WILL THE HASHEMITE MONARCHY SURVIVE THE ARAB SPRING?

BY SAMER LIBDEH
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## Contents

Political Agitation in Jordan  6  
The Islamic Action Front  6  
Trans-Jordanians  7  
Recommendations  7  
Introduction  9  
Electoral Reform: Genuine Change or Superficial Salve?  10  
The Muslim Brotherhood: A Vehicle for Reform or a Roadblock?  13  
Tribes: From Royal Asset to Threat  14  
Challenges to the Transitional Period  16  
Conclusion and Policy Recommendations  18
Political Agitation in Jordan

• The Arab Spring protests throughout the region, in particular the unfolding crisis in neighbouring Syria, have led to mounting protests from the opposition in Jordan;
• These protests are increasing in size and are mainly focussed on economic decline and corruption, and further on reducing the powers of King Abdullah II in favour of a more administrative and legislative system of government;
• On 11th October, the King dissolved Parliament for the fifth time in two years, and appointed a new Prime Minister;
• The King has called for new elections to take place in Jordan towards the end of 2012, but he has repeatedly reacted to domestic political pressure; however, there is much speculation that the election will not take place until 2013 owing to a low registration of voters;
• Whilst the King has declared his support for political reforms in Jordan, the opposition has alleged that all the initiatives instituted, thus far, are cosmetic and not substantive;
• Chief amongst these is the appointment of Abdul-Elah al-Khatib as the President of the Independent Elections Commission, which has frustrated and angered opposition groups, as his appointment is viewed as an attempt by the Royal Court to influence or control the election process and outcome;
• The new electoral law provides increased representation for candidates in the larger urban areas of Amman, Zarqa, and Irbid, where the vast majority of Palestinian-Jordanian and Muslim Brotherhood voters are based at the expense of regime-loyal rural areas, which tend to favour Trans-Jordanian tribes.

The Islamic Action Front

• The Muslim Brotherhood’s political arm, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), which in early October organised a protest in Amman that gathered as many as 40,000 people, has announced that it will boycott the elections in an attempt to challenge the legitimacy of the entire reform-oriented political process in the Kingdom;
• The IAF views Palestinian-Jordanians as citizens with full political rights in Jordan;
• The IAF is attempting to create an alliance with the National Front for Reform, which is led by Ahmad Ubaydat, an independent figure and the former Prime Minister and Intelligence Chief, who is a leading critic of the regime’s domestic, neoliberal policies, as well as the King’s executive powers.
Trans-Jordanians

• Emboldened by the Arab Spring, tribal leaders who have historically been close to the Royal Court have come together to form the Coordination Committee for Popular Movements, a pan-tribal association (a coalition of the largest seven tribes) which has been responsible for organising various protests and demonstrations in rural areas, such as Tafileh, Karak, Ma’an, and Shobak;

• The tribes have called for the separation of powers in the executive, legislative and judicial branches, and for wider representation from Jordan’s rural districts;

• They also consider Palestinian-Jordanians as ‘brothers living in Jordan temporarily’ and believe that the Kingdom should offer them full support to live with dignity until they return back to Palestine.

Recommendations

• Despite these challenges, Jordan can still become a successful case of peaceful transition towards democracy in the Middle East, similar to the Moroccan monarchy’s reduction of the authority of the King and its expansion of parliamentary powers;

• The US, in 2011, have provided Jordan with around $840 million in aid, and promised around $474 million for 2012. The European Union, meanwhile, has promised $4 billion for the coming three years;

• Although the US, in particular, should exercise caution in publicly praising the Royal Court’s reform efforts, the West can still encourage liberalisation in Jordan by pegging its sizeable aid packages to the court’s progress in instituting substantive electoral and parliamentary reforms.
WHILST KING ABDULLAH HAS PUBLICLY DECLARED HIS SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL REFORM IN JORDAN, FOLLOWING THE ONSET OF ARAB UPRISINGS IN THE REGION, CRITICS HAVE THUS FAR CLAIMED THAT THE ENACTED REFORMS ARE MORE COSMETIC THAN SUBSTANTIVE.
Introduction

It was only a matter of time before the Arab Spring would come to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Protests in Amman, among other Jordanian cities calling for political reform, which started in March 2011, have grown in size, as have violent clashes, although state repression has remained mild by Middle Eastern standards. Yet the continued lack of real political reform, combined with growing instability in neighbouring Syria, is likely to fuel further discontent. This month, King Abdullah II dissolved Parliament and appointed a new Prime Minister, responding to mounting protests demanding that he relinquish some of his power. The foremost complaint in Jordan, however, is that of ongoing state corruption, and there has been much speculation in the press that a number of unresolved cases may lead all the way back to the Royal Court, such as the large amount of state land and property that was granted to the Court, by the government, back in 2002 for social development and charitable purposes.¹

Trans-Jordanians, mainly represented by influential tribes, have traditionally been very loyal to the King, but even they have been calling for more administrative and legislative efforts to combat poverty, and to reduce the monarch’s power over Parliament. For instance, members of the influential Ajarmeh-clan issued a statement in June 2012 calling for the adoption of a constitutional monarchy and for the limiting of the King’s constitutional powers.²

The majority of Palestinian-Jordanians, on the other hand, have focused their efforts on changes to the electoral law, which, they hope, will ensure that they are more fairly represented in Parliament and the state bureaucracy. The growing economic crisis has also led to calls for a government measure to tackle unemployment, especially amongst the country’s youth. Scholar Labib Qamhawi calls the government position against Palestinian-Jordanians as “exclusivist and triggered by haphazard policies”.³

Whilst King Abdullah has publicly declared his support for political reform in Jordan, following the onset of Arab uprisings in the region,⁴ critics have thus far claimed that the enacted reforms are more cosmetic than substantive. Yet the difference in demands from the Trans-Jordanian and Palestinian-Jordanian protestors poses a challenge for the Royal Court, as it struggles to find a compromise that will satisfy both communities. Political unrest threatens to upset the delicate balance that the Amman have been able to maintain since the Civil War in 1970.

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³. Interview, Labib Qamhawi, August 22nd, 2012.
Electoral Reform: Genuine Change or Superficial Salve?

On 24th September 2011, the Jordanian Parliament - mainly dominated by tribal independent MPs and pro-government figures - approved the draft constitutional amendments proposed by the Royal Commission on Constitutional Review. The Commission, established by the King in June 2011, was to undertake a review of the constitution following public demands for reform. Previously, the 1952 Jordanian constitution stipulated the King as the source of all power who could recall and dissolve Parliament; it also, further to this, designated the Ministry of the Interior as responsible for conducting the legislative elections.

The constitutional amendments suggested by the Royal Commission call for the following:

(1) The creation of an independent constitutional court;

(2) The establishment of an independent commission to supervise and conduct Parliamentary elections;

(3) The right of the judiciary to adjudicate the validity of prosecutions and consider appeals.

The proposed amendments also prohibit the issuing of temporary laws by the King, unless Parliament is dissolved or a natural disaster, war, or other emergency occurs.5

Whilst these amendments represent a major step forward, they also fall short of the protestors’ demands and public expectations. For instance, the appointment of the veteran diplomat, Abdul-Elah al-Khatib, as President of the Independent Elections Commission, has frustrated and angered the opposition groups, for his appointment is viewed as an attempt by the royal court to influence or control the election process and outcome. Al-Khatib has ties and a strong association with the security establishment, and is considered to be part of the power elite. The security establishment is loyal to the court, and it has taken steps to ensure that the legislative amendments designed to increase democracy and political liberalisation have not challenged the constitutional powers of the King. Indeed, according to the Director of the Centre for Strategic Studies (a leading Jordanian think-tank), Musa Shteiwi, “It is not the personality of Al-Khatib and his background that has triggered dissatisfaction, but rather the general perception among Jordanians that the Commission is affiliated with the government”6. Whilst the creation of the Independent Election Commission suggests that the court is attempting to move away from the legacy of rigged Parliamentary and municipal elections, the appointment of Al-Khatib does seem to suggest otherwise.

Furthermore, on 26th June, 2012, Parliament passed a new electoral law which increased the number of members in Parliament from 120 to 140 (of which,

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6. Interview, Musa Shteiwi, August 30th, 2012.
APPARENTLY, THE ROYAL COURT WANTS TO STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN SECURING AN ELECTED MAJORITY IN A PARLIAMENT LOYAL TO THE REGIME, WHILST RESPONDING TO POPULAR DEMANDS FROM OPPOSITION GROUPS AND PARTIES THAT PREVIOUSLY BOYCOTTED ELECTIONS IN PROTEST AGAINST THE SNTV SYSTEM.

at least 15, must be women). Jordanian Parliament is bicameral. Members of the Lower House are directly elected, whilst all members of the Upper House are appointed by the King. Under the new law, the old and controversial Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system, which was introduced in 1993, and which enabled candidates to stand for several seats in a single constituency will be replaced with a parallel voting system: voters will be able to vote for two candidates, one from a national list and the other from a constituency list. The old system merely consisted of a single vote for every citizen.

The Upper House was able to approve the law before the end of the current four-year electoral year, which means that the Parliamentary elections expected to be held before the end of this year will be governed by the new electoral law.

Jordanian officials have expressed concern over the new electoral law whilst the opposition leaders are debating whether there should be a return to the law of 1989, which consisted of three ballots for each citizen. However, the 1989 law did not favour governmental candidates hailing from tribal backgrounds, as citizens mainly were able to vote for political figures running on the national ballot rather than through local, tribal associations. It also gave more seats to candidates from urban areas at the expense of rural ones. Accordingly, Palestinian-Jordanian candidates have higher chances for victory.

Apparently, the Royal Court wants to strike a balance between securing an elected majority in a Parliament loyal to the regime, whilst responding to popular demands from opposition groups and parties that previously boycotted elections in protest against the SNTV system.

The new electoral law provides increased representation for candidates in the large urban areas of Amman, Zarqa, and Irbid, where the vast majority of Palestinian-Jordanian and Muslim Brotherhood voters are based, at the expense of regime-loyal rural areas. Voters in urban centres are more politically aware and engaged in the electoral process, so candidates have historically attempted to create broad-based coalitions prior to the elections in order to secure victory.

Whilst the new electoral law is likely to result in a slight increase in representation for the opposition groups and parties
in the Parliament, they are unlikely to obtain a majority, as more seats are distributed to rural areas. It is, therefore, unlikely that the opposition will gain enough representatives to amend the constitution to reduce the powers of the King.

It also remains to be seen whether all opposition groups will participate in the upcoming elections. So far, the Muslim Brotherhood has announced that it will boycott the elections in an attempt to challenge the legitimacy of the entire reform-oriented political process in the Kingdom. The Muslim Brotherhood, represented by its political wing the Islamic Action Front (IAF), is attempting to create an alliance with the National Front for Reform, which is led by Ahmad Ubaydat, an independent figure and former Prime Minister and Intelligence Chief, who is a leading critic of the regime’s domestic, neoliberal policies, as well as the King’s executive powers.  

The Muslim Brotherhood: A Vehicle for Reform or a Roadblock?

The IAF is the most organised political and social movement in Jordan. It has also benefitted from the lack of political activism amongst civil society actors, as well as the organisational weaknesses of liberal, secular, nationalist and leftist parties. In early October, the IAF organised a rally in Amman, which the Jordanian political analyst, Hassan Barari, estimated as consisting of 35,000-40,000 people.\(^8\)

The Royal Court has historically discouraged citizens, especially Jordanian-Palestinians, from joining political parties or engaging in political activism. However, the rise in popularity of Islamists during the Arab Spring, and the success of its counterparts in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco, has emboldened the IAF, which has attempted to develop cross-community alliances in an effort to increase the pressure on the Court to introduce amendments to the constitution and alter the Jordanian electoral law. The Brotherhood has been successful in persuading other actors, including tribal, independent, and liberal forces, to challenge government policies: some parties, already, have hinted that they may boycott the upcoming political elections.\(^9\)

According to the Brotherhood’s deputy leader, Zaki Bani Rusheid, the Court failed to meet the demands of the majority of Jordanians for political reform. Additionally, the IAF leader, Hamza Mansour, described the new electoral law as a hollow gesture. The IAF called for 30 per cent of the seats to be awarded to candidates contested under the proportional representation list at the national level. The new law allocated only 17 seats for the national ballot out of 140 (24% of the seats).

The Brotherhood has attempted to persuade members of the Upper House to reach out to their contacts in the government and the royal palace, so as to encourage them to agree to its proposed amendments to the new electoral law. Led by Marwan Doudin, the former Minister for Occupied Territories (that is, the West Bank before the Jordanian disengagement in 1988), a coalition of 15 independent senators have urged the King to amend the law in accordance with the Brotherhood’s 30 per cent demand, following a private meeting with the monarch in August.

Members of the Upper House are appointed by the King, and they act as his last line of defence in Parliament. Their intervention is an indication of the level of anxiety and concern amongst pro-regime loyalists at the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies, fearing that they may encourage a significant number of voters to boycott the elections and thus cast doubts over the legitimacy of the elections, unless amendments are made to the new election law.

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9. Ibid.
Will the Hashemite monarchy survive the Arab Spring?

Tribes: From Royal Asset to Threat

The Court has always depended on the support of tribes to counter the influence of the majority Jordanian-Palestinians mainly located in the urban centres. In order to secure support from the tribes, the Court has offered its members employment, educational scholarships, and elite positions in the ranks of the Jordanian security and military establishment. But the court has also developed a strategy to ensure that no single family or tribe builds an alternative power-base that could threaten the Hashemite predominance.10

The success of protestors in other Arab countries – as part of the Arab Spring – has emboldened tribal leaders, who are now more willing to publicly challenge the state and the court in order obtain additional concessions and privileges. These leaders have come together to form the Coordination Committee for Popular Movements, a pan-tribal association (a coalition of the largest seven tribes),11 which has been responsible for organising various protests and demonstrations in rural areas, such as Tafileh, Karak, Ma’an, and Shobak.12

There is, however, a major distinction between the current anti-government activism of the IAF and the tribes. Arguably, the tribes have considerable support among young people, and have focused much of their efforts on socio-economic and political issues affecting those living in rural areas; comparatively, the IAF support is predominantly based in Jordan’s large urban centres. Moreover, young tribal members are growing impatient with the King, openly criticising his domestic policies in public and through social media, which is, arguably, the most provocative medium for fomenting Arab political unrest. On an organisational level, the tribes operate outside of the political sphere, as they have associated parties with factionalism and elitism and, by and large, have opposed the unilateral decisions made through rigid hierarchies from inside the monarchy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LARGEST TRIBES IN JORDAN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abbad:</strong> Large, semi-settled group of loosely connected tribes. Originally based in the Balqa Province and West Amman.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adwan:</strong> Leading tribes of Balqa Province.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Awamla:</strong> One of the largest tribes from the city of Salt.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bani Hasan:</strong> The largest tribe in Jordan, consisting of a confederacy of six semi-nomadic tribes. Mainly based in the North and East of Jordan.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bani Sakhr:</strong> The most powerful, nomadic tribal confederacy dominating central Jordan.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Da’ja:</strong> Semi-settled tribes based in Amman.</td>
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But what are the tribes’ major reformist goals? They have called for the separation of powers for the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. They are calling for reform to the electoral system so that rural areas are more fairly represented in the Parliament. In the economic realm, they have also criticised the Court’s ‘state’ privatisation policies, and further campaigned for the nationalisation of companies in the real estate and telecommunications sectors. They have also called for measures to combat financial and administrative corruption, and for the judiciary to prioritise these cases.13

On the longstanding, contentious, interethnic relations, the tribes have been inspired by the infamous call, issued in May 2010, by the National Committee of Retired Servicemen Association. It had requested constitutional disengagement from the West Bank and an end to the so-called ‘soft transfer’ of Palestinians across the Jordan River,14 which took place during the past few years due to difficult security and economic conditions in the West Bank.

The tribes view Palestinian-Jordanians as ‘brothers living in Jordan temporarily’ and believe that the Kingdom should offer them full support to live with dignity until they return back to Palestine. In this view, Palestinian-Jordanians are, at best, temporary citizens or second-class citizens. This is in marked contrast to that expressed by the IAF, which views Palestinian-Jordanians as citizens with full political rights, and which, as such, suggests that consensus between the tribes and the IAF on political reform may be difficult to achieve.

The Trans-Jordanians’ view of Palestinian-Jordanians is also inconsistent with the provisions of the Peace Treaty that Jordan signed with Israel in 1994. Article 8 of the Treaty states that Jordan and Israel should recognise problems caused to Palestinian refugees, ‘through the implementation of agreed United Nations programmes and other agreed international economic programmes concerning refugees and displaced persons, including assistance to their settlement’, which implicitly amounts to the absorption of large numbers of Palestinian refugees into Jordan.15

This prevents the government from excluding Palestinian-Jordanians politically through a carefully engineered electoral law, governmental decrees or legislations, or any other bureaucratic procedure.

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Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The Royal Court has been slow to respond to the Arab revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, even in the face of widespread demonstrations and protests on Jordanian streets. The proposals put forth by the government, thus far, fall far short of the demands made by the opposition groups and civil society activists.\(^{16}\)

The lack of transparent democracy and accountability, especially in respect to the executive branches, has forced the King to adopt extreme measures to test the support and performance of his government. For example, it has been reported that the King travelled around Jordan disguised as an ‘ordinary citizen’ poking and prodding his compatriots to share their views on his government.\(^{17}\)

According to an opinion poll published by the Centre for Strategic Studies in September 2012, less than 50 per cent of those polled believe that the government is leading Jordan in the right direction.\(^{18}\) Calls for the King to intervene in service-related matters, such as water shortages in rural areas, is yet further evidence of the lack of trust in the competence and ability of local and governmental officials.

In spite of these issues, the government has indicated that elections under the new election law will likely take place sometime at the end of 2012. The lack of clarity around the precise date of the elections has negative implications for candidates, who need to schedule activities, reach out to constituents, and mobilise and run campaigns.\(^{19}\) There is much speculation that the elections will be delayed until Spring 2013, owing to low levels of voter registration. The government has indicated that it will only proceed with the election when a minimum of two million voters have registered to vote. Reports suggest that only one million have registered (as of September 2012). According to Maher Abu Tair, an independent columnist in Addustour Daily, this is due to the following reasons:

1. MPs have discouraged their constituents from registering in the hope that elections will not take place this year, and thus they will be able to remain in office for a longer period of time;
2. The lack of general confidence in the government, including towards MPs;
3. The successful campaign mounted by the IAF and other opposition groups to encourage voters to boycott the elections;
4. Weaknesses in the government’s media campaigns;
5. The increasing belief that the conflict in Syria will spill over into Jordan, especially in light of recent clashes across its northern border. (This has led to a call for emergency laws to be introduced similar to those prior to the Iraq War in 2003.)

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\(^{16}\) Interview, Sa’ad Abu Dayeh, September 9th, 2012.


\(^{19}\) Interview, Musa Shteiwi, August 30th, 2012.
Will the Hashemite monarchy survive the Arab Spring?

**IT IS LIKELY THAT THE KING WILL CALL FOR ELECTIONS TO TAKE PLACE LATER THIS YEAR, THOUGH UNDER THE CURRENT ELECTION LAW. THIS MEANS PROTESTS AND DISCONTENT WILL CONTINUE TO BE EXPRESSED ON JORDANIAN STREETS, AND COULD TURN INCREASINGLY VIOLENT.**

(6) Technical faults in issuing electoral cards;

(7) Fears amongst Palestinian-Jordanians that they will have their identity cards confiscated if they attempt to register to vote.20

As to the last point in abu Tair’s litany, the government has done very little to allay such concerns. According to a report by Human Rights Watch in 2010,21 over 2,700 Jordanians of Palestinian origin were stripped of their nationality between 2004 and 2008. Jordanian officials defended the government’s decision on the rather spurious claim that it was attempting to ‘preserve Palestinian identity’ amid fears that Israel would attempt to expel Palestinians from the West Bank.

With the exception of those active in the IAF, Palestinian-Jordanians have not contributed significantly to the political reform process or debate. According to scholar Labib Qamhawi, “this is due to the fact that the government has discouraged Palestinian-Jordanians from participating in the political process and its attempts to prevent them from participating in the military and security sectors; and the changes to the electoral system which has increased the political representation of Transjordanians at the expense of Palestinian-Jordanians”22.

The options available to the King are as follows:

(1) Call elections under the new election law, even if voter registration remains low;

(2) Postpone elections until the Spring of 2013 and take measures to increase voter turnout; for example, by allowing those working in the military and security establishment to vote (this approach was adopted in previous elections and led other parties to boycott the elections);

(3) Renegotiate the election law to reflect concerns raised by the opposition groups, such as the IAF.

It is likely that the King will call for elections to take place later this year, though under the current election law. This means protests and discontent will continue to be expressed on Jordanian streets, and could turn increasingly violent.

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22. Interview, Labib Qamhawi, September 03rd, 2012.
Political events in the Hashemite Kingdom have received little coverage in the international press and media, especially when compared to other countries in the region, mainly because: (a) Jordan is relatively stable, and the demonstrations have been peaceful and on a smaller scale than those in Egypt and Syria; (b) the Kingdom’s pro-western foreign policy rarely challenges American and European interests in the Middle East; (c) the Kingdom’s limited influence over political events in the oil-rich Gulf region, and the Arab-Israeli peace process. However, it is clear that this trend is set to change as the number of political demonstrations increase and new political actors come to the fore.

Events in the region are having an impact on the pace of political reform and change in the Kingdom. It is unclear whether the Free Syrian Army in Syria, which is a largely inscrutable consortium of the Muslim Brotherhood, independent Islamists, Salafists, and secular groups, will come to power in Syria any time soon, given the continued support from Russia and China, and the strength of the Syrian Army. The Jordanian monarchy might thus feel that it does not need to make concessions to the IAF in Jordan. Moreover, the Jordanian government has managed to present itself as an important safe-haven for Syrians fleeing the conflict, having received a total of 250,000 Syrian refugees, however poorly many of them are treated. The West has, therefore, shifted its attention away from local Jordanian politics until the far more pressing Syrian conflict is ended. That said, it is clear that the King’s political balancing act is becoming even more difficult to manage, as the previously loyal Trans-Jordanians are beginning to challenge the legitimacy of the King. The attack on the King’s motorcade, in the town of Tafileh in June 2011, is one of the most visible signs of a decline in King Abdullah’s personal popularity.

THE KING’S POLITICAL BALANCING ACT IS BECOMING EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO MANAGE, AS THE PREVIOUSLY LOYAL TRANS-JORDANIANS ARE BEGINNING TO CHALLENGE THE LEGITIMACY OF THE KING. THE ATTACK ON THE KING’S MOTORCADE, IN THE TOWN OF TAFILEH IN JUNE 2011, IS ONE OF THE MOST VISIBLE SIGNS OF A DECLINE IN KING ABDULLAH’S PERSONAL POPULARITY.
member of the Hashemite family.

Accordingly, the monarchy opted to put the Queen’s activities in the shadow as a way to avoid further criticism among Trans-Jordanians. For instance, for the first time, the official news agency, Petra, refrained from running a long piece commemorating the Queen’s birthday on 31st August, 2012.24 Indeed, many Trans-Jordanians fear the ‘Palestinianisation’ of the monarchy once Crown Prince Hussein, the King’s eldest son, ascends to the throne. Rather, they have openly expressed a desire for Prince Hamza, King Abdullah’s younger half-brother, to be restored to the succession line.

A crucial issue that has been discussed in the past few months is the growing confidence-gap among the people and the monarchy. With the Royal Court making minor concessions to those calling for political reform, a large number of Jordanians are becoming increasingly apathetic, even hostile towards the Court. There have been increases in violent clashes between protestors and the security forces, along with growing calls for civil disobedience (as was the case in other Arab countries during the Arab Spring). And yet, according to Musa Shtwei, “the regime is still undisputedly favoured by all Jordanians, even the hardcore of the opposition. All political currents agree on its arbitrating role while so far there are no indications for a call to replace the regime.”25

Jordan can become a successful case of peaceful transition towards democracy in the Middle East, similar to the Moroccan monarchy’s reduction of royal authority and its expansion of Parliamentary powers. But it should be understood that there are outstanding local and regional reasons that can still stymie the process:

(1) The fear that political reform would enable Islamists to control the Parliament and hence amend the constitution;

(2) The influence of Saudi Arabia through conditional financial aid to cash-stripped Jordan. The Saudi-Kingdom fears reform would change the conservative identity of Jordan and hence bring a hostile government to office on the north of its borders;

(3) The influence and authority of the anti-reform bloc inside the security establishment and the power elites of some tribes and families, who consider that political reform will undermine their inherited privileges;

(4) An understanding in the security establishment that the policy priority for this period is to meet the challenges of the Syrian conflict and to contain any negative spill-over across its northern border.

The fact remains that reform is unlikely to be successful without the firm support of the Royal Court due to the historical and supra-communal legitimacy of the Hashemites.26

The West can play an important role in encouraging and supporting the Royal Court’s political initiatives and efforts. But it is important to closely dissect its policy options vis-a-vis King Abdullah’s long-term personal ability – or willingness – to transform the Kingdom into a full constitutional monarchy. It is crucial to link foreign aid to political reform and change, especially given the significance the aid plays in maintaining the regime’s control.

25. Interview, Musa Shteiwi, August 30th, 2012.
The US, in 2011, provided the Kingdom with around $840 million in aid, and has promised around $474 million for 2012. The European Union, meanwhile, has promised $4 billion for the coming three years. Foreign aid plays an important role in reducing external debt, which amounts to $18 billion, equal to more than 65 per cent of Jordan’s GDP.  

American officials, in particular, must be careful in their statements praising the government’s reform efforts. Due to the sensitivity of American influence over the Kingdom’s policies, any public statement might be interpreted negatively and could bring contradictory results, as was the case with US ambassador Stuart Jones’s statement in August, when he publicly praised the government for its reform efforts, which accordingly created an uproar amongst civil society actors.  

A key ally of the West, the Hashemite Kingdom will face increasing discontent amongst Jordanians, and the possibility of widening anti-regime activities from frustrated Trans-Jordanians, so that their activism might be extended to reach the security and military establishments. For some Jordanians, the government is standing in a position favouring a collision with the citizens rather than in a position to legitimately answer their calls.


Moderates or Manipulators? Tunisia's Ennahda Islamists Bear Trap: Russia's self-defeating foreign policy in the Middle East