used to arrest almost 100 people](#) for raising the flag of IS during demonstrations by Jordanian Salafis, which took place in August 2014, especially in the southern city of Maan.

Jordanian intelligence and police had already been monitoring Salafi activism closely, as Salafi jihadists crossed Jordan's borders to fight against Assad in Syria, and later, to join groups like Jabhat al-Nusra and IS. By 2013, border forces became more stringent in preventing would-be jihadists from crossing the borders out of Jordan, but they were even more aggressive against those attempting to return, opening fire on any jihadi militants approaching Jordan's Syrian or Iraqi borders.

Jordan's attempts to guarantee its own security have been very controversial at home. Many Jordanians do indeed support each key move, including the deployment of U.S. forces, jets and missile systems, seeing these as vital to Jordanian security and national defense. But many, perhaps even more, do not. Some argue that the Western powers, and especially the U.S. in light of the 2003 Iraq War, are the main culprits behind the destabilization of the region, and hence are the last forces that should deploy on Jordanian national soil. Others fear that too close a connection to Western powers, or even to the reactionary bloc that is the GCC, will trigger jihadist retaliation, not on Jordan's borders, but within the kingdom itself.

This is not an idle fear. Jordan has been the victim of jihadist terrorism before. On Nov. 9, 2005, jihadist suicide bombers affiliated with al-Qaida in Iraq attacked three hotels in Amman, killing 60 people and injuring hundreds. It was a devastating moment for the Jordanian state and society, and one that has loomed like a shadow ever since.

When Jordan agreed to play an active role in the U.S.-led coalition against IS, many Jordanians worried about similar terrorist acts again being visited on the kingdom by IS jihadists. This time, Jordan was playing a very public role, with Jordanian fighter jets even joining in a bombing campaign against IS strongholds. This role became crystal clear when a Jordanian pilot, Muadh al-Kassasbeh, was shot down and captured near Raqqa, Syria, considered the capital of IS. The capture of Kassasbeh, and the threat by IS to execute him, led to renewed debate within Jordan over the kingdom's very controversial role in the anti-IS coalition.

The 'Arab Spring' and Internal Reform Struggles

In 2011, mass uprisings toppled Arab regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, and soon spread to Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Yemen. No two outcomes were quite alike. Revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt ousted their respective dictators relatively quickly, yet the post-revolutionary transitions soon went in radically different directions. In Yemen, a partial transfer of power was arranged via a negotiated exit for President Ali Abdullah Saleh, while in Bahrain, the counterrevolution seemed to be in full swing. Both the Libyan and Syrian revolutions turned into civil wars, with the former prompting NATO military intervention and the latter descending into a seemingly endemic conflict between regime and opposition that has drawn in various forms of direct and indirect foreign intervention. In the latter cases in particular, the original optimism and democratic impulses of the Arab Spring have taken a darker turn toward repression and violence.

Throughout the years of the Arab Spring, Jordan maintained a moderate and seemingly stable position. The kingdom did not see revolution, civil war, insurgency or a coup d'état. The Hashemite regime remained in place, and Jordan persevered as a regime, a state and a society. But that is not to say that nothing happened.

In 2011 and 2012, protesters marched in Jordan too, with demonstrations sometimes reaching the thousands. The largest of them tended to emerge when multiple elements of political opposition all took to the streets: youth activists, Islamists—based heavily in Jordan's very large Muslim Brotherhood movement—leftist and nationalist political parties, as well as trade unions and professional associations. In almost every case, however, Jordanian protesters called for reform, not revolution. Some wanted the regime to lead the reform process. Others wanted the regime to remain, but to take a few steps back in terms of its role in politics, devolving more power to elected bodies and allowing for greater democratization.

In general, protesters' demands touched on three large themes: the revival of a long-dormant political liberalization process; the restoration of the fuller economic and social safety net that had eroded in an era of privatization and other neoliberal economic reforms; and a serious effort to stamp out widespread corruption in public life.

Jordan did not have millions of protesters occupying a central square, or a death toll from police brutality, but protesters gathered like clockwork every Friday for more than two years beginning in 2011. By 2013, these demonstrations began to taper off and shifted in size and focus. Many activists were disillusioned with the violent turns taken by the Arab Spring elsewhere, especially in Syria. The Syrian civil war had in fact divided many elements of the Jordanian opposition, with Islamists backing the rebel movements while secular leftist and nationalist political parties often backed Assad against his largely Islamist opponents.

Broader trends across the region seemed to reinforce these opposition divisions. Non-Islamist protesters were alarmed by the rise of Islamist movements to power in Tunisia and Egypt. Jordanian Islamists, in turn, were at first inspired by this same turn of events, but then became alarmed by the failures and ousting of Islamist regimes in 2013 and 2014.

Today, Jordan's leadership has survived the Arab Spring, at least in the sense of avoiding its more violent and revolutionary manifestations. The Hashemite regime feels that this is due to its own efforts in responding to public demands. King Abdullah noted on many occasions that the Arab Spring was not a constraint, but an opportunity, a wake-up call to Arab regimes for reform and change. The king argued therefore that the strategic moment empowered would-be reformers to finally move against otherwise entrenched hardliners who opposed liberalization or other forms of political change.

Four years after the start of the Arab spring, however, the regime and the opposition retain markedly different images of what exactly has transpired during this period. The regime argues that Jordan has, once again, demonstrated its exceptionalism and durability by adapting to volatile circumstances. The list of reforms includes changes to the constitution, electoral laws, political party laws and media laws, as well as the creation of a Constitutional Court, an Independent Electoral Commission to oversee national elections and an Anti-Corruption Commission. The most recent of these were held in 2013 and included open access to international election observers. The 2013 elections ushered in a new Parliament, which consulted with the regime about the naming of a new prime minister. It was a step short of explicitly parliamentary government, but the regime maintained that it was [making deliberate and careful steps](#) toward that eventual end.

Opposition activists, in contrast, don't disagree with the reality of the reforms listed above, but they do tend to disagree about their depth and whether they are meaningful or simply cosmetic changes. The monarchy, they argue, maintains most political power in the Jordanian system. Despite the list of reforms, the electoral law remains uneven in terms of representation among districts, and true parliamentary government remains a goal but not yet a reality. Perhaps more alarming for democracy activists, however, was the new law on media, press and publications, which extended government supervision to include online media, along with the revamped counterterrorism law, which included under its terrorism rubric online activism or perceived support for militant groups even in online posts.

For many regime officials, and indeed many in Jordan's security and intelligence services, the new laws are essential to the security of the kingdom, especially in light of the turmoil across Jordan's borders. But democracy activists argue that national security concerns, both real and

perceived, tend to be used to block greater reform, liberalization or democratization. They worry specifically about how—and against whom—these laws might be used.

Shortly after the new media restrictions went into place, Jordan blocked hundreds of websites, reining in a proliferation of online news sites and tabloids that had riled many in the ruling elite. Several sites that vanished will likely not be missed, but some other more professional sites were also banned in this process, including the highly regarded 7iber.com (pronounced “Hiber”—Arabic for “ink”). The 7iber site, run by an enclave of young supporters of reform and democracy, responded by changing their domain several times—7iber.com, 7iber.net, 7iber.org—but each time the government found the new site and blocked it. Eventually, 7iber too complied with the new, more restrictive rules, became licensed and was once again accessible. But in many ways, the overall state of press and media freedom was more troubled in 2015 than it had been in 2011, at the start of the Arab Spring.

In 2011, many young activists in Jordan were inspired and hopeful about democratic reform. But many have since come to believe that Jordan remains in stasis, with much fanfare over reforms, but little depth to the actual change.

Others feel that the situation is actually worse than stasis—that Jordan has begun regressing as the public pressure for reform has subsided. Yet that doesn’t mean that these same activists are necessarily part of an organized opposition. Indeed, many young activists in Jordan are as disillusioned with the old opposition—whether Islamist, leftist or nationalist—as they are with the government.

For that reason, some activists feel that the Arab Spring never hit Jordan at all. Others feel that it did in a reformist rather than revolutionary sense, but that the kingdom has since reverted to its pre-Arab Spring form. Regime supporters, in contrast, argue that Jordan’s story is a model for the region—a model of largely top-down reform launched by the regime itself. In this sense, and many others, Jordan is often compared to Morocco.

Perhaps the main issue accounting for these very different readings of contemporary political life is the security situation itself. Historically, and indeed throughout the world, countless reform or democracy programs have been abandoned in the name of national security. Regime critics argue that this is happening again in Jordan—that the panic over the rise of IS and other security threats [may be the final nail in the coffin](#) of the reform process.

The monarchy, the government, the security services and many Jordanians argue the opposite. Given its severe security concerns, they say, Jordan has proceeded as far along the reform path as is feasible at present.

Refugees and Economic Challenges

Whether the issue is reform, security or the economy, Jordanian domestic political debates are never entirely domestic. Jordan’s small size and weak, even dependent economy make the kingdom especially vulnerable to regional crises. At the outset of the Arab Spring, Jordan was already embroiled in its own economic crisis, which was then compounded by regional turmoil,

not only in terms of regional violence, but also in the form of massive refugee flows into the kingdom.

Syria's revolution and civil war began deep in the south of the country, in Deraa, a border town just north of Ramtha, Jordan. As the Assad regime responded with extreme violence against unarmed protesters, hundreds began to flee across the border to Jordan. Those hundreds soon became thousands and eventually hundreds of thousands.

Today, it is unclear how many Syrian refugees there actually are, since most are not in refugee camps but instead have made their way to cities like Amman. The Jordanian government [has sometimes estimated](#) that as many as 1.4 million Syrians may be in Jordan—a country of less than 7 million people. Of these, approximately 736,000 are refugees, with perhaps 20 percent of the refugees in camps. Jordan has worked closely with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in established camps such as Zaatari near Mafraq, and has been reliant on international aid to get by on a daily basis.

There is no way to overstate the depth of this refugee burden. It is greatest, of course, on the refugees themselves, especially the majority who are children and who may ultimately comprise a lost generation for Syria. But for host countries—especially Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq—the burden is also overwhelming, with international pledges rarely matching actual funds needed for services, food, water and lodging.

It is worth noting that no country has dealt with more waves of refugees over time than Jordan. It is estimated that perhaps half the Jordanian population is descended from waves of Palestinian refugees, especially following the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars. But Jordan has also seen waves of Iraqi refugees in the various Gulf wars, including hundreds of thousands fleeing the violence that followed the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. Even some of Jordan's prominent minority communities, such as the Circassians and the Chechens, are themselves the descendants of refugees who fled persecution in the Russian Empire. Refugee flows, in short, are not new to Jordan. But Jordan's economy [remains unable to cope](#) with these latest refugee flows without extensive daily international support.

The economy itself is also small and aid dependent. Unlike its GCC allies, Jordan was not blessed with extensive oil resources. It has few natural resources, aside from limited supplies of phosphates and potash. Jordan remains dependent on outside suppliers for its energy needs—especially oil and natural gas—and even for its water supplies. This makes it even more vulnerable to times of regional tension. The kingdom has drafted long-term plans to try and create a more sustainable economic situation, including starting shale production within Jordan itself as well as the creation of a pipeline from Aqaba to the Gulf for liquefied natural gas, which requires good relations with Qatar.

Jordan began a process of economic liberalization under the late King Hussein in 1989. This involved a series of neoliberal economic reforms, opening the Jordanian economy to greater trade and investment; austerity programs to deal with a bloated public sector; and the privatization of previously state-owned companies in industries from communications to

transportation to construction. Under King Abdullah, the neoliberal economic agenda steadily accelerated and has been a major part of the regime's economic development strategy.

Jordan's economic adjustment program has at times involved severe economic austerity measures, as part of a long-term IMF restructuring program. These, in turn, have at times triggered political unrest, including riots over the loss of subsidies for basic food items in 1989, 1996 and most recently in November 2013. Today, despite regional turmoil and the refugee crises, the IMF has rated Jordan's economy as stable. The kingdom is, in fact, almost the poster country for the world's dominant economic institutions: the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. Many in Jordan's business community applaud this economic trajectory, but there is also no shortage of domestic critics, and this has even to some extent rearranged the normal structures of opposition in the kingdom.

For decades, many observers have remarked on the importance of identity politics within Jordan, in particular the tendency for state institutions and the public sector to be dominated by East Bank Jordanians, while the private sector seemed to be dominated by Jordanians of Palestinian origin. As privatization has proceeded apace, shrinking the public sector and empowering the private sector, many historically bedrock pro-regime communities now feel left out of Jordan's development plans. Tribal East Jordanians have historically been seen as the core supporters of the Hashemite regime, but with often jarring economic, social and political change, this is no longer always the case.

When the 2011 uprisings rocked the Arab world, youth-based movements (known as "Herak" in Jordan) [emerged throughout the kingdom](#), but most often in tribal East Jordanian communities like Dheban, Tafila and Maan. Many of these protesters felt that Jordan's neoliberal reform process had gone too far, undermining the social safety net and harming their own prospects for jobs and livelihoods. Some Herak activists want to roll back privatization efforts and re-establish direct state support for their communities. But others have emphasized political reform and democratization, rather than economic change, as the key points to their agenda. Palestinians [have also participated](#), but seemingly not in great numbers.

Indeed, since identity politics has been used so often in the past as a divide-and-rule tactic, especially by the intelligence services, many Jordanians try to downplay their own roots, fearing that legitimate democratic activism will be manipulated by hardline anti-reform elements in the regime. The latter elements have a long history of attempting to label any mass activism as really Palestinian, or Islamist, or both—in each case questioning the national loyalty and patriotism of the participants.

To be clear, Jordanian politics is not simply a contest between rich Palestinian business elites and poor disenfranchised tribal East Jordanians, nor is it the reverse: a contest between powerful East Jordanian elites versus poor disenfranchised Palestinians living in urban refugee camps. One can find all of the previous dimensions within Jordan, to be sure, but these are cross-cutting social cleavages. Jordanians of both Palestinian and East Bank origins can be found among Jordan's poorest citizens, and also among its richest.

Sometimes the dividing lines in Jordanian politics are between ethnic identities, sometimes between tribes, sometimes between ideologies—but the most important line is economic: between rich and poor. Still, the cynical invocation of identity politics nonetheless has a long history of success in terms of dividing potential opposition coalitions for greater economic or political change.

Regional politics and economic crises have often mobilized—or divided—protest movements in Jordan. As noted above, Jordan's various opposition elements were sharply divided over the Syrian war. But Israeli policies have sometimes had the opposite effect, uniting Jordanians of various ideological, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Israel's Likud governments have in particular made this an unintended result of their hard-line policies. The bombardment of Gaza in the summer of 2014, for example, triggered broad-based demonstrations in support of Palestinian rights, bringing a seemingly dormant street opposition movement back to life.

Even more recently, economic and energy issues triggered an even greater grassroots political mobilization, when the Jordanian government announced that it intended to solve part of its energy crisis by importing gas from Israel. Jordanian activists equated the gas deal with supporting Israeli occupation and urged the government not to follow through with it. The movement that followed soon blurred the usual dividing lines to include leftists and Islamists, parties and professional associations, Muslims, Christians and Jordanians of all ethnic backgrounds. The activists even triggered a vigorous debate in Parliament, which ultimately voted to urge the government to scrap the deal with Israel.

It remains unclear whether the government and regime will follow through with the widely unpopular deal. It is possible that Jordan can look to other suppliers, such as Cyprus, or increase the pace of its own energy-development plans with Iraq and the various GCC states. But all these options are long-term, including the potential deal with Israel, so Jordan will still need to find short-term solutions for greater energy security in the interim. In the meantime, the global drop in oil and energy prices has at least eased the economic urgency, if not the political difficulty, of Jordan's energy crisis. But in a broader sense—beyond energy needs alone—Jordan's economy remains aid-dependent, and hence stable foreign relations continue to be vital to sustain the state and society.

Conclusion

At the onset of 2015, Jordan has survived the regional waves of change known as the Arab Spring. But the kingdom's security situation, always precarious, seems to be even worse as Jordan's neighbors remain unstable at best, or embroiled in endemic turmoil at worst.

Yet so far Jordan has managed to muddle through. At home, both the regime and its critics remain concerned with security threats, reform struggles and economic and energy crises. Most Jordanians seem aware that their situation could, at any moment, change radically, and that their security, political stability and economic well-being remain deeply dependent on the actions of neighbors—both allies and enemies alike. While this is in some ways an alarming prospect, it has also been true in varying degrees since the kingdom's independence in 1946.

Jordan cannot control or solve the problems of its neighbors, but in 2015 and beyond, if the kingdom is to do more than muddle through, it will be vital for both government and opposition to move forward in achieving meaningful political and economic reform and energy security, and above all to emphasize inclusion for Jordanians of all walks of life in every phase of that process.

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