



JORDAN: A CRITICAL ALLY IN A DANGEROUS AND VITAL REGION

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THIS WHITE PAPER:

1

Explains the continuing U.S. national security interest in the Middle East.

2

Describes the important role Jordan plays in helping the U.S. achieve its goals in the Middle East.

3

Offers steps that should be taken to strengthen the U.S.-Jordan relationship.

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The Trump Administration has shifted United States national security priorities away from terrorism and the Middle East towards great power competition with China and Russia. This shift is appropriate, but it would be a mistake to ignore the Middle East or key allies in that region.

The Middle East remains a region of significant strategic interest to the U.S. despite the draw-down of troops in Iraq, the President's desire to end the U.S. role in Syria, and growing energy independence. The reasons for continued U.S. engagement in the region are primarily:

- the continuing threat of radical Islamist terrorism;
- the continuing importance of fossil fuels to the global economy; and
- the presence of a nuclear power (Israel) and an aspiring nuclear power (Iran).

Sometimes overlooked, Jordan is a critical ally for U.S. initiatives in the region despite having a small economy, no natural resources, and a military that is dwarfed by other regional players. The reasons Jordan remains key among U.S. allies in the region are primarily:

- the role it plays as a critical geographic buffer;
- the role it plays as a critical ideological buffer; and
- the valuable military and intelligence assistance it provides the U.S.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE THE U.S.-JORDANIAN RELATIONSHIP INCLUDE:

- continued U.S. foreign assistance;
- cooperating to address the Israeli-Palestinian dispute; and
- supporting Jordan's efforts at political and economic reform.



THE STABILITY OF THE MIDDLE EAST REMAINS A HIGH PRIORITY FOR U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY

The United States' military commitment to Iraq is far less than it was a decade ago. The United States' dependence on Middle East oil is far less than it was a decade ago. The United States' vulnerability to radical Islamist terrorism is less than it was a decade or even a few years ago. President Trump and his administration have taken notice. In December 2017, President Trump released his National Security Strategy (NSS).¹ It stated that the greatest threats to the United States are posed by nation states, and it identified China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran as those that pose the greatest risks. This judgment reflected a shift from previous iterations of the NSS that gave higher priority to the risks of terrorism and the attendant use of weapons of mass destruction.²

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Notwithstanding this strategic adjustment, and statements by President Trump expressing his desire that U.S. military personnel leave Syria,³ the Middle East remains critical

to U.S. national security for three separate reasons:

- it is the geographic center for the continued threat posed by radical Islamist terrorism and the ideological battle taking place within Islam;
- it has a disproportionate share of the petroleum reserves that are the lifeblood of the global economy; and
- it is the home to one nuclear power and a potential nuclear adversary.

RADICAL ISLAMIST TERRORISM CONTINUES

The Trump Administration and U.S. allies should be congratulated for the significant progress that has been made in eliminating the Islamic State's control over vast swaths of territory in Syria and Iraq. In November 2017, leaders in the region were able to declare military victory over the Islamic State. However, the loss of territory has not completely extinguished the Islamic State's organization and ideology, its social media outreach, and the continued threat it poses directly, through affiliate organizations, and Islamic State sympathizers.

During 2018, attacks causing injuries and deaths by those affiliated with the Islamic State occurred in Afghanistan,⁴

1 The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (2017), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>.

2 The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (2010), available at <http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2010.pdf>.

3 Karen DeYoung & Shane Harris, *Trump Instructs Military to Begin Planning for Withdrawal from Syria*, THE WASHINGTON POST, Apr. 4, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-instructs-military-to-begin-planning-for-withdrawal-from-syria/2018/04/04/1039f420-3811-11e8-8fd2-49fe3c675a89_story.html?utm_term=.7eef86e8d19.

4 *Isil claims attack on Save the Children in Jalabad*, ALJAZEERA, Jan. 25, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/blast-save-children-afghanistan-jalalabad-180124050807137.html>; Travis Fedschun, *ISIS suicide bombing at Afghanistan voter registration center kills 57*, FOX NEWS, Apr. 22, 2018, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2018/04/22/isis-suicide-bombing-at-afghanistan-voter-registration-center-kills-31.html>.

Australia,⁵ Belgium,⁶ France,⁷ Egypt,⁸ Indonesia,⁹ Iraq,¹⁰ Pakistan,¹¹ Tajikistan,¹² and Russia.¹³ This is in addition to threats made against the World Cup soccer tournament in Russia.¹⁴ In 2017, the Islamic State inspired and took responsibility for two separate attacks in New York City.¹⁵

While its territorial holdings are largely gone,¹⁶ it would be mistaken to assume that the U.S. and countries around the globe are safe from future attacks by the Islamic State, al Qaeda, or other radical Islamist terrorist organizations.

The geographic seat of radical Islamist terrorism is the Middle East. Islam is a religion and ideology that was born in the Middle East. The debate within Islam, whether it will return to a more fundamentalist approach (as expressed in various theological strains such as Wahhabism, Salafism, and the Islamic State's ideology) or it will reach an accommodation with the modern world, is largely taking place in the Middle East. The Middle East is home to more Muslims than any other part of the

world, and the holiest places in Islam are all found in the Middle East. Until and unless this debate is resolved in favor of a peaceable accommodation with modernity, the Middle East will remain a region of national security significance to the U.S.

THE MIDDLE EAST IS A LEADING POSSESSOR AND PRODUCER OF PETROLEUM

Independent of the global dimensions of the Islamic religious debate, the Middle East is of strategic importance to the U.S. because of its vast oil reserves. Of the top ten oil-producing countries in the world, five of them are located in the Middle East: Saudi Arabia (#2), Iran (#6), Iraq (#7), the United Arab Emirates (#8), and Kuwait (#10).¹⁷ Notwithstanding technological progress in the development of alternate sources of energy, fossil fuels will remain the world's predominant energy source for the foreseeable future.

5 Charles Chang, Shannon Molloy, & Stephanie Bedo, *Melbourne stabbing attack was 'terrorism incident', police say, as Islamic State claims it*, NEWS.COM.AU, Nov. 10, 2018, <https://www.news.com.au/national/victoria/car-on-fire-in-melbournes-bourke-st-mall/news-story/47635c260e97cf932516036aea0f336a>.

6 Fiona Simpson, *Belgium shooting: ISIS claim responsibility for terror attack that left two policewomen and a man, 22, dead*, EVENING STANDARD, May 30, 2018, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/belgium-shooting-isis-claim-responsibility-for-knife-and-gun-attack-that-left-two-policewomen-and-a-a3851676.html>.

7 Jon Sharman & May Bulman, *Trèbes siege: President Macron calls supermarket attack an 'act of Islamist terror'*, THE INDEPENDENT, Mar. 23, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/trebes-hostage-supermarket-armed-siege-terror-france-carcassonne-police-shooting-a8269981.html>. Eliau Peltier & Aurelien Breeden, *France Declares Strasbourg Shooting an Act of Terrorism*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/12/world/europe/france-strasbourg-shooting.html>.

8 *Egypt: Deadly attack on bus near Christian Coptic monastery*, AL JAZEERA, Nov. 28, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/egypt-deadly-attack-bus-headed-coptic-christian-monastery-181102134431364.html>.

9 *Surabaya church bombings: What we know so far*, THE JAKARTA POST, May 13, 2018, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/05/13/surabaya-church-bombings-what-we-know-so-far.html>.

10 Rukmini Callimachi & Margaret Coker, *ISIS Claims Responsibility for Baghdad Bombings*, AL JAZEERA, Jan. 18, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/17/world/middleeast/iraq-baghdad-isis-bombing.html>.

11 *Quetta: Death toll jumps to 31 in election day blast*, AL JAZEERA, July 25, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/07/pakistan-elections-2018-deadly-blast-hits-quetta-city-180725063749657.html>.

12 *ISIS claims attack on cyclists in Tajikistan, releases video of purported cell*, CBS NEWS, July 31, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-claims-tajikistan-attack-cyclists-2-americans-dead-tajiks-blame-islamists/>.

13 Scott Neuman, *5 Killed in Church Shooting in Russia's Dagestan*, NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO, Feb. 19, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/19/587013514/five-killed-in-church-shooting-in-russias-dagestan>.

14 David Brennan, *ISIS Threatens World Cup Attacks with Video Showing Stadiums in Flames*, NEWSWEEK, June 15, 2018, <http://www.newsweek.com/isis-threatens-world-cup-attacks-video-showing-stadiums-in-flames-978520>.

15 Benjamin Mueller, William K. Rashbaum, Al Baker & Adam Goldman, *Prosecutors Describe Driver's Plan to Kill in Manhattan Terror Attack*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 1, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/01/nyregion/driver-had-been-planning-attack-in-manhattan-for-weeks-police-say.html>; Brynn Gingras, Emanuella Grinberg, & Elliott C. McLaughlin, *Suspect in attempted 'terrorist attack' pledged allegiance to ISIS*, officials say, CNN, Dec. 12, 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/11/us/new-york-possible-explosion-port-authority-subway/index.html>.

16 Linda Givetash, *ISIS Defeated say U.S.-backed forces, declaring total victory in Syria*, NBC NEWS, Mar. 23, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/u-s-backed-forces-declare-victory-over-isis-syria-n972401>.

17 U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Total Petroleum and Other Liquids Production 2017*, available at <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/rankings/#?product=53-1&cy=2017>.

It could be argued that the shale fracking revolution that has resulted in the U.S. becoming the number one producer of petroleum in the world¹⁸ means that the U.S. can wash its hands of the Middle East. But that conclusion ignores economic linkages that cannot be easily broken, even with growing U.S. energy independence.

First, oil prices have significant ripple effects across the global and the U.S. economy. As the producer of approximately one-third of the world's oil and the possessor of approximately fifty-four percent of the known global oil reserves,¹⁹ decisions made by leaders in the Middle East will have an outsized influence on economic growth.

Second, key U.S. allies such as India and Japan are heavily dependent on the supply of Middle East oil.²⁰ The strength of U.S. allies bolsters the strength of the U.S.

Finally, our foremost global competitor, China, while it is attempting to diversify its sources of oil, continues to rely on Middle East oil.²¹ That alone warrants continued U.S. engagement in the region.

THE REGION IS HOME TO A NUCLEAR POWER AND A MALIGN NUCLEAR ASPIRANT

While never confirming possession of a nuclear arsenal, Israel is believed to have had these weapons since the 1960s.²² The logic behind the Israeli nuclear program was to ensure the security and survival of the Jewish homeland against attack by Arab countries. In the 1950s,

Israel's conventional forces were no match against those of its Arabic rivals, and a nuclear deterrent was viewed as an important hedge against this imbalance.²³ It is likely that Israel has continued to invest in and increase its nuclear arsenal, but the size and scope of the program are a well-guarded secret. Fortunately, Israel is the closest ally the U.S. has in the region.

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Unfortunately, the United States' greatest foe in the region, Iran, aspires to possess nuclear weapons. In 2015, President Obama—on behalf of the U.S. along with China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the European Union—entered into the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran. In exchange for Iran promising to halt its nuclear weapons development program for fixed periods of time, the U.S., EU, and United Nations agreed to lift nuclear-sanctions against Iran.

The problem with the JCPOA was multifold:

- it gave Iran immediate sanctions relief that increased the regime's cash pools;
- Iran's nuclear program was paused, at best, rather than halted;
- it failed to address Iran's ballistic missile program;

18 *Id.*

19 Annual Statistical Bulletin 2018, Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, available at <https://asb.opec.org>.

20 Candace Dunn, *India is increasingly dependent on imported fossil fuels as demand continues to rise*, U.S. Energy Information Administration, Aug. 14, 2014, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=17551#>; Candace Dunn & Mark J. Eshbaugh, *Japan is the second largest net importer of fossil fuels in the world*, U.S. Energy Information Administration, Nov. 7, 2013, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=13711>.

21 Jeff Baron, *More Chinese crude oil imports coming from non-OPEC countries*, U.S. Energy Information Administration, Apr. 14, 2017, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=30792>.

22 Daniel R. DePetris, *Welcome to Israeli Nuclear Weapons 101*, THE NATIONAL INTEREST, Sept. 20, 2015, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/welcome-israeli-nuclear-weapons-101-13882>.

23 *Id.*

- it failed to address Iran’s ongoing support of terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas, made easier by its new-found cash; and
- it failed to address Iran’s support of the monstrous Syrian regime and Iran’s sponsorship of the rebellion that has led to civil war in Yemen.

In short, the trade was remarkably one-sided in favor of Iran, and after signing the deal, Iran’s belligerence in the region increased. President Trump was correct to withdraw the U.S. from the JCPOA. The question now is what the U.S. will do as a next step as Iran seeks a form of regional hegemony that directly threatens U.S. allies such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf Cooperation Council nations.

III

JORDAN IS A CRITICAL U.S. ALLY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The debate over the future of Islam and radical Islamist terrorism, the continued importance of oil to the global economy, and the presence of one nuclear power and one aspiring nuclear power mean that the Middle East must remain a U.S. national security priority. In turn, U.S. relationships with key allies in the region remain central to a stable and prosperous Middle East — importantly Jordan.

Key U.S. Allies And Partners In The Middle East

- **Israel.** Israel, America’s closest ally in the region, is an indispensable friend. As noted above, it is a nuclear power. It also has the most advanced military in the region and is a stable democracy that has experienced peaceful changes of power since its founding in 1948.
- **Saudi Arabia.** The U.S enjoys a long-standing alliance with Saudi Arabia, though it was recently shaken by the apparent involvement of Saudi leadership in the death of Adnan Khashoggi, a political dissident. Importantly, Saudi Arabia is the second-largest producer of petroleum in the world,²⁴ has significant military strength, and is home to two of the holiest

sites in Islam. Saudi Arabia is also seen, along with Egypt, as the intellectual leader of the Sunni Islamic world.

- **Egypt.** Egypt, also a U.S. ally, has a large military and maintains a peaceful border and relationship with Israel following their landmark 1979 peace treaty,²⁵ though Egypt’s ability to project power and influence is currently hampered by economic dysfunction and political brittleness.
- **GCC.** Finally, the U.S. also counts the U.A.E. and its fellow Gulf Cooperation Council members as friends in the region, all of which supply strategically key oil resources or military and intelligence assistance.

With this array of allies, its own inherent strength, and the exercise of sound judgment, the U.S. should be in a strong position from which to influence events that are favorable to its interests.

Why Jordan?

Jordan’s military does not compare to that of Israel, Saudi Arabia, or Egypt.²⁶ It is not a nuclear power. It is

²⁴ See *supra* note 16.

²⁵ Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty, Isr.-Egypt, Mar. 26, 1979, U.N.T.S 17813, available at <https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/israel-egypt%20peace%20treaty.aspx>.

²⁶ See Jordan Military Strength, GLOBAL FIRE POWER, available at https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=jordan.

not an intellectual leader in the Sunni Islamic world. Its economy is small with a GDP in 2017 of \$40B,²⁷ – slightly more than Wyoming (~\$38B) and somewhat less than Montana (~\$46B). Its population of 10.25M people is almost identical in size to that of North Carolina (10.25M). Its petroleum reserves are insignificant, and it has little in the way of natural resources. While it has been a victim of radical Islamist acts of terrorism, it is not the epicenter for any of these organizations.

By these measures, one could argue that Jordan isn't worth much attention from the U.S. That would be a misguided view.

JORDAN IS A CRITICAL GEOGRAPHIC BUFFER

The size of Jordan's economy, military, and natural resources do not draw notice, but Jordan's central location makes it a compelling partner for U.S. efforts in the Middle East. Jordan is bordered by Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, which is critical for two reasons – Iran's expansionist efforts and the threat that poses to Israel.

Iran has taken great efforts to expand its malign influence across the Middle East. Jordan's King Abdullah is credited with first describing these efforts in 2004 as a "Shia crescent" that runs from Tehran, through Iraq, to Damascus, Syria.²⁸ Today, that crescent is closer to a full circle when looking at a map of the region.

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Iran continues to jockey for influence in Iraq and was a prominent supporter of former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki.²⁹ Moving west, Iran and its Quds military forces have propped up Bashar Al-Assad during the course of the Syrian civil war, and Iran has built permanent military installations in Syria.³⁰ In Lebanon, Iran has backed Hezbollah, an armed political organization that acts as Iran's proxy against neighboring Israel and has fought in

27 U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook, Jordan (2019), updated Mar. 11, 2019, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html>.

28 Ian Black, *Fear of a Shia Full Moon*, THE GUARDIAN, Jan. 26, 2007.

29 Jason M. Breslow, *Who is Nouri al-Maliki*, FRONTLINE, July 29, 2014, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/who-is-nouri-al-maliki/>.

30 Seth J. Frantzman, *Israel's Uphill Battle with Iran in Syria*, THE NATIONAL INTEREST, Feb. 3, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/israels-uphill-battle-iran-syria-42942>.

Syria on behalf of Assad.³¹ To the south, Iran crossed the Shia-Sunni divide to support Hamas in Gaza as a further wedge against Israel.³² Both Hezbollah and Hamas are U.S.-designated terrorist organizations. Moving to the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, Iran supports the Houthi rebellion in Yemen while Saudi Arabia and its Sunni allies support the Yemeni regime.³³

Sitting in the middle of this nearly complete circle, and keeping it from constricting more closely around Israel, is Jordan. If Jordan's opposition to an aggressive Iran were to disappear, the Iranian threat would be brought to Israel's long eastern border with Jordan. This would further destabilize the region as Israel would face the Iranian menace from all sides – North (Hezbollah in Lebanon), Southwest (Hamas in Gaza), and East (Jordan).

This in turn would undermine U.S. interests in seeking a rollback against Iran in the region as well as the fight against the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations. Furthermore, a weakened Jordan could result in internal unrest or possibly even civil war, not dissimilar from the disasters seen in Syria and Yemen. Beyond the dire consequences for Jordanians, it would deprive the Arab world of a significant stabilizing influence.

JORDAN IS A CRITICAL IDEOLOGICAL BUFFER

In the Middle East, Jordan has been a consistent and long-time voice of moderation when it comes to relations

with Israel and Islamic terrorism. In 1994, Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel that normalized relations between the two countries.³⁴ Jordan was only the second Arab country, after Egypt, to reach such an accord with Israel. The ability to forge a peaceful relationship with Israel, long viewed with great antipathy by Arab countries, has paved the way for more cooperative relationships between Israel and other Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE.³⁵ Jordan is in an unusual position to influence other Arab states to follow this path. For the U.S., improved relations amongst its Middle East allies enhances its ability to achieve the goals of restraining Iran and combating Islamic terrorism.

King Abdullah has been outspoken in his calls for vigorous action against terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State, and he has argued that Muslims must take the lead in this effort.³⁶ Jordan has been active in the fight against the Islamic State by joining U.S. efforts, and he has called for countries to work together to defeat the threat.³⁷

Extremism and terrorism are not just an external threat to Jordan. Jordan has accepted 1.3 million Syrian refugees during the course of the Syrian civil war, and it accepted refugees from Iraq when the Islamic State was in power there. These populations are vulnerable to Islamist extremism and recruitment, and in turn, elements of Jordan's population are exposed to the same risk factors.³⁸

31 *Hezbollah leader says in event of war, Iran won't be alone*, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, Feb. 6, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/3ce85d337ca242779674fcd8ab7c93ce>.

32 Daniel Levin, *Iran, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad*, THE WILSON CENTER, July 9, 2018, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/iran-hamas-and-palestinian-islamic-jihad>.

33 *Yemen crisis: Why is there a war?*, BBC NEWS, Dec. 18, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423>.

34 Israel-Jordan: Treaty of Peace, Oct. 26, 1994, 34 I.L.M. 43 (1995), available at <http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/peacetreaty.html>.

35 Seth J. Frantzman, *How Significant are Israel's Relations with the Arab World?*, THE JERUSALEM POST, Dec. 25, 2017, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/How-significant-are-Israel's-relations-with-the-Arab-world-519959>.

36 Kate Ng, *King Abdullah of Jordan Calls for Muslims to lead the fight against terrorism*, THE INDEPENDENT, Nov. 16, 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/king-of-jordan-calls-for-muslims-to-lead-fight-against-terrorism-a6736586.html>.

37 Alice Su, *It wasn't their war*, THE ATLANTIC, Feb. 5, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/jordan-isis-pilot-response/385199/>.

38 See Central Intelligence Agency, *supra* note 25; see also Charlotte Florance, *The Priest who Provides a Safe Haven for Iraqi Christian Refugees*, NEWSWEEK, Nov. 15, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/priest-who-provides-safe-haven-iraqi-christian-refugees-394072>; see also David Schenker, *Terrorist Spillover in Jordan*, THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE, June 23, 2016, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/terrorist-spillover-in-jordan>.

Jordan's ability to identify and combat radicalization efforts among these populations while also taking a strong stand against terrorist threats from beyond its borders is critical to avoiding future cycles of terrorist violence. Jordan's strong stand against terrorism aligns with U.S. interests in the region.

JORDAN PROVIDES VALUABLE MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE ASSISTANCE TO THE U.S

In addition to being a treaty partner with Israel and a vocal opponent of Islamic terrorism, Jordan has been a valuable partner to the U.S. in its fight against the Islamic State.³⁹ Jordan also has provided military training assistance to the U.S. mission in Afghanistan,⁴⁰ and it supported the 2017 U.S. air strike against Syria following the use of chemical weapons by the Bashar al-Assad regime.⁴¹ Beyond providing direct support to U.S. military and diplomatic efforts in the region, Jordan hosts approximately 1,500 U.S. soldiers.

During his 2017 visit to Jordan, General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, described Jordan as an “enduring partner.”⁴² Because of its central location, the inflow of refugees from Syria, Iraq, and its long-term Palestinian refugee population, Jordan is able to provide the U.S. valuable intelligence insights on the most critical issues in the Middle East. As General Dunford observed, “This is their neighborhood and they are attuned in ways we are not”⁴³

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IV OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCED U.S.-JORDANIAN COOPERATION

Jordan's location, its ideological orientation, and its actions have demonstrated that it is a valuable and needed U.S. ally in a complex region. In return, the U.S. should seek opportunities to support Jordan.

JORDAN MERITS U.S. ASSISTANCE

One of those opportunities is the Jordanian economy, which is under economic strain because of structural

issues, as well as the long-standing population of Palestinians and the more recent influx of refugees from Syria and Iraq. Its unemployment rate in 2017 was estimated to be 16.5%.⁴⁴ In 2018, protests broke out in reaction to ongoing austerity efforts and proposed legislation to broaden income levels subject to taxation.⁴⁵ King Abdullah responded by dismissing Prime Minister Hani Mulki and appointing Omar al-Razzaz, a former World Bank official, as Mulki's replacement.⁴⁶

³⁹ See *supra* note 37.

⁴⁰ *Jordan sends trainers to Afghanistan*, UPI, Oct. 6, 2010, <https://www.upi.com/Jordan-sends-trainers-to-Afghanistan/51901286393752/>.

⁴¹ Madison Park, *Who's with the U.S. on Syria strike and who isn't?*, CNN, Apr. 8, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/07/world/syria-us-strike-world-reaction/index.html>.

⁴² Jim Garamone, *Chairman Thanks Jordan for Counter ISIS Support*, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND, Mar. 13, 2017, <http://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/News-Article-View/Article/1111919/chairman-thanks-jordan-for-counter-isis-support/>.

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ See DePetrìs, *supra* note 21.

⁴⁵ Suha Ma'ayeh & Margherita Stancati, *Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and U.A.E. Pledge \$2.5 Billion in Aid to Jordan*, WALL ST J., June 10, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-kuwait-and-u-a-e-pledge-2-5-billion-in-aid-to-jordan-1528685116?mod=searchresults&page=1&pos=16>.

⁴⁶ *Id.*

Recognizing the importance of a stable Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates pledged \$2.5 billion in assistance to Jordan.⁴⁷ Additionally, in February 2018, Jordan and the U.S. entered into a memorandum of understanding in which the U.S. agreed to provide Jordan approximately \$1.3 billion per year over the next five years.⁴⁸

Finding ways to broaden and deepen this relationship by strengthening the Jordanian economy should be a priority for diplomats from both countries.

This is money well spent. Jordan needs U.S. help, and the U.S. needs theirs. Finding ways to broaden and deepen this relationship by strengthening the Jordanian economy should be a priority for diplomats from both countries.

COOPERATING TO ADDRESS THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN DISPUTE

Like all relationships, there are areas of disagreement between the U.S. and Jordan. The status of Jerusalem is of keen interest to both parties. The Jordanians host approximately 2 million Palestinian refugees and have acted as the custodian of the holiest Muslim and Christian sites in the Old City of Jerusalem, including the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.⁴⁹

Jordan is concerned that the U.S. peace proposal for the Israeli-Palestinian dispute will include terms that revoke the “right of return” claimed by Palestinian refugees living in Jordan.⁵⁰ The disagreement over Jerusalem was also reflected in Jordan’s decision to vote with 127 countries in the United Nations General Assembly against the U.S. decision to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.⁵¹

Jordanian officials have also expressed unhappiness about not having a larger role in the peace process being driven by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia.⁵² The U.S. would be wise to ensure that the Jordanians are actively engaged in the discussions. This does not mean the U.S. will agree with Jordan on all details, but the Jordanians should be heard.

SUPPORTING NEEDED REFORM IN JORDAN

As noted above, Jordan’s economic problems have led to demonstrations and the resignation of Prime Minister Mulki. Economic liberalization and political liberalization will need to continue if Jordan wishes to diminish the risk of disruptive changes like those that took place throughout the Middle East and North Africa during the Arab Spring.

On the economic front, some progress has been made. The IMF recognized Jordan recently for its efforts and credited the Central Bank of Jordan for taking careful steps to strike a balance between supporting the Jordanian

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ U.S. Dep’t of State, Bureau of Pub. Aff.: Off. of Press Rel., New U.S.-Jordan Memorandum of Understanding on Bilateral Foreign Assistance to Jordan (Feb. 14, 2018), available at <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/02/278318.htm>.

⁴⁹ *Where we work, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*, available at <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan>; Mohammad Ersan, Does latest Gulf aid to Jordan come with strings?, AL-MONITOR, June 17, 2018, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/06/jordan-saudi-arabia-aid-deal-of-the-century.html>.

⁵⁰ See Ersan, *supra* note 49.

⁵¹ *General Assembly demands all States comply with UN resolutions regarding the final status of Jerusalem*, UN NEWS, Dec. 21, 2017, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/12/640152-general-assembly-demands-all-states-comply-un-resolutions-regarding-status>.

⁵² See Levin, *supra* note 32.

dinar and ensuring domestic economic growth.⁵³ The IMF also noted the adoption of a new tax law that will help to reduce Jordan's budget deficit as well as reforms in the area of secured transactions, bankruptcy, business inspections, and labor market reforms.⁵⁴

Creating an environment that encourages business investment, both foreign and domestic, is critical for Jordan's long-term fiscal stability. Given that Jordan is currently ranked 104th in the World Bank's "Doing Business" report, there is clearly more work to be done.⁵⁵

The U.S., through direct diplomacy and technical assistance, should seek opportunities to help Jordan continue its reform efforts as well as encourage U.S. investment in Jordan. In addition, the U.S. should consider offering top Jordanian students with an interest in business and economics special scholarship programs to attend U.S. universities.

In late 2018, protests in Jordan called for a shift to a constitutional monarchy, with King Abdullah's powers

reduced.⁵⁶ Jordanians have parliamentary elections, but the King appoints the Prime Minister, the head of the judiciary, the leader of the army and intelligence ministries, and members of the Senate.

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Political reform must be driven by King Abdullah and the Jordanian people, but, as with economic reform, the U.S. should stand ready to provide ongoing political and technical assistance to ensure continued opportunity and security for Jordan. The U.S. has stood by key allies that have done the difficult work of transitioning to democracy (e.g. South Korea), and it should be prepared to do so again with Jordan.

V CONCLUSION

Would it make sense for the U.S. and its allies to make sizeable investments in a country with the profile of Jordan located somewhere else in the world? In most circumstances, the answer would be no. But Jordan has a prime location in a critical region for U.S. national security interests. It has expended blood and treasure in support of U.S. interests, and it provides the U.S. a critical perspective on the most difficult challenges in the Middle East.

In a time of reduced foreign aid budgets and tensions in long-standing alliance relationships, it is wise for the Trump Administration to continue investments in a valuable partner like Jordan, and it should seek opportunities for greater cooperation.

⁵³ Press Release, Int'l Monetary Fund, IMF Staff Reaches Agreement on Policies for the Completion of the Second Review of Jordan's Extended Fund Facility (Feb. 7, 2019), available at <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2019/02/07/pr1934-imf-staff-reaches-agreement-on-policies-for-the-completion-of-the-2nd-review-of-jordans-eff>.

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Ease of Doing Business in Jordan*, The World Bank Group, available at <http://www.doingbusiness.org/en/data/exploreeconomies/jordan>.

⁵⁶ Ali Younes, *Jordan protesters call for political reform*, AL JAZEERA, Oct. 20, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/jordan-protesters-call-political-reform-181020175643361.html>.



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