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Retaining the Crown in the Face of Refugee Crises: King Abdullah II

Kevin Laymoun

On the morning of May 14, 2011, hours after the first reported rockets had been fired in Talkalakh, Syria, thousands of Syrians flooded into neighboring countries to escape what would become one of the bloodiest civil wars of the twenty-first century. In the midst of its own political turmoil, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was a target destination for many of those fleeing the conflict in Syria. By early 2013, the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan had climbed to 252,706, with 36,000 entering between January and early February.¹ With Jordan hosting preexisting Palestinian and Iraqi refugee populations, the addition of a third group, the Syrians, highlights the country's continued struggles with its role as a refugee state, as well as the challenges of balancing the needs and expectations of three different groups of displaced people.

Jordan's central location in the Middle East has made it the target destination for those fleeing troubles in neighboring countries. The Israeli occupation, U.S.-led war in Iraq, and Syrian civil war have forced refugees from differing societal, cultural, and economic backgrounds to cohabit the same land.² The complex

¹ "Syrian Regional Refugee Response," *UNHCR*, February 12, 2013.

² Ilan Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (n.p.: Oneworld, 2007). and Joseph Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugees: The New Crisis in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris), 2009. and

relationships that have arisen out of this unique situation have resulted in a clash of cultures and rights, as each group struggles with its own issues of identity. Amid the myriad issues surrounding the refugees in Jordan lies one important additional issue: the role of the country's ruler, King Abdullah II, who has struggled to maintain a national identity for a country whose citizens are greatly outnumbered by refugee populations. This paper argues that given the recent arrival of the Syrian refugees and the historic nationalist, economic, religious, and political tensions caused by the preexisting Palestinian and Iraqi populations, King Abdullah II's past usage of his tribal power base, parliamentary control, and the *Mukhabarat* — secret police force, are the tactics he will again employ in dealing with the three-part refugee complexity. His main goal, in all of this, is to promote Hashemite rule. To understand King Abdullah's approach to the Syrian refugee crisis, it is essential to first examine the challenges posed to Jordanian nationalism by the arrival of the Palestinian and Iraqi populations, and the King's methods for dealing with these crises.

This paper builds on the work chronicling the experiences of both the Palestinian and Iraqi refugees in Jordan, and applies it to an understanding of the unfolding Syrian refugee situation. Since it assumed responsibility for the West Bank territories at the Arab League conference of 1948, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has been home to thousands of Palestinian

"Syria—Uprising and Civil War," *New York Times*, accessed February 13, 2013.

refugees.³ According to Rex Honey and Jim A. Wilson, Palestinian-Jordanian refugees are unique due to their presence in Jordan since its birth as a state, which resulted in their receiving citizenship.⁴ Honey and Wilson explain that the displacement of thousands of Palestinians from Palestine with the creation of the state of Israel led to both the creation of modern Jordan as well as to a short-term solution to the Palestinian refugee crisis.⁵ The denial of the right to return by Israel forced many Palestinians to remain in Jordan permanently despite their desire to return home.⁶ As a result, the Palestinian population in Jordan, despite having Jordanian citizenship, still identifies itself as Palestinian, and desires a return to their original homeland.⁷ The Palestinian case of quasi-permanent refugee status in Jordan will be contrasted with the case of the more recent, and, perhaps less-permanent, Iraqi and Syrian refugees. Historical sources and media accounts discussing the Palestinian experience in Jordan will be used to build an understanding of the issues this refugee group has posed and continue to pose for the King.

The Iraqi example is particularly helpful in analyzing the tactics the King used in dealing with refugees in Jordan. Sassoon provides the most

³ Oroub Al Abed, "Palestinian refugees in Jordan," *FMO*, (2004).

⁴ Rex Honey and Jim A. Wilson, "Planning in Jordan: Coping with Uncertainty," *GeoJournal* 37, no. 1 (September 1995): [134], accessed January 22, 2013, JSTOR.

⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁶ Kamal S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Jordan* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 165.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

comprehensive report on the Iraqi experience in Jordan, especially of the negative reactions towards this refugee group by both Palestinians and the native Jordanians, also referred to in this paper as Transjordanians. The difference between these two latter groups will be discussed later. Sassoon identifies differences between Palestinian and Iraqi refugee situations, namely the difficulty in accurately assessing the Iraqi population: “What makes the Iraqi refugee crisis unique is the fact that many of the refugees were urban, educated middle class who fled to large urban areas, making it extremely difficult for humanitarian agencies to provide the right services and to collate accurate information from an ‘invisible’ refugee population.”⁸

In accounting for the lack of self-disclosure by many unregistered Iraqis, Sassoon offers a more accurate context in which to examine the facts and figures reported by Jordanian officials and NGOs.⁹ Sassoon also explains some similarities shared by the Iraqis and Palestinians, namely that the Palestinians’ failure to return home has made Jordan wary of what might become of the Iraqis.¹⁰ His resourceful use of barometric tools, such as interviews of Amman’s taxi drivers, are employed effectively to gauge political and cultural sentiment, and to explain the tensions existing between Iraqi refugees and their host country.¹¹ Since Sassoon released his book in 2009, the demographic data has changed, but updated

⁸ Joseph Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugees: The New Crisis in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

figures regarding refugee registration, average household income, and the number of Iraqi refugees in Jordan are available from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).¹² Along with other scholarly sources and opinion pieces, Sassoon's cultural observations regarding Iraqi refugees in Jordan offers insight into the challenges that Iraqi refugees pose to King Abdullah's nationalist agenda.

Because the introduction of the Syrian refugee population to Jordan is so recent, a comprehensive analysis of the group has yet to emerge. As the Syrian refugee experience unfolds, UNHCR reports, op-ed pieces, and media accounts will provide a varied account of the emerging issues and problems that accompany yet another refugee group to Jordan.

The Monarchy and Refugees

Before examining the issue of refugee arrival in Jordan, it is important to understand the definition of a refugee used in this paper. The term "refugee" is often employed as a blanket-term in reference to all manner of displaced people, but this general application of the term distorts the scope of the discussion. According to the UNHCR, a refugee is a person "who has been forced to leave his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence."¹³

¹² "Jordan: 2013 UNHCR Country Operations Profile," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, last modified 2013, accessed March 19, 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486566&submit=GO>.

¹³ "What is a Refugee?," UNHCR, last modified 2013, accessed March 19, 2013, <http://www.unrefugees.org/site/c.lfIQKSOWFqG/b.4950731/k>.

This definition is useful in understanding the common usage of the term refugee. Moreover, Article 1 of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees offers a legal definition:

[The term 'refugee' shall apply to any person who] owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.¹⁴

While the parties discussed in this paper do not universally accept this definition, to avoid the confusion that accompanies such a debate, the term refugee will be used here to refer to the groups of people who were, for whatever reason, compelled to leave their native country and settle in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Apart from providing a legal definition for the term refugee, the UN Convention of 1951 outlined both the rights and obligations of the host state as part of its agreement. The states that signed the 1951 agreement acknowledged a set of

A894/What_is_a_refugee.htm.

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 2198, "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees," April 22, 1954, <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>.

refugee rights that grant, among them, freedom of religion, movement, the right to work, and accessibility to travel documents. Most importantly, signatories agreed to non-refoulement, or the principle of not returning refugees to countries in which they fear persecution.¹⁵ Jordan has refused to sign the document and is not bound by its bylaws; this fact is especially important as it reflects the country's view of its refugee population.

Jordan characterizes any refugees residing in the country as "guests" of the King and thus subject to any treatment deemed suitable by the government.¹⁶ Adding to the terminological confusion, the majority of Iraqis in Jordan reject the label of "refugee," given its connotations of helplessness. Instead, these groups prefer the term "traveler."¹⁷ The debate over terminology dates back to the wave of Palestinian refugees taken in by Jordan in 1948, who were viewed as temporary citizens.¹⁸ However, the Palestinians were never able to return to their native land. The subsequent granting of full citizenship rights to this refugee group transformed the ethnic balance of Jordan. Consequently, it was the goal of King Abdullah's great grandfather to avoid another such occurrence by renouncing any legal obligation towards refugee groups.

Before discussing the history behind the ethnic and national tensions within Jordanian society, it is

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Mohamed Y. Owlán, "The Legal Framework of Forced Migration," *American University in Cairo Egypt*, October 23-25, 2007.

¹⁷ Sassoon, *The Iraq Refugees*, 154.

¹⁸ Salibi, *The Modern History of Jordan*, 165.

necessary to note first the nature of the country's leadership. Trans-Jordan began as a British mandate, and then became the sovereign state of Jordan in April 1949, at which time King Abdullah I assumed the title of King of Jordan.¹⁹ After his assassination in 1951, Abdullah I's son Talal promulgated a constitution on January 1, 1952 that called for the creation of a parliament and government, with the King acting as a constitutional monarch.²⁰ The constitution of 1952 remains the legal basis of the country, and it speaks to the absolute authority of the King in Article 30: "The King is the Head of State and is immune to any liability and responsibility."²¹ It is important to note the level of control that belongs to the King within this type of system: he selects both the Prime Minister and the entire Senate. While the Senate is half the size of the House of Representatives, while elected, both houses need to have a two-thirds majority to over-rule the King's veto power. Moreover, the House of Representatives, while elected, has been skewed to reflect greater representation amongst the districts with tribal allegiance to the King's Hashemite clan, thus awarding the King almost total control over governmental and legislative affairs.²² The issues of political control will be addressed in greater depth later in this paper. The extent to which the King influences policy and government affairs under the Jordanian

¹⁹ Ibid., 153.

²⁰ Ibid., 178.

²¹ "The Constitution of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan January 1, 1952," The Library, accessed March 19, 2013, http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/constitution_jo.html.

²² Curtis Ryan, "Reform Retreats Amid Jordan's Political Storms," *Middle East Report*, June 10, 2005.

legal system parallels the tactics used to manage the refugee populations as well, and reflects the will of King Abdullah II.

The Palestinian Example

The problems that Palestinian refugees pose to Jordan are based in the history of the relationship between the refugee group and the state. As noted above, the Palestinians arrived in the West Bank in 1948 following the *Al-Nakba*, or catastrophe, in which the Israeli Army occupied villages across what was known as Palestine, forcing roughly 700,000 Palestinians to flee.²³ Once Trans-Jordan annexed the West Bank in 1950, the Palestinian refugees living in that region gained full citizenship as part of a deal that King Abdullah I made with Palestinian ministers in return for guardianship of East Jerusalem.²⁴ Following the 1967 War, Israel occupied the West Bank, forcing thousands of Palestinians into the East Bank and what is today modern Jordan. With the influx of roughly 400,000 more Palestinians into the East Bank, Palestinians constituted more than half of Jordan's population after 1967.²⁵

One result of the 1967 War was the emergence of the *fedayeen*, a group of Palestinian resistance fighters living in Jordan. The *fedayeen* fought the Israeli

²³ "United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine," United Nations on the Question of Palestine, accessed March 19, 2013, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/EE6BDACAD5A0229385257508007CFEA4>.

²⁴ Salibi, *The Modern History of Jordan*, 165.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3, 224.

occupying forces from border towns, but were based in Irbid, a town in the north of Jordan.²⁶ While King Hussein, King Abdullah II's father, was pressed by the Arab countries to militarily back the Palestinian resistance fighters, he feared that his involvement might provoke the Israeli Army to invade his country. Several battles took place between the *fedayeen* and the Israeli Army, most notably the Battle of Karameh, in which Israeli forces crossed into Jordan and clashed with Jordanian and *fedayeen* troops. By mid-1970, King Hussein feared he had lost control of his country as the *fedayeen* began operating as "a state within a state." In an effort to reaffirm control of his country, King Hussein ordered an all-out assault on the *fedayeen* in the country. King Hussein and the Jordanian Armed Forces eventually won the civil war known as "Black September," but the bloody events left a deep cultural resentment between "Transjordanians," or native Jordanians, and Palestinian-Jordanians.²⁷ Salibi explains that events like Black September prove that the Palestinians' continued devotion, both perceived and real, to their native Palestine has often put them at odds with the nationalist-minded monarchy and Bedouin tribes that make up the population of indigenous Jordanians.²⁸

The events of Black September highlighted the emergence of two major positions taken by King Hussein. The first was the King's political and military reliance on the rural Bedouin tribes that both

²⁶ Ibid., 186.

²⁷ Ibid., 237.

²⁸ Mudar Zahran, "Jordan Is Palestine," *Middle East Quarterly*, (Winter 2012): 3-12.

supported and fought for his regime against the Palestinian resistance. The second was the enduring skepticism with which the King viewed Palestinians, a view that manifests itself in his political marginalization of the group.

Black September and the policy shifts it produced under King Hussein were passed to King Abdullah II when he inherited the throne in 1999, and are evident in the latter's dealings with the Palestinian population since then. In October 2000, on the heels of the second *Intifada*—the collective uprising of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation—protests broke out in Amman and other parts of Jordan in support of the Palestinian cause. King Abdullah responded by suspending Parliament on June 13, 2001, ahead of the scheduled elections, and implementing 125 “temporary” laws aimed at quelling political dissent.²⁹ One such law made it illegal to criticize “friendly nations,” a law that, as a result of Jordan's 1994 treaty with Israel, clearly targeted the groups protesting the Jordanian government's lack of support for the second *Intifada*.³⁰ As his late father had done, King Abdullah treated the largely Palestinian protestors with considerable hostility, and moved quickly to quash any would-be movements that might run counter to Jordanian nationalist interests.

To this day tensions remain high, as Palestinians have increasingly come to resent the measures taken by the King to diminish their impact on Jordanian

²⁹ Jillian Schwedler, “More than a Mob: The Dynamic of Political Demonstrations in Jordan,” *Middle East Research and Information Project* 226 (2003): 19.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

affairs. Mudar Zahran characterizes the Palestinian population in Jordan as a “ticking bomb” that is resentful of its lack of representation in Parliament despite representing a majority of the population.³¹ In his article on Jordanian political reform, Greenwood argues that electoral laws passed by the crown serve to engender support amongst its most important constituent: “[The] House of Hashim has sought to reward its Transjordanian supporters with public jobs and subsidies [...] these efforts [have] given Transjordanians a greater voice in local and national politics [...] and] have also enabled East Bank tribes and clans to secure more public jobs, spending, and services [...]”³²

The Palestinian refugee population protested their political marginalization under King Hussein even after they gained some representation in Parliament under laws passed by the previous regime. King Abdullah, during the period when he suspended Parliament in 2001, passed an electoral law that, “like the old law, [...] continues to rely on the principle of ‘one person, one vote’ and also over-represents the rural areas heavily populated by Transjordanians.”³³ By granting more representatives to a larger number of rural districts, King Abdullah effectively nullified any Palestinian representation in Parliament. Recent evidence of King Abdullah’s commitment to the

³¹ Mudar Zahran, “Jordan is Palestine,” *The Middle East Quarterly* 19 (Winter 2012): accessed March 19, 2013, <http://www.meforum.org/3121/jordan-is-palestinian>.

³² Scott Greenwood, “Jordan’s ‘New Bargain:’ The Political Economy of Regime Security,” *Middle East Journal* 57 (Spring 2003): 252-259, accessed March 19, 2013, JSTOR.

³³ *Ibid.*, 264.

maintenance of a controlled Palestinian population is that he instructed officials to reject Palestinian refugees at the border who were fleeing the Syrian conflict so as to not add to the current imbalance of Palestinian and Transjordanians in the country, a move that could tip the balance of power.³⁴

In addition to the political tensions, ethnic conflict between Palestinian and Transjordanian groups have been sources of concern for the King. King Abdullah's wife, Queen Rania, is a Palestinian and has recently been the target of insults by Bedouin groups who protest her inclusion in the royal family.³⁵ Largely driven by the lingering effects of Black September, many Transjordanians see her position of authority as a justification of their fears that Palestinians are gaining too much power in the Kingdom.

Serving as an example for the Transjordanian skepticism of Jordan's Palestinian population are the King's exclusionary edicts regarding Palestinian involvement in the Jordanian government, army, and *Mukhabarat*. The government is comprised primarily of Transjordanians, who, for both tribal-lineage and self-serving reasons, are fiercely loyal to the crown. The Transjordanian population, which is largely rural and Bedouin, resents Palestinians for their devotion to the

³⁴ Ruth Eglash, "Jordan rejecting Palestinian refugees from Syria," *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), July 4, 2012, accessed March 19, 2013, <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=276261>.

³⁵ Ian Black, "Queen Rania Still in Shadows as Jordan Plays Waiting Game," *The Guardian* (Amman, Jordan), May 11, 2012, accessed March 19, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/11/queen-rania-jordan-waiting-game>.

retrieval of their lost state, but also for their dominant position in the private business sector. Laszlo Csicsmann characterizes the King's apprehensions towards the Palestinian population:

The private sector of the Jordanian economy is dominated by Palestinians [...]. The main dilemma for the Hashemite dynasty is to decide whether the Palestinians will support the *status quo, vis-à-vis* the regime or will challenge the legitimacy of the current system by using their economic assets.³⁶

The King's distrust of the economically viable Palestinian population, coupled with the Transjordanian need for economic support, has created a symbiotic relationship with the Transjordanian population in which the King receives legitimacy and support in return for granting native Jordanians exclusive privilege to government jobs and political posts. A key element in this relationship is the Jordanian Army, which is completely Transjordanian, since the army's total allegiance to the King is essential to the security of his regime.³⁷ The practice of maintaining a Bedouin army with no Palestinian membership reflects the lingering trepidation left from the events of Black September. However, apart from providing insurance against any would-be Palestinian military coup, the exclusion of Palestinians from the

³⁶ Laszlo Csicsmann, "Responsible Freedom and National Security," *Society and Economy* 29, no. 1 (April 2007): 108, accessed March 20, 2013, JSTOR.

³⁷Zahran, "Jordan Is Palestine."

army also serves to economically marginalize the refugee population, as some of the country's highest salaries and greatest benefits are reserved for members of the army.³⁸

The Jordanian *Mukhabarat* represent another resource that is invaluable to the King in controlling dissidents in his kingdom. Like the army, the agency's membership is exclusively Transjordanian. The *Mukhabarat* is one of the largest intelligence programs in the world in relation to its country's total population.³⁹ Notoriously brutal, the *Mukhabarat* enforce King Abdullah's rule at the street level by using an intricate and extensive network of informants; it also collaborates with foreign intelligence agencies to squelch any subversive movements.⁴⁰ The influence of the *Mukhabarat* must not be overlooked: besides providing intelligence, the agency plays a key role in elections and public discourse. Mahmoud A. al-Kharabesheh, a former director of the *Mukhabarat*, explains: "Some Parliament members allow the mukhabarat [sic] to intervene in how they vote because they depend on them for help in getting re-elected."⁴¹ The former

³⁸ "Assessment for Palestinians in Jordan," Minorities at Risk, last modified December 31, 2006, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=66302>.

³⁹Zahran, "Jordan Is Palestine."

⁴⁰ Neil MacFarquhar, "Heavy Hand of Secret Police Impeding Reform in Arab World," *New York Times* (Amman, Jordan), November 14, 2005, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/14/international/middleeast/14jordan.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

director also notes that the agency is involved in “90 percent” of the political affairs of the country. Furthermore, the *Mukhabarat* functions to deter discourse that is critical of the King by imprisoning anyone who makes comments deemed unacceptable to the crown.⁴² The hard line that the *Mukhabarat* take on criticism of the crown or national policies has been enforced thoroughly, as seen in the many instances of Jordanians being whisked away for questioning regarding remarks they have made or areas they have visited.⁴³

With each challenge that the Palestinian refugees have posed to Jordanian nationalism and the authority of the Hashemite crown, King Abdullah, like his late father, has relied on his Transjordanian constituency’s roles in the government, army, and *Mukhabarat* to promote allegiance to Jordan, and simultaneously his legitimacy as king.

The Iraqi Example

On the heels of the 2003 United States invasion of Iraq, thousands of Iraqis flooded into Jordan, adding to the complexities of Jordanian society. Though he supported the US “war on terror” in Afghanistan, King Abdullah faced a difficult diplomatic circumstance posed by a US war with Iraq. Torn between his strong dependence on US aid to his country and a large domestic sympathy for Iraq, King Abdullah was once

⁴² “A Sad Day for Freedom of Expression,” *Al-Ahram Weekly* (Cairo, Egypt), May 23, 2002, 587th edition, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/587/re7.htm>.

⁴³ MacFarquhar, “Heavy Hand of Secret.”

again challenged to maintain control of his country amidst the public's disapproval of his diplomatic stances on regional issues. With the US promising an additional \$150 million on top of the annual \$460 million military and economic aid it already gave to Jordan, in return for support of its invasion of Iraq, King Abdullah pledged his cooperation, and began a campaign to combat public disapproval by emphasizing a focus on domestic issues to draw attention away from his foreign policy.⁴⁴

Like the rest of the world, King Abdullah did not anticipate the fallout of the US invasion of Iraq, particularly the impact caused to Jordan by the mass of refugees fleeing from the war zone. The number of Iraqis and their standard of living are areas of great debate due to the glaring lack of self-disclosure by many Iraqi refugees in Jordan.⁴⁵ Figures have been provided by government-contracted research institutions and international humanitarian agencies, although these figures become less helpful once it is recognized that the sample pool, which will be discussed below, is largely unrepresentative of Jordan's Iraqi refugee population as a whole.

To fully grasp the Iraqi refugee situation in Jordan one must make the distinction between two waves of Iraqi refugees. Despite a number of political dissenters and exiled persons fleeing to Jordan prior to the US invasion, the first wave, which arrived shortly after the

⁴⁴ Anthony Shadid, "Jordan to Allow Limited Stationing of US Troops," *Washington Post* (Amman, Jordan), January 30, 2003, A10. And Jamal Halaby, "Diplomats: Jordan to OK Airspace Use," *Washington Post* (Amman, Jordan), January 30, 2003.

⁴⁵ Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugee*, 37.

2003 invasion, was comprised mostly of upper-class businessmen and government officials who were labeled as “Mercedes refugees” by the diplomatic community, and were able to make a comfortable living for themselves in Jordanian cities.⁴⁶ A second larger wave came in 2005 and was made up of poorer Iraqis fleeing the sectarian violence.⁴⁷

The most comprehensive survey of Iraqi refugees in Jordan was published in 2007 by Fafo, a Norwegian research company, and contains some inconsistencies that reflect a lack of information regarding the disadvantaged majority of Iraqi refugees in Jordan. Sassoon explains the problematic nature of the Fafo figures: “Fafo found that among those Iraqis surveyed, 56 percent had valid permits. If it was a representative sample, this would translate into at least 250,000 Iraqis having legal status in Jordan, and by the time of Fafo’s survey that was definitely not the case.”⁴⁸ Sassoon goes on to explain that the sample group targeted in the survey favors those “less vulnerable and with the right legal status,” as refugees without permits and little to gain from answering survey questions from agencies with no power to help them out. Updated figures provided by UNHCR are available, but it is important to recognize the sample group when

⁴⁶ Congressional Research Service, *Iraqi Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: A Deepening Humanitarian Crisis?*, Doc. No. 7-5700, at 7 (2009).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Iraqis in Jordan Their Number and Characteristics* (Amman, Jordan: FAFO, 2007), accessed March 20, 2013, http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos_home_a/main/Analasis_Reports/Iraqis%20in%20Jordan/Iraqis%20in%20Jordan.pdf and Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugee*, 37.

interpreting any figures. According to the UNHCR and Jordanian government figures as of January 2012, 450,500 Iraqi refugees reside in Jordan, and 29,000 of those are assisted by the NHCR.⁴⁹

The arrival of Iraqis has led to a number of tensions within the Hashemite Kingdom. The first wave of rich Iraqis began to entrench themselves in the Jordanian economy by buying homes, thus causing housing prices to rise.⁵⁰ The second wave of very poor Iraqis is regarded as having increased the number of “black market jobs” that have undercut many Jordanians’ wages.⁵¹ Regardless of their culpability for the rise in inflation, which Sassoon discusses as possibly misplaced blame, the Iraqi refugees have been singled out in the press as the cause for the sagging Jordanian economy.⁵²

Additionally, many Jordanians feared that the sectarian violence plaguing Iraq would follow the Iraqi refugees into Jordan. Iraq hosts three clashing groups: Shia, Sunni, and Kurds. The Shia and Sunnis are two Islamic sects that have fought with each other for hundreds of years over ideological differences regarding the Islamic faith. Jordan historically had

⁴⁹ "Jordan: 2013 UNHCR Country," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

⁵⁰ Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugee*, 49.

⁵¹ "IRAQ-JORDAN: Iraqis Cause Black Market for Jobs," IRIN, last modified March 28, 2007, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/71004/IRAQ-JORDAN-Iraqis-cause-black-market-for-jobs>.

⁵² Ibid. and Ibrahim Saif and David M. DeBartolo, *The Iraq War's Impact on Growth and Inflation in Jordan* (Amman, Jordan: University of Jordan Center for Strategic Studies, 2007), accessed March 20, 2013, http://www.carim.org/public/polsocetexts/PS2JOR028_EN.pdf.

very few Shias (about 15.6 percent of the Muslim population), and feared that an influx of them into the country would cause problems with its Sunni majority.⁵³ Seen as a growing threat to his control, King Abdullah warned that the arrival of Shias in Jordan could be part of a larger subversive movement by Iran to gain control in the region.⁵⁴ The *Mukahbarat* eventually began targeting Iraqi Shias for expulsion from the Kingdom.⁵⁵ Chatelard explains that the Jordanian government's encouragement of the public's skepticism of Iraqi Shias affected the entire Iraqi refugee population and helped them become labeled as *guhriba* (strangers).⁵⁶ The branding of the Iraqis as the "other" helped to isolate and so frustrate any political aspirations the refugee group might have.

Another source of animosity felt towards the Iraqi refugees stems from the precedent set by the Palestinian refugee group. Palestinians were universally welcomed into Jordan as they were viewed

⁵³ *Iraqis in Jordan Their*, 6.

⁵⁴ Peter Baker and Robin Wright, "Iraq, Jordan See Threat To Election From Iran," *Washington Post*, December 8, 2004, A01, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43980-2004Dec7.html>.

⁵⁵ *World Refugee Survey 2007* (n.p.: US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2007), [Page #], accessed March 20, 2013, http://www.uscrirefugees.org/2010Website/5_Resources/5_5_Refugee_Warehousing/5_5_4_Archived_World_Refugee_Surveys/5_5_4_5_World_Refugee_Survey_2007/5_5_4_5_4_Country_Updates/5_5_4_5_4_2_Printable_Versions/Iran_Namibia.pdf.

⁵⁶ Geraldine Chatelard, *Iraqi Forced Migrants in Jordan: Conditions, Religious Networks, and the Smuggling Process* (Florence, Italy: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, 2002), 14-15, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.aina.org/articles/chatelard.pdf>.

as victims of the unprovoked aggression of Israel; but the immovability of the Palestinian refugee population has made Jordanians wary of what might happen with the Iraqi situation.⁵⁷ This fear was confirmed by a UNHCR report in 2009 that revealed that a shocking 92 percent of Iraqi refugees in Jordan have no intention of returning to Iraq.⁵⁸ These figures were especially worrisome given that a large portion of the survey pool, 630 of the 1118 interviewed, may not have been registered with the UNHCR. Given the anonymous nature of the survey, these findings are particularly important given their insight on previously underreported segments of the Iraqi population in Jordan. The report goes on to list the reasons offered by participants for not wanting to return to Iraq. However, most important is the reality that the Iraqi refugee population continues, with each passing year, to become a more permanent aspect of Jordanian society.

King Abdullah's treatment of Iraqi refugees began to resemble the treatment, decades earlier, of the Palestinian population that experienced government-approved alienation, little political involvement, heavy censorship by the *Mukabarat*, and an obscuring of their national heritage. King Abdullah, having learned from both his father's and his own experience with the Palestinians, began to implement policies to manage the arriving Iraqi refugees. By publicly blaming Iraqis for economic and religious subversion, King Abdullah's

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁸ *Summary: Intention to Return to Iraq Inquiries of 2008 & 2009* (Amman, Jordan: UNHCR, 2009), 1, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/4acb0e429.html>.

regime tried to mute any sympathy for Iraqi refugees by encouraging–discrimination against Iraqis across economic, racial, and religious grounds.

It is difficult to reconcile Jordan's harsh treatment of its refugee populations with its history of willingness to host displaced peoples. One explanation can be found in the Fafo report. Earlier, the Fafo report was shown to reflect embellished figures regarding the Iraqi refugees in Jordan, but the nature of the report is more problematic because the Jordanian government contracted Fafo and then delayed publication of its findings for six months to negotiate the final figures.⁵⁹ One diplomat indicated that the delay was to adjust the figures with the ultimate goal being to secure greater aid for Jordan.⁶⁰ The financial incentive offered to countries that host refugee populations explains King Abdullah's willingness to accept refugees despite the challenges they present to his Kingdom's stability.

King Abdullah has long relied on Jordan's non-signatory status of the 1951 UN Convention as a means to leverage his power over arriving refugees. Unlike the Palestinian refugees who, under the constitution, at least, are afforded rights of citizenship and political participation, the post-2003 Iraqi refugees enjoy no such benefits due to their lack of citizenship. The likelihood of citizenship being granted to most Iraqis remains fleeting, as the Jordanian government

⁵⁹ Patricia Weiss Fagen, *Iraqi Refugees: Seeking Stability in Syria and Jordan* (n.p.: Institute for the Study of International Migration Georgetown University, 2009), 7-8, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www12.georgetown.edu/sfs/qatar/cirs/PatriciaFagenCIRSOccasionalPaper2009.pdf>.

⁶⁰ Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugees*, 38.

continues to deny them rights granted to refugees under the 1951 UN Convention, and characterizes the group as “illegal immigrants.”⁶¹

Having effectively neutralized Iraqi political activity through the denial of citizenship or refugee rights, King Abdullah has recognized the possibility of an Iraqi backlash in the form of protest or violence. As was his solution to the Palestinian problem, King Abdullah has turned to his loyal *Mukhabarat* to monitor the Iraqis and quell any possible Iraqi insurgency. One product of this policy is to deny Iraqis the ability to congregate in mass gatherings, with an exception being made for funerals.⁶² A source of great consternation for many middle class educated Iraqis who arrived in 2005 is the low-level positions they are forced to take despite their professional experience. Sassoon explains that many engineers and doctors who were top specialists in their fields in Iraq are being forced to work below their qualifications and for meager pay.⁶³ The preferential treatment of Jordanians over many highly qualified Iraqis is in line with the King’s assurance to his Transjordanian constituents of financial reward in return for their political support.

Amidst growing turmoil over the 2000 Intifada, the 2001 suspension of Parliament, and the impending US invasion of Iraq, King Abdullah launched the *al-Urdun Awwalan*, or “Jordan First,” campaign. With turmoil in the region at an all-time high, King Abdullah embarked on a campaign to consolidate support for Jordan, and his crown, by emphasizing Jordan’s own

⁶¹ Ibid., 52.

⁶² Ibid., 53.

⁶³ Ibid., 47.

domestic problems over those of the Middle East region. Greenwood explains that the purpose of the Jordan First campaign was to quiet “domestic challenges generated by regional political developments.”⁶⁴ The Jordan First constitution on the Jordanian Royal website makes it clear that allegiance to Jordan must come before religious, ethnic, and other differences.⁶⁵ King Abdullah’s maneuvering can be best understood in terms of his highest priority, which is to preserve his control over the Kingdom. The purpose of the Jordan First campaign was to shift Jordanian consciousness away from the King’s unpopular position regarding Israel and the US, so that he could continue to secure vital aid for domestic socio-economic issues that appealed to the underrepresented and marginalized groups of Jordan. The economic project championed by Jordan First is the Socio-Economic Transformation Plan (SETP). In return for King Abdullah’s pledge of support, and to ensure the success of his domestic campaign, the US pledged a total of \$395.5 million in the first two years of SETP.⁶⁶ Though Greenwood notes that Jordan First failed to truly deliver improvement to the Iraqis or Palestinians, “the vast majority of this new spending was to take place in rural areas where most of the regime’s Transjordanian political base resides.”⁶⁷ In

⁶⁴ Greenwood, "Jordan's 'New Bargain:' The Political," 265.

⁶⁵ Jordan Armed Forces, last modified 2010, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://jaf.mil.jo/Ar/History.aspx?CategoryID=7>.

⁶⁶ "JORDAN: \$145.5 MILLION OF US GRANT EXTENDED TO SETP," *Jordan Times* (Amman, Jordan), January 27, 2003, [Page #], accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-96897273.html>.

⁶⁷ Greenwood, "Jordan's 'New Bargain:' The Political," 266.

2005 a probe into the expenditures of SETP launched a controversy, the result of which the King ultimately ordered the program closed so as to avoid further unrest.⁶⁸ Despite the major questions surrounding its central financial policy, the Jordan First campaign remains a central message of King Abdullah's regime, as he continues to stress devotion to his throne above all else.

Implications for Syrian Refugees

Having discussed King Abdullah's past responses to the challenges posed by the Palestinian and Iraqi refugee populations, the arrival of a third refugee group, namely the Syrians, provides a new, yet familiar, set of problems for the King's regime. The UNHCR reports as of March 13, 2013 state the Syrian population in Jordan as 289,268.⁶⁹ Additionally, according to Jordanian officials, the country spent \$600 million in 2012 supporting Syrian refugees.⁷⁰ Jordan, which is already battling a budget deficit,

⁶⁸ Sufyan Alissa, *Rethinking Economic Reform in Jordan: Confronting Socioeconomic Realities*, report no. 7 (Washington DC, United States: Carnegie Middle East Center, 2007), 14, accessed March 20, 2013, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/cmec4_alissa_jordan_final.pdf.

⁶⁹ "Syrian Regional Refugee Response," UNHCR, last modified 2013, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

⁷⁰ "Jordan Reels Over Syrian Refugee Crisis," Al-Jazeera Middle East, last modified January 25, 2013, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201312414346170182.html>.

claims that the refugee influx causes an enormous strain on the country's already meager water, food, and healthcare supplies.⁷¹ Despite its massive size, the Syrian refugees are relatively new to Jordan, and comprehensive studies examining this group's impact on Jordan have yet to be completed. However, as one might imagine, Jordan can expect the Syrian element to pose ethnic, nationalist, and economic challenges much like its Palestinian and Iraqi predecessors.

The arrival of the Syrian masses has prompted King Abdullah to once again rely on his tribal power base, parliamentary control, and the *Mukhabarat*. Yet in dealing with the Syrians, King Abdullah has begun to demonstrate a clear departure from his treatment of previous refugee groups in Jordan. Through Parliament's past legislation of refugee law, along with the usual assistance of the Transjordanian citizenry and the *Mukhabarat*, King Abdullah has isolated the majority of the Syrian refugee population in refugee camps, preventing any interaction that could foment social unrest in the Kingdom. Pelham notes the shift in policy towards the Syrian arrivals: "Initially Jordan followed Lebanon, in allowing refugees to mingle freely with the local population. But as the influx intensified, Jordan adopted Turkey's approach of erecting vast internment camps [...]."⁷² The largest of the Syrian

⁷¹ Ahmad Khatib, "Syrian Refugees Taxing Jordan's Skimpy Water Supply," Mother Nature Network, last modified June 1, 2012, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/wilderness-resources/stories/syrian-refugees-taxing-jordans-skimpy-water-supply>.

⁷² Nicolas Pelham, "Jordan's Syria Problem," The New York Review of Books, last modified January 10, 2013, accessed March 20, 2013,

refugee camps in Jordan is Zaatri, with a population of 80,000 as of February 20, 2013.⁷³ King Abdullah recognized that the inherent pitfall of both the Palestinian and Iraqi refugees was that, once they moved into cities, it was hard to move them out. Therefore, the King modified his refugee approach to preemptively deny urbanization, and isolate the Syrian population, before they had the opportunity to insert themselves into Jordanian society. King Abdullah has publicly stated that the reason for Syrian internment is to quarantine any arriving Islamists—a group forming the core of the Syrian resistance movement—and to prevent the spread of their ideology to Jordan.⁷⁴ With Islamist movements winning democratic elections throughout the Middle East, including Egypt and Tunisia, King Abdullah is justified in viewing the group as a legitimate threat to his regime.

Playing a large role in the containment of the Syrians are the Transjordanian “tribal forces” which are charged with establishing a “buffer zone” along Jordan’s border with southern Syria, their position meant to “block the passage of Islamist fighters into

<http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2013/jan/10/jordans-syria-problem/>.

⁷³ Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Syrian Refugees Pour South to Jordan in Nightly Exodus," Reuters, last modified February 20, 2013, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/20/us-syria-crisis-border-idUSBRE91J0WU20130220>.

⁷⁴ Pelham, "Jordan's Syria Problem," *The New York Review of Books*. And for more on the Islamist movement see Line Khatib, "Syria's Islamic Movement and the Current Uprising: Political Acquiescence, Quietism, and Dissent," *Jadaliyya*, February 21, 2012.

the kingdom.”⁷⁵ Additionally, King Abdullah has relied on the *Mukhbarat* to augment his containment policy towards the Syrian refugees. Syrians that managed to avoid internment in the refugee camps, or were previously in Jordan, live in constant fear of being rounded-up by the *Mukhbarat*. One woman even expressed a fear of taking her children to the park out of concern that the *Mukhbarat* might arrest her and send her to a camp.⁷⁶

The Syrian example demonstrates the essence of King Abdullah’s refugee policy: the use of parliamentary control, the tribal power base, and the *Mukhbarat* to contain and control refugee populations, and to assure continued monarchial rule, while simultaneously allowing Jordan to collect international aid for refugee relief. With Jordan already receiving aid from the West and from the Arab Gulf States for refugee support, President Obama’s FY2013 request for an additional \$663.7 million demonstrates the magnitude of such financial assistance.⁷⁷

The practice of playing host to refugee populations has proven profitable for King Abdullah’s regime. The flow of cash into Jordan, intended to allay the economic and infrastructural impact of the refugees, has most likely been mismanaged along with much of the government funds in Jordan. In 2010, the Finance Minister along with a number of top officials were relieved of their offices amidst an investigation into

⁷⁵ Pelham, "Jordan’s Syria Problem," *The New York Review of Books*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Congressional Research Service, *Jordan: Background and U.S. Relations*, Doc. No. 7-5700, at 19 (2012). Accessed March 20, 2013. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33546.pdf>.

mismanaged funds that involved a petroleum official, Ahmed al-Rifa'i, who was related to then-Prime Minister Samir Rifa'i.⁷⁸ The officials were characterized as, "[...] well-connected people, many from Transjordanian rather than Palestinian origin."⁷⁹ Cases of corruption amongst top Transjordanian government officials, siphoning funds, much of which were intended for Palestinian and Iraqi refugee populations, have only worsened inter-cultural Jordanian relations. Furthermore, the case of Toujan Al-Faisal demonstrates King Abdullah's unwillingness to permit whistleblowers, and indicates his ambivalence, or even participation in corruption.⁸⁰

It is reasonable to infer, given both the corruption of King Abdullah II's regime, and the massive amount of refugee relief aid managed by the Jordanian government, that the acceptance of refugee populations is profitable to the King. The relief aid is essential to economically pacify his Transjordanian constituents. A simplified description of King Abdullah II's refugee approach can be characterized as follows: with the corrupt channeling of international relief aid providing incentive for the acceptance of refugee populations, the King's concern for the challenges and

⁷⁸ Marc Lynch, "Going after Jordan's Al Capone?," *Foreign Policy*, March 10, 2012, accessed March 20, 2013, http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/03/10/a_rare_crackdown_on_corruption_in_jordan.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ "A Sad Day for Freedom of Expression," *Al-Ahram Weekly* (Cairo, Egypt), May 23, 2002, 587th edition, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/587/re7.htm>.

tensions provided by each refugee group has led him to develop an approach which he has, over time, adapted in order to mitigate the impacts that refugee groups have on the kingdom. The Syrians, as Jordan's newest refugee group, have elicited a newly adapted response from King Abdullah resulting in their rigid segregation from Jordanian society. However, the King's strategy of reliance on his tribal power base, parliamentary control, and the *Mukhabarat* remain unchanged in his struggle to maintain his throne.

Kevin Laymoun gravitated towards the discipline of History because of his interests in the Middle East region. Having a father from the region, Kevin was motivated to learn more about the cultural context of the people and the land. His fascination with his area of study led him to travel abroad to Amman, Jordan. During his semester in Jordan, Kevin began to identify the political structures that would eventually form the basis of his thesis. Kevin hopes to attend law school in the coming years, but one day hopes to return to Jordan to observe its ever-contentious political landscape.