

In His Own Words: Jordan's Security Backbone **The Thoughts of His Majesty King** **Abdullah II of Jordan**

King Abdullah, II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
World Policy Journal 2013 30: 31
DOI: 10.1177/0740277513506380

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://wpj.sagepub.com/content/30/3/31.2>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



World Policy Institute

Additional services and information for *World Policy Journal* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://wpj.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://wpj.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Sep 23, 2013

[What is This?](#)

Jordan's Security Backbone: Pluralism and National Unity

THE THOUGHTS OF HIS
MAJESTY KING ABDULLAH II
OF JORDAN

Since the creation of the modern Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the monarchs King Hussein and his son, the current ruler King Abdullah II, have presided over a nation that has served as a model of tranquility and security, moving steadily toward an increasingly democratic system of government. As turmoil has shaken all its neighbors, the royal family has managed to guard its sovereignty and independence. King Abdullah II, described as the 43rd generation direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammad, ascended the throne of the Hashemite Kingdom on the death of his father in February 1999. Educated in the United States and Britain, after training at the British military academy at Sandhurst, he served as a major general in the Jordanian Army. During his 14-year reign, the kingdom's economy has



flourished, and he has played a major role in encouraging an Israeli-Palestinian peace process. *World Policy Journal* editors asked His Majesty to illuminate, in his own words, the roots of Jordan's extraordinary record of security and democracy and the unique challenges posed by the complex neighborhood where his nation finds itself.

HIS MAJESTY KING ABDULLAH II OF JORDAN

Throughout the life of my country, the Middle East has been the front line of bitter conflicts and the crossroads of world economic forces. Jordan's security in this tough neighborhood has not come from great power or vast resources. Our security comes from an inveterate national ethos that has kept our country resilient through decades of almost constant pressures and change. Today, these values—unity, moderation, pluralism, and respect—are helping us achieve consensual, lasting democratic reform even in the face of extraordinary regional and global pressures. As our strategic region faces its future, the Jordanian model of democratic transition merits attention and support.

I hear some people say the Arab World is not suited for democracy. This is an historical misperception. A great civilization was built by Arab peoples of many backgrounds. In modern Jordan, tribes and peoples from every region contributed to building our state as moderate, pluralistic, and based on the rule of law. Our people come from the Badia [arid and semi-arid regions], villages, and cities. Some even come from the far-away highlands and mountains of Eurasia. Muslims and Christians have always lived side-by-side in mutual respect. From the mosaic of our national fabric we have drawn unique strengths and capabilities;

not least, the ability to face challenges that require change.

In recent years, we came to a challenge unlike any before. Jordan entered the 21st century with a large youth population, young men and women who have the same high expectations as their peers across the world. They need jobs, good jobs, to secure their families and futures and to give Jordan the empowered middle-class we need. The old status quo could not deliver on this promise. Reform—economic and political—was the only road forward to give everyone a stake in the process and a share of the fruits of success.

When I had the honor to ascend to the Throne of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, nearly 15 years ago, I took an oath upon myself to contribute all I could to making Jordan more prosperous. And it has always been crystal clear to me that this means more democratic, too. Our approach included balanced economic liberalization and socio-economic initiatives to expand the middle class, the main driver of political reform. We worked to create a framework of partnership and integration, bringing together the public and private sectors, as well as civil society organizations, to achieve inclusive growth and sustainable development. Other efforts focused on improving governance and broadening participation. We have forged the path, but we still have much hard work ahead of us.

Political-party culture immediately emerged as a vital issue. Our goal is effective parliamentary government, under the umbrella of our unifying constitutional monarchy and parliamentary political system based on the Constitution. But parliamentary government comes with practical requirements: nation-wide parties, able to formulate programs, run campaigns on the issues, and win votes; and party-based

parliamentary blocs (for both the majority that forms governments, and the minority that acts as shadow governments), able to carry through programs and be held accountable by voters. New structures and mind-sets had to be planted deep within our political system.

REFORM: A WAKEUP CALL

By 2011, progress on reform was dragging. Global crises in finance, food and energy overwhelmed the sense of economic progress and reform. Regional conflict exacted a toll. There was resistance to change from dug-in interests. Others wanted to stand outside the process, criticizing but refusing to engage in dialogue and change.

Reform needed a wake-up call, and that is what the Arab Spring provided. With new and vocal support, we set milestones for reform to meet people's needs and secure our country's future. We grounded change in the Constitution, the citadel of our rights and freedoms. One-third of our Constitution was amended, to strengthen protection of civil rights and freedoms, and enhance balance and separation of powers. There were new constitutional parameters for the Monarch's responsibilities, and provisions creating a Constitutional Court and an Independent Election Commission.

The Commission's first major role was to run and oversee parliamentary elections in January 2013. Despite those who hoped to promote a boycott, voter registration reached 70 percent. All stages of the electoral process were monitored by international and local observers. On Election Day, voter turnout was one of the highest in Jordan's history. The new Parliament includes blocs from nationalist, Islamist, and leftist parties, as well as activists and leaders of popular movements. Sixty-one percent of the members of Parliament are

first-time members. Eighteen MPs are women—15 who won seats under the women's quota, and three more elected as leaders of national tickets and local district representatives. This Parliament began a pilot role in governance, consulting on the selection of the Prime Minister and Cabinet members, and vigorously debating the vote of confidence in the new government.

In my role as guarantor of the political reform process, I am resolute about moving forward. In four

discussion papers posted online, I have sought to open public dialogue on our next steps. We have enhanced checks and balances to uphold pluralism and a level playing field, with measures to make

sure no side can exploit power to isolate or disenfranchise others. Now, political-party culture must continue to grow. The Civil Service must be developed, to support the gradual development of a full-fledged parliamentary government system. Public confidence in state institutions must be strengthened (already in place: a National Integrity Committee, a Privatization Review Committee, and fast-tracked judicial procedures for corruption cases, with proper due process).

Key to the success of this process is citizen participation—not simply voicing one's own views, but listening to others respectfully and together finding workable solutions to national priorities like jobs, energy, water, and more. I see citizen engagement—active citizenship—as more than a right. It is a responsibility, the core of peaceful development and security. Building democratic culture, with active

**WE HAVE
BOLSTERED
OUR SECURITY
FROM ITS
CORE OF
NATIONAL
UNITY.**

citizenship at its core, is at the heart of Jordan's new *Demograti* initiative, which supports civil society, especially young leaders and grassroots activists.

Jordan wants reform that cannot be turned back—reform built on peaceful and gradual change, pluralism, and respect for others. By making an uncompromising choice of reform despite all regional security challenges surrounding us—literally on all sides—and by embarking on an unprecedented political transition, rooted in the principles of inclusiveness and participation, we have bolstered our security from its core of national unity.

The entire democratic world has an interest in such an evolutionary model. Our success will be the democratic world's, as well. And there are three ways to help.

First is economically. The global downturn hit Jordanians hard, and its impact is still being felt in the painful choices we are making to restore fiscal sustainability. International institutions have commended our national plan; continued support is key to opportunity, hope, and stability as people face change.

Global support is equally urgent as we cope with the horrifying, still-expanding Syrian refugee emergency. The number of Syrian refugees in Jordan already equals 10 percent of the population. By year-end, this percentage could double. Not even the strongest economies could cope with such numbers, let alone a country that is the fourth water-scarcest in the world, imports 96 percent of its energy and 87 percent of its food. The international community agrees: Jordan cannot be left alone to shoulder the huge economic and security costs. More refugee support is crucial.

In tandem, there must be global diplomatic action toward a political transi-

tion—the only solution that can end the bloodshed, prevent the fragmentation of Syria and further radicalization, stop the regional spillover and sectarian strife, and counter the chemical weapons threats. All these risks, as I have been warning, have increased as the conflict drags on. The world simply cannot afford not to converge on a solution for inclusive political transition.

Third is the core importance of ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—the central crisis of our region, and a burning torch for extremism in our region and beyond. Jordan has long taken a lead for a two-state settlement, supported by the Arab Peace Initiative, creating a viable and independent Palestinian State on Palestinian national soil that will end an occupation that has crossed 46 years, and providing Israel with the real security that only peace can guarantee. The resumption of talks last July was a testament to what can be accomplished with U.S. leadership, backed by regional and wide international support. The process is certain to be rocky, but the alternatives are, quite frankly, unthinkable. The region, and the world, will be immeasurably more secure with peace.

Evolutionary and consensual change, moderation, pluralism, and respect for others—these are the drivers of progress and security, within as well as between countries, and they are Jordan's values. As regional events play out, we will continue to pursue our reform trajectory, to secure the thriving future our people deserve.

Jordan is on the path to set the right model for itself and to transform its challenges into opportunities. Our history is witness to the resilience of Jordan and Jordanians and to the fact that we can accomplish a lot with very little means. It is a path worth international support. ●