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THE U.S. STAKE IN POST-HUSSEIN JORDAN

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The death of Jordan's King Hussein on February 7 deprived the United States of a longtime friend who exercised a moderating and stabilizing influence in the volatile Middle East. His eldest son and successor, King Abdallah, has promised to "carry my father's flag" and is expected to continue the broad outlines of Hussein's pro-Western foreign policy.

King Abdallah has reaffirmed Jordan's commitment to its 1994 peace treaty with Israel. However, he is not in a position to play the same helpful role as his father in the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. King Hussein's death is also a setback for U.S. efforts to overthrow Saddam Hussein in neighboring Iraq, because King Abdallah probably will be wary of provoking Saddam.

Nevertheless, the United States has an important interest in helping the new king to build a stable, prosperous, and pro-Western Jordan. The Clinton Administration should help King Abdallah continue his father's free-market economic reforms, improve relations with the oil-rich Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf, and deter hostile neighbors—Iraq, Syria, and Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority—from meddling in Jordan's internal affairs.

Prospects for a Smooth Succession. King Hussein, who enjoyed broad popular support among Jordanians as well as the respect of his neighbors, will be difficult to replace. King Abdallah, age 37 and a career military officer, is untested as a politi-

cal leader. The chief short-term threat to his rule is the possibility of a rift in the royal Hashemite family. King Hussein's last official act was to replace his brother, Prince Hassan, with Abdallah as Crown Prince. Although the family presented a united front at King Hussein's funeral, it is likely that Prince Hassan bitterly resents being cast aside after 34 years as Crown Prince. If the Hashemites splinter into factions, this could be exploited by Jordanian opposition movements; by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was defeated and expelled in Jordan's 1970–1971 civil war; or by hostile regimes in Syria, Iraq, or Iran. Even if Abdallah maintains Hashemite solidarity, he is likely to be challenged by each of these hostile forces in the coming years.

Another major concern is Jordan's stagnant economy. A poor country with few natural resources and a rapidly growing population, Jordan has been ravaged by the economic fallout of the 1991 Gulf War. It lost its chief export market, Iraq, because of United Nations sanctions, and was deprived of the

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income of more than 300,000 Jordanian workers expelled from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Most of these workers have returned home to swell the ranks of the unemployed, now an estimated 25 percent of the work force.

Although King Hussein initiated a free-market economic reform program in 1989, Jordan's foreign debt has climbed steadily to \$6.8 billion, in large part because of the loss of trade with Iraq. Austerity measures imposed in 1996 precipitated riots and led Hussein to slow the pace of economic reforms. Festering economic problems and declining living standards also pose a threat to political stability because they can be exploited by opposition groups, including a strong Islamic fundamentalist movement.

Preserving an Oasis of Stability. The United States recognized Jordan's strategic importance as a supporter of Arab-Israeli peace and a force for containing Saddam Hussein when it designated Jordan as a "major non-NATO ally" in 1996. The Clinton Administration responded to the death of King Hussein by promising to rush through Congress a \$300 million aid package originally proposed as part of the October 1998 Wye peace accord. It also pledged to support an International Monetary Fund loan package that would provide up to \$150 million per year for three years. Such aid would be wasted, however, without Jordan's renewed commitment to economic reform.

To help King Abdallah consolidate power and continue Jordan's pro-Western policy, the United States should:

- **Encourage Jordan to continue its free-market economic reforms.** The United States should link its aid offer to steady progress toward free-market economic development. It also should press Israel to allow Jordan to trade freely with Palestinian-controlled areas in the West Bank and Gaza. The ultimate goal should be the establishment of a free trade zone encompassing Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority.

- **Encourage Saudi Arabia and other Arab monarchies to strengthen political and economic ties with Jordan.** The violently pro-Iraq tide of public opinion in Jordan caused King Hussein to tilt toward Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait. This led Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to break diplomatic relations with Jordan and cut off foreign aid. By 1995, King Hussein had reversed course and extended support and sanctuary to Iraqi opposition groups. Washington should press the Gulf Arabs to end their ostracism of Jordan, renew shipments of cut-rate oil and foreign aid to Amman, and permit Jordanian workers to return to work in the oil states. This would go far toward easing Jordan's economic plight and increase King Abdallah's willingness to support efforts to overthrow Saddam Hussein.
- **Deter hostile neighbors from meddling in Jordan's internal affairs.** Syria and the PLO have a long history of supporting subversion inside Jordan. King Abdallah's special forces have been fighting Iraqi infiltrators along the border for many months. More than 100,000 Iraqis live in Jordan, many of them loyal to Saddam. Washington should warn Jordan's neighbors against adventurism in Jordan, promise an overwhelming military response if Iraq invades Jordan, and threaten to halt aid to the Palestinians if they resume efforts to overthrow the Hashemites. The U.S. also should increase military aid and intelligence-sharing with Jordan's army and security services.

King Abdallah faces a long uphill struggle to preserve Jordan's independence and stability against threats from hostile and more powerful neighbors, but he is better prepared to lead his country than his father was when he ascended to the throne in 1952. The United States must support the new king firmly and consistently to preserve Jordan as an ally for building Arab-Israeli peace and ousting Saddam Hussein.

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