



# Foreign Policy Under King Abdullah II

*Faisal Odeh Al-Rfouh*

Viewed in a broad perspective, foreign policy of Jordan has been channelised towards meeting three significant challenges: (a) challenges pertaining to the Arab-Israel conflict, the occupation of the West Bank and the question of Palestinian refugees; (b) promoting the survival of the State in the light of its limited natural and economic resources; and (c) safeguarding Jordan's territorial integrity, sovereignty, stability, and security notwithstanding multiple internal and external threats in the region (Rashdan 1989, p. 71). Enthronement of King Abdullah II in February 1999 coincided beneath the cusp of the twenty-first century and the contemporary geopolitical and geo-economic ambience, having witnessed a decade-long occurrence of developments veering round globalisation and post-Cold War setting at regional and global levels, entailed unpredictable future.

Soon after his enthronement, King Abdullah II did not hesitate in consolidating Jordan's international ties with major world powers such as the US, European Union (EU), Japan, China, France, etc. and cultivated close links with international financial institutions such as International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation

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F. O. Al-Rfouh (✉)

Glendon Political Science, York University, Toronto, ON, Canada

University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan

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(WTO). At the regional level, he continued the rich legacy, inherited by him, of nurturing cordial and friendly relations with Jordan's immediate neighbours as well as member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The King embarked on a series of visits to key foreign capitals to garner support for his regime and these visits were underpinned by his central concern for the economic development of Jordan and reflected his interest and aptitude for engagement with the outside world. Apart from visiting member countries of the Group of Seven (G-7) and European Union (EU), he focussed on fostering close cooperation with Jordan's immediate neighbouring countries and Gulf Arab Countries to elicit political and economic support for his regime.

Jordan's near-landlocked geographic location, sparse natural and economic resources, and relative economic, political, and military weaknesses vis-à-vis its neighbours make an impact on its foreign policy (Ryan 2004, p. 45). While articulating a strong nationalist approach and to counter foreign influences in the domestic politics, King Abdullah came with the slogan of "Jordan First" or *al-Urdun Awalan*. While elaborating his conception of "Jordan First" in early October 2002, the King observed:

The programmes, objectives, membership, and financing of every party operating in Jordanian territory ought to be purely Jordanian ... In recent decades, Jordan has given priority to Arab interests and not to its national interests ... We have a right to be concerned first for our own people, as every country in the world does, which is where our "Jordan first" slogan comes from. (Agence France Presse, 11 October 2002, cited in Ryan 2004, p. 56)

King Abdullah's rule, spanning close to two decades, has witnessed growing economic, political, and military cooperation between Jordan and great powers, including immediate neighbours and Gulf Arab countries.

## JORDAN-US RELATIONS

King Abdullah II had inherited a rich legacy of cordial and friendly relations between Washington and Amman and tragic events of the 11 September terrorist attacks on the US and Jordan being among the first Arab and Muslim countries to extend support to the Global War on Terrorism, brought both countries closer. In recognition of its vital role in the war against terrorism, particularly after the American war in Afghanistan

in 2001 and the Iraq war in 2003, the US increased its foreign aid to Jordan from US\$228.4 million to US\$1.557 billion in 2003. Ostensibly, the objective of this increased aid was to ease the impact of the Iraq war on Jordan's economy and to help Jordan maintain its border security.

Under the terms of an agreement reached between the US and Jordanian governments on 22 September 2008, the former agreed to provide a total of US\$660 million in annual foreign assistance to Jordan over a five-year period (2010–2014) and this deal committed the US to provide US\$360 million per year in Economic Support Funds (ESF) and US\$300 million per year in Foreign Military Financing (FMF). Total bilateral US aid to Jordan through 2016 amounted to approximately US\$19.2 billion. In accordance with a nonbinding three-year memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed on 3 February 2015, the US pledged to provide the Kingdom with US\$1 billion annually in total foreign assistance from 2015 to 2017. The provision for Jordan under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017, *inter alia* include about US\$1.279 billion in bilateral aid to Jordan and up to US\$500 million in funds from the Defence Department's Operation and Maintenance, Defence-Wide account to support the armed forces of Jordan and to enhance security along its borders (Sharp 2017, p. 13).

Within a short span of Abdullah's accession to the throne, Washington and Amman on 24 October 2000, signed a US-Jordanian Free Trade Agreement, which eliminated duties and commercial barriers to bilateral trade in goods and services originating in the two countries, which positively impacted their overall trade. As a direct outcome of this agreement, the US emerged as Jordan's chief market making up nearly one-third of its total exports by 2007 and the latter ranked 74th American trading partners in the volume of trade in 2012. In that year Jordan exported over 1 billion dollars worth of goods and services to the US, a large percentage of which comprised apparel and clothing accessories. In the same year, Jordanian imports from the US reached US\$1.6 billion, and the principal commodities consisted of aircraft parts, machinery, appliances, vehicles, and cereals (Sharp 2013, p. 12). In 2014, Jordan became 66th trading partner of the US concerning the volume of trade (Al Sarhan 2016).

Their friendly relations also extend to military and defence cooperation, entailing the supply of American defence equipment, training of Jordanian defence forces, and joint military exercises. Jordan, having been granted the Major non-NATO Ally (MNNA) status by the US in 1996, made it eligible to receive excess US defence articles, training, and loans of

equipment for cooperative research and development. Between 2009 and 2012, the Kingdom received excess US defence equipment valued at approximately US\$81.69 million (Sharp 2013, p. 13).

In the wake of instability spreading throughout the Arab world, Jordan's likelihood of emerging as the most dependable Arab partner for pursuing US interests in the region have increased. Such an indication could be discerned from the remarks of the US President Barack Obama, who during his visit to Jordan in March 2013, said:

The reason I'm here is simple. Jordan is an invaluable ally. It is a great friend. We've been working together since the early years of the Kingdom under His Majesty's great-grandfather, King Abdullah I, who gave his life in the name of peace. Today, our partnership in development, education, health, science, technology, improves the lives of our peoples. Our close security cooperation helps keep your citizens and ours safe from terrorism. Your military and police help train other security forces from the Palestinian Authority to Yemen (Sharp 2013, p. 8).

Jordan has acquired Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles, upgrades for its fleet of F-16 fighters (approximately 70–80) and Black Hawk helicopters from the US. In July 2017, the US delivered two S-70 Blackhawk helicopters, bringing their total Blackhawk fleet up to 26 aircraft. Proposed arms sales notified to Congress include 35 Meter Coastal Patrol Boats; M31 Unitary Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (GMLRS) Rocket Pods; UH-60 M VIP Blackhawk helicopter; and repair and the return of F-16 engines (Sharp 2017, p. 15).

Jordan's relations with Trump Administration have continued to follow the past rich legacy of friendship and cordiality. During their meeting in Washington on 20 September 2017, President Trump and King Abdullah vowed to keep working together to fight terrorism in the Middle East. While touting the bilateral ties, President Trump said: "Never has the relationship been better than it is now" (*Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 2017). In spite of this deep-rooted friendly relation between Jordan and the USA, there's a difference in political points of views; particularly, regarding the Palestinian- Israeli conflict, the Jerusalem issue, as well as, Iraqi situation.

## JORDAN-EU RELATIONS

Jordan's relations with the European Union are characterised by many bilateral agreements, close cooperation, and almost identical views on global issues. Trade relations between Jordan and EU have recorded substantial growth in recent years and trade in goods amounted to €4.4 bil-

lion in 2016. The EU imported goods worth €0.3 billion from Jordan in 2016, which mostly comprised chemicals and machinery and transport equipment. The EU exports to Jordan in 2016 accounted for €4.1 billion comprising machinery and transport equipment, followed by agricultural products and chemicals. Two-way trade between EU and Jordan in services amounted to €1.4 billion in 2015 with EU imports of services representing €0.5 billion and exports €0.9 billion (European Commission). The Association Agreement governs the Jordan-EU bilateral trade, entered into force in May 2002, established a Free Trade Area liberalising two-way trade in goods.

Jordan is a partner country within EU's programme of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) since 2004. Political framework for the dialogue between EU and Jordan is envisaged by a joint ENP Action Plan endorsed by the EU-Jordan Association Council. In October 2010, both reached an agreement on a new EU-Jordan ENP Action Plan and this envisaged substance to the "advanced status" relationship between the two. In January 2014, a new programme the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) was introduced as the first multi-annual strategic framework for the EU cooperation with Jordan.

The financial allocation for the period 2014–2020 under the ENI was to vary between €587 million and €693 million depending on the progress made on democratic and socio-economic reforms by Jordan. On 27 January 2014, their representatives met in Amman and deliberated on enhancing security cooperation and joint efforts to combat crime, especially in the wake of international and regional security developments. Extending support to Jordan to handle the impact of the Syrian crisis, the EU has so far provided more than €320 million since 2011 in humanitarian, crisis response, and development support to this aim (*The Jordan Times*, various issues).

## JORDAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Jordan shares cordial and friendly relations with Russia and there were exchange of high-level visits between the two countries, especially in the aftermath of the Syrian crisis. There have been frequent exchanges of top-level visits which have proved instrumental in bringing both countries closer. In September 2000, President Vladimir Putin and King Abdullah had a short talk during the "Millennium Summit" in New York. In August 2001, the King paid his first official visit to Russia and subsequently he visited Russia in November of 2001, July and November of 2002, November of 2003,

September of 2004, and August of 2005. Discussions veered round augmenting bilateral relations and the situation in the region. President Putin visited the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in February 2007, and this was followed by the visit of King Abdullah to Russia in April 2014 and August 2015 and the visit of Russian Deputy Foreign Minister in August 2016 to be followed by the visit of Abdullah to Russia in February 2018.

Their growing political interactions during the first decade of the twenty-first century also witnessed trade and economic cooperation moving to a new stage since 2007. The two-way trade grew substantially and amounted to US\$169 million, for ten months in 2007, in comparison to only US\$64.8 million in 2006. This period also witnessed attempts at developing techno-economic cooperation, and the Russian Railways showed interest in taking part in building Amman-Zarqa railway line and another company Tekhnopromexort reportedly showed interest in building two thermal power plants and hydroelectric power stations on the River Yarmuk (Sharif 2015).

However, the Syrian crisis and the Russian involvement in it brought Jordan's strategic geographic location into focus, and the direct outcome was the coming closer of Russia and Jordan. During 2014 and 2015, Jordan maintained close contacts with Russia for finding a lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict. On 24 March 2015, Jordan concluded a US\$10 billion deal with Russia for building the Kingdom's first nuclear power plant, with two 1000-megawatt reactors. The deal, a strategic one for the energy-starved Kingdom, followed many months of negotiations (Ibid.).

During his visit to Moscow in the last week of August 2015, King Abdullah held discussions with Russian leaders, including President Vladimir Putin, on bilateral cooperation as well as developments in the Middle East. The talks emphasised on the need for the expansion of partnerships in the fields of military cooperation, air and railway transportation, as well as religious and medical tourism. While dwelling on contemporary developments especially combating terrorism and extremism as part of a comprehensive approach and with the participation of all stakeholders, both leaders also reviewed the Syrian crisis and other events in the region, in addition to efforts of reviving Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations (*The Jordan Times*, 26 August 2015).

Undoubtedly, the Russian intervention in Syria had commenced at the end of September 2015 and Jordan's initial silence was an indication of its "tacit approval" of Moscow's role and signified Amman's cautious

approach to the Syrian conflict. The Kingdom was trying to keep itself away as far as possible from “axis wars” in Syria and hoped for a solution that could help maintain Syria’s territorial integrity and prevent its collapse (Sharif 2015).

The sudden announcement simultaneously made in Moscow and Amman on 23 October 2015 that both countries had agreed on military coordination in Syria through a joint mechanism took the world by surprise. While asserting that both the armies had decided to coordinate their actions, including military aircraft missions over Syrian territory, the Russian side added that such coordination would be effective against terrorists of all shades. The Jordanian spokesperson averred that his country’s coordination with Russia was aimed at safeguarding the country’s northern borders and stability in southern Syria. The agreement, apart from reflecting a standard approach to Syria, also served Jordan’s interests in keeping its northern borders outside the cycle of violence for so long as possible (Sharif 2015).

After the October 2015 agreement, media reports confirmed consistent cooperation between on airline security, exchanging intelligence, including information on people suspected of having ties to extremists and collaboration on ground operations. Defending Jordan’s strategy of having an agreement with Russia, Barmin (2017) has opined that the critical factor in Jordan’s security equation is the border being shared by Jordan with Syria and Iraq, and it is against this backdrop that cooperation with external powers, “such as Russia and the United States, is motivated solely by Jordan’s internal security calculations. It is no coincidence that in this tumultuous region, Jordan has remained one of the few ‘islands of stability’ ...” (Barmin 2017).

Before the Russian military intervention in Syria in the second half of 2015, the contours of the Russian-Jordanian bilateral relationship were mostly confined to nonbinding political deliberations and limited trade and arms deals, despite the frequency of interaction. The past decade has witnessed the signing of many arms deals between Russia and Jordan, which among other things include, Iгла portable air defence system, Kornet anti-tank systems and localising production of Russian RPGs in Jordan. However, the Syrian conflict has catapulted this relationship to a new trajectory of growth, and under the prevalent geopolitical scenario in the Middle East, Russia and Jordan need each other politically and militarily.

## JORDAN-UK RELATIONS

Jordan shares a long-standing and close relationship with Britain and defence relations are an essential part of this. King Abdullah, having inherited a rich legacy, has made efforts to further consolidate this relationship by continuing the conduct of annual joint military exercises between the two armies, and Royal British Navy ships pay regular visits to Aqaba. In September 2001, British Prime Minister Tony Blair visited Amman and early November 2001, King Abdullah paid an official visit to Britain (*The Jordan Times*, 7 November 2001). Jordan was supported by the UK in July 2002 in debt rescheduling as a result of the Paris Club discussions, and this enabled Jordan to reschedule debts to lender states. In 2008, the UK and other member countries of the Paris Club agreed for US\$2 billion debt settlement with Jordan. Subsequent period has witnessed frequent exchange of visits by dignitaries and high-level delegations between the two counties.

During his visit to Britain in early March 2017, Abdullah held discussions on wide-ranging issues with Prime Minister Theresa May, including boosting cooperation in the economic, military, and security fields along with the importance of following up on the outcomes of the London donor conference held in February 2016 to aid countries hosting Syrian refugees (*The Jordan Times*, 4 March 2017). Bilateral cooperation, especially in economic and defence areas, Middle East peace process and Syrian crisis were the primary focal points of discussions between Abdullah and May who visited Jordan in early April 2017. While the Jordanian King expressed appreciation of continued British support, the British premier asserted her country's high regard of Jordan's efforts to support peace and stability in the Middle East (*The Jordan Times*, 4 April 2017).

During her visit to Jordan in the last week of November 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May outlined her vision for the post-Brexit relationship with Jordan and the wider region, focusing on a commitment to support national prosperity and regional security. She emphasised on supporting joint bilateral initiatives that promote socio-economic development and enable the Kingdom to achieve economic security through job creation and employment for a bulging youth population. While security and counterterrorism cooperation dominated her approach, she also sought to reiterate her commitment to boost trade and investment opportunities and strengthen long-term support for economic and social reforms in Jordan and its neighbouring region (*The Jordan Times*, 30 November 2017).



The volume of trade between Jordan and the UK is more favourable to the latter. Jordanian exports to the UK in 2015 stood at JD18 million compared to JD200 millions of imports. Jordanian experts and business circles feel that Brexit will have no direct effects on Jordan's economy and bilateral agreements will remain active. It is being argued that Jordan and the UK will start re-negotiating their bilateral trade agreements after Brexit (*The Jordan Times*, 27 August 2016).

### JORDAN-CHINA RELATIONS

The frequency of high-level visits between Jordan and China has proved instrumental in bringing their bilateral relationship to new heights. In January 2002, King Abdullah visited China and again in July 2004 to be followed by the visit of in October 2004 by the then prime minister of Jordan; and in December 2005, King Abdullah II again visited Beijing. This period also witnessed visits of the Chinese delegations to Jordan and discussions veered round means of boosting bilateral relations and expanding prospects of cooperation, particularly in the fields of investment and trade exchange.

Abdullah's visit to China in September 2013 was followed by a high-level Chinese delegation visiting Jordan in November 2014. However, Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Jordan in the second week of September 2015 proved instrumental in further consolidating the friendly level of friendship. This occasion was utilised by both leaders to exchange views on bilateral relations in different fields and developments at the regional and international arenas. Their announcement to establish strategic partnership relations was hailed as a "new chapter" and that it would take bilateral ties to a new level of fruitful cooperation, especially in economic fields. On his part, the Chinese President lauded Jordan's efforts in the war against terrorism and extremism, stressing his country's willingness to help the Kingdom deal with the Syrian refugee crisis. While reviewing the latest developments in the Middle East, with specific emphasis on the need for a comprehensive political solution to the Syrian crisis conflict, both leaders also discussed endeavours to revive Palestinian-Israeli negotiations on the basis of the two-state solution (*The Jordan Times*, 10 September 2015).

A joint statement issued at the end of the talks, while announcing the establishment of a strategic partnership, also stressed the importance of carrying on with efforts to enhance friendship and cooperation ties that

would serve the interests of both peoples as well as regional and world peace, stability, and progress. It also reflected both countries' agreement to mutually support their vital interests, with the Kingdom stressing its commitment to the "one China principle," renewing its position on Taiwan as an integral part of the Chinese mainland and supporting "the Chinese government's efforts to achieve peaceful development across the Taiwan Strait and its efforts to reunite the country." For its part, Beijing pledged to support Jordan to maintain its security and stability and enhance its economic and social development. Jordan also highlighted the importance of the Chinese initiative to participate in building "the economic belt of the Silk Road" and "the naval silk road of the 21st century" (Ibid.).

Undoubtedly, the trade volume between Jordan and China reached US\$3.6 billion in 2014 but is tilted in favour of China despite Jordan's exports to China having gone up by 200 per cent from 2013. Jordan's exports goods comprised mainly of potash and phosphate, valued at around US\$300 million while the imports from China stood at US\$3.3 billion. With bilateral trade said to have reached US\$3.1 billion in 2016, the number of Chinese tourists coming to Jordan rose by 60 per cent in 2016 (*The Jordan Times*, 3 April 2017). During the visit of the Chinese foreign minister to Jordan in June 2017, both sides reiterated their commitment to further enhance political mutual trust, deepen practical cooperation speeding up the advancement of cooperation projects in economy, trade, investment, infrastructure, and other fields, in a bid to make joint contribution to safeguarding regional peace and security (*The Jordan Times*, 24 June 2017).

### JORDAN-FRANCE RELATIONS

Frequent exchange of high-level visits, sharing identical views on many regional and international issues and holding close and detailed dialogue through regular high-level bilateral meetings have immensely contributed to uniting Jordan and France through ties of friendship and trust. In July 2002, King Abdullah visited France and discussions between the two sides veered round bilateral relations and the situation in the region. Visit of the Jordanian King to France in August 2007 entailed discussion on bilateral relations and to elicit French support for Mideast peace and stability in Iraq.

King's September 2014 visit proved instrumental in eliciting French support for Jordan's development efforts, especially in the aftermath of the influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan and accordingly in early October 2015, France confirmed its support for Jordan through the signing of development agreements totalling US\$265 million. During the visit of the French President Francois Hollande in April 2016, six contracts were signed, including a memorandum of understanding between the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation concerning the granting of €900 million in additional loans over the next three years.

France ranks sixth concerning foreign investors, with €1.5 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock and is active in the area of telecommunications, which accounts for 66 per cent of French investment, banking services, cement production, water distribution and treatment, fuel distribution, and transport. The French exports to Jordan increased by 9.1 per cent in 2016 compared with 2015 and France has a trade surplus of €308 million, and the total trade volume is €370 million (Diplomatie France).

Visit of the Jordanian King to France in June 2017 culminated in his talks with the French President Emmanuel Macron on the latest regional and international developments and means to enhance cooperation and partnership between the two countries, thereby, highlighting the importance of continuing coordination and consultation between the two countries on issues of mutual interest and expanding participation in the economic and military fields. The joint statements issued for the media during this visit emphasised on historical relations between the two countries (*The Jordan Times*, 20 June 2017). On the Syrian crisis, both sides agreed on the importance of reaching a political solution to the crisis in a way that guarantees the unity of Syria and the security of its people.

The focal points of deliberations between King and the French president, during his visit to France in December 2017 entailed, apart from bilateral issues, regional issues as well, specifically the US announcement to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Both sides stressed the importance of continued coordination between Jordan and France on various issues and boosting cooperation in the economic, military, and security fields. Emphasising that the Trump administration's unilateral decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital was against the international law; from Jordanian point of view, King Abdullah said that both sides agreed that there was no alternative to the two-state solution and

that there is no solution without Jerusalem. On his part, the President Macron, while underlining the on-going progress between France and Jordan in different fields, stated that the issue of Jerusalem was of paramount importance for both sides, dictating cooperation between France and coordination with Jordan (*The Jordan Times*, 20 December 2017).

### JORDAN-JAPAN RELATIONS

Recognising the importance of political and economic stability of Jordan, which is located in a unique geopolitical position and directly affects the stability of the Middle East, Japan has actively extended support to the Kingdom. This understanding has been furthered by the mutual exchange of high-level visits between the two countries. During his working visit to Japan in December 2004, Abdullah, while exchanging views on bilateral and regional issues, also sought Japanese support and investment for his development programmes. Emphasis on augmenting bilateral cooperation, increase in Japanese investment in Jordan and developments in the Mideast Peace process constituted the central planks of his visit to Japan in April 2010.

During his visit to Japan in October 2014, Abdullah held wide-ranging talks with the Japanese leaders. The Japanese side expected that the bilateral relationship would be further strengthened in a wide range of fields, including politics, security, and economy. On his part, the King thanked Japan for the various kinds of support offered to deal with the Middle East situation. He also explained Jordan's efforts for the Syrian refugee issue and the current challenges and asked Japan for continued cooperation (*The Jordan Times*, 27 October 2014).

In the wake of Jordan's significant role to the Middle East peace process and the sustainable peace in the region, Japan has been implementing economic cooperation to Jordan by providing practical assistance in each area combining requisite modalities, including loan, grants, and technical cooperation. Since 2009 to early 2016, Japan has extended more than US\$1 billion in financial assistance to Jordan, including some US\$491 million as grants and US\$530 million as soft loans (*The Jordan Times*, 5 September 2016). Concerning trade, the overall trade balance is favourable to Japan; in 2016, Jordan's exports comprised mainly fertiliser and phosphorus ore and Jordanian imports consisted mainly of transport machinery and other machinery.

During his visit to Jordan in early January 2015, the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe while assuring his readiness to extend non-military assistance said that Japan would provide financial help to Jordan, which was struggling financially owing to its efforts to support refugees fleeing from Syria and Iraq. Besides, an agreement was signed between the two private sectors to establish Shams Ma'an, projected to be the largest solar energy project in the Middle East with an investment of up to US\$160 million (*Japan Times*, 18 January 2015).

During the October 2016 visit of the King, apart from the exchange of views on bilateral and regional issues, proved instrumental in eliciting a soft loan worth US\$300 million to be spent on development projects. Exchange of views also encompassed ways to maintain coordination and communication and boost cooperation in political, economic, and security fields. Japan also evinced its interest to expand its role and build on the "peace corridor" project to promote economic cooperation between Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians, as well as support the Red Sea-Dead Sea Water Conveyance Project (*Japan Times*, 28 October 2016).

### JORDAN-ISRAEL RELATIONS

Jordan's relations with Israel under the leadership of King Abdullah II have been marked by many ups and downs and is described as "semi-cordial official relationship," which is used by him to "improve Jordan's standing with Western governments and international financial institutions, on which it relies heavily for external support and aid" (Sharp 2013, p. 7). The unresolved perennial question of Palestine is the main stumbling block in the full normalisation of Jordan's relations with Israel and for that matter between Israel and other Arab countries. In May 1999, King Abdullah had stated that Jordan was needed as a "fulcrum for the future stability of the region" (*The Jordan Times*, 18 May 1999).

Israeli opposition to two-state solution and its insistence on one-state solution (merging West bank with Jordan), which had been endorsed by Trump administration in February 2017, was viewed with alarm by the Kingdom, which has reiterated in the strongest terms its steadfast commitment—along with of the Arab states during the March 2017 Arab summit in Amman—to a two-state solution that would give Palestinians a homeland in the West Bank and Gaza and King Abdullah in his meeting with President Trump in Washington in April 2017 made this position clear (Muasher 2017).

During his first ever official visit to Israel in April 2001, King Abdullah tried to convince Israeli leadership that to improve the bilateral relations between it was imperative for Israel to make substantial progress with the Palestinians. In early 2004, Prime Minister Sharon visited Jordan at the invitation of the King, and while referring to the nature of talks, Abdullah recalls, "I knew that the true national interest of Jordan and of Israel would be served only by reaching peace between Israel and the Palestinians. I tried to convince him of this, but by the end of the meeting, after a lengthy discussion of Israeli actions in the Occupied Territories and the need to take effective steps to create an environment conducive to the resumption of serious peace negotiations, I was quite certain that Sharon did not share my view" (King Abdullah 2011, Chap. 26).

Israeli action of constructing a wall dividing the West Bank and the continued construction of illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories, which was already in progress, was opposed by the King during his meeting with Sharon on 19 March 2004 in Negev (Israel), but of no avail. In his memoirs, Abdullah describes briefly about his meetings with Israeli leaders between 2004 and 2010 wherein he frequently raised the issues of illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as they were eating away at land that should be part of the future Palestinian state and thereby threaten the viability of a two-state solution. However, the pleadings of the Jordanian King with Israeli leaders failed to bear any tangible outcome, and he was convinced that the proof of the intentions of Israeli leaders was in their actions, not in their words (Ibid.).

The 1994 Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty proved instrumental in opening up some avenues of cooperation, though limited and the post-treaty phase saw the development of Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs), in Jordan where the companies that used a percentage of Israeli inputs could export duty-free goods to the US. These zones were reported to have generated many jobs, thereby emerging as a potent engine of growth for the Jordanian economy. In 1999, US\$2.5 million worth of goods were exported to the US through QIZs, which by 2007 had exceeded US\$1.14 billion. In 1999, there were only two companies in the QIZs, and the number of employees in the zones was about 5000, and by 2007, the number of companies increased to over 50 and the zones employed over 46,000 workers (Mitha 2011).

Other examples of Israeli-Jordanian cooperation are agreement on water sharing signed in early December 2013 and an agreement on Israeli natural gas to Jordan signed in 2014. A regional water agreement signed

among Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority entailed the potential of paving the way for Red-Dead-Canal that could provide freshwater to water-scarce countries in the surrounding areas while restoring the Dead Sea. In 2014, Israel signed an agreement with Jordan for the supply of natural gas (Sharp 2015, p. 5).

Despite these overtures of cooperation, the second half of 2017 witnessed brewing up of diplomatic tensions owing to disputes over holy sites in Jerusalem and to an incident at the Israeli Embassy in Amman in which two Jordanian citizens were killed by an embassy employee who claimed to be acting in self-defence (Sharp 2017, p. 7). The US President Donald Trump's announcement in early December 2017 to recognise the disputed city of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has been opposed by Jordan, and the King in his subsequent meetings with President Trump in 2017 and early 2018 has conveyed his country's opposition to it and this has also led to an unease in Jordan's relations with Israel, particularly after the refusal of the Jordanians to the so-called the American deal of the century.

### JORDAN AND PALESTINE

There has been no dilution of Jordan's support to the Palestinian cause and under the leadership of King Abdullah II, time and again Jordan has reiterated its endorsement of the two-state solution that would lead to a Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel is opposed to two-state solution and has been arguing for some time for the Jordanian control over parts of the West Bank that it does not wish to keep and such a proposal essentially promotes a solution that is detrimental to the Palestinians and denies them any control over East Jerusalem as well as undermines Jordan's national interests (Muasher 2017). The divisions within the ranks of the Palestinian leadership, especially between Fatah and Hamas, have further complicated the goal of attaining a two-state solution to the Palestine problem.

Jordan has continued to support Mahmoud Abbas government, despite tense periods on some occasions. However, the emergence of an unexpected trilateral rapprochement involving Hamas, Egypt, and former Fatah strongman Mohammad Dahlan has seemingly added to Jordan's worries. The emergence of Yehya Sinwar as the de facto prime minister of the Hamas-led government in Gaza in early 2017 and alteration by Hamas in its manifesto in May 2017 where it accepted an independent Palestinian State according to the 4 June 1967 borders, but without recognising

Israel are touted as serious developments complicating the already complex issue of Palestine (Sharif 2017).

In Jordan's view, the fate of the two-state solution is intimately linked to the future of Gaza and the West Bank. Articulating Jordan's apprehensions, Sharif (Sharif 2017) writes: "A semi-autonomous Gaza opens the path to unilaterally imposed arrangements by Israel regarding the future of the West Bank—Israeli control of the land with responsibility for the population assigned to Jordan through some form of confederation, in which it is refused by the Jordanian King and people. Amman could be pressured and enticed to accept such a deal. The caveats include giving up on Palestinian refugee rights and awarding citizenships to most, which would upset Jordan's current demographic balance."

During his visit to West Bank in August 2017, King Abdullah held a short meeting with the Palestinian President Abbas and the two leaders discussed recent tension with Israel, and it is a move seen by some observers as an act of unity during a time of heightened tension with Israel. In the wake of US President Donald Trump's assertion in early December 2017 to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, on 28 January 2018 King Abdullah affirmed his support for establishing a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem, highlighting his differences with the Trump administration on a central issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (*The Jordan Times*, 28 January 2018).

### JORDAN AND SYRIAN CRISIS

In the wake of on-going Syrian Crisis since 2011, according to the data based on preliminary results of the national census conducted in late November 2015 that of the total non-Jordanian population, 1.265 million are Syrians (*The Jordan Times*, 30 January 2016) and according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 31 December 2017, there were 655,624 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan (UNHCR, December 2017). Looking after such a massive number of refugees has impacted profoundly on Jordan's fiscal resources, augmenting government expenditures on subsidies, public services, and security, while further compounding the negative economic consequences of regional instability. However, the regime has sought to meet this challenge despite all odds through the National Resilience Plan (NRP 2014). The government has come out with Jordan Response Platform 2017–2019, a three-year plan that seeks to address the needs and vulnerabilities of Syrian refugees and the Jordanian people.



In February 2016, the government entered into an arrangement with foreign governments and international financial institutions known as Jordan Compact for improving the livelihoods of Syrian refugees already living in the Kingdom. This programme is designed to enable the government to procure low-interest loans from foreign creditors and preferential access to European markets for goods manufactured in special economic zones with a high degree of Syrian labour participation (Sharp 2017, p. 5).

### JORDAN AND GCC COUNTRIES

Jordan shares cordial, brotherly, friendly, and close relations with Gulf Arab countries. King Abdullah II has accorded priority in maintaining ties with these countries and harnesses his rapport with heads and the leaders of the Gulf countries to foster close ties and broadly extends his Kingdom's support for the decisions of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on broader issues.

The proximity between Jordan and the GCC is discernible from the trade relations which have been on ascendance for years now. In 2016, Jordan's exports to Arab Gulf States stood at JD1.32 billion, while imports amounted to JD2.53 billion. Jordan's exports to GCC countries stood at JD455 million in the first five months of 2017, while imports amounted to JD1.11 billion for the same period (*The Jordan Times*, September 28, 2017).

By the end of 2016, the total amount of funds transferred from the Gulf countries' grant to Jordan had reached JD1.661 billion. Jordan has received JD524.94 million from Saudi Arabia, JD721.04 million from Kuwait and JD415.61 million from the UAE. The total sum of the funds spent in 2016 was JD327.17 million, while the value of approved projects reached JD2.469 billion. The GCC Higher Council, in its 32nd session in 2011, approved allocating US\$5 billion in grant to support development projects in Jordan over five years provided by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar on a share basis of \$1.25 billion for each country (*The Jordan Times*, 19 April 2017).

The unexpected eruption of Gulf dispute on 5 June 2017 in the wake of severance of diplomatic relations with Qatar jointly by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt presented Jordan with a dilemma. The specific reasons for this extraordinary action were allegations that Qatar was funding terrorist groups and was interfering in the domestic affairs of these countries in clear violation of GCC agreements and international law. It was a litmus test for King Abdullah's diplomatic acumen. On 6 June 2017, the govern-

ment of announced the downgrading its diplomatic representation with Qatar and asked the Qatari ambassador to leave and revoked the license of *Al-Jazeera's* office in Jordan (*Al-Monitor*, 22 June 2017). But the relation between Jordan and Qatar resumed its natural path in July 2019.

The Jordanian King adroitly handled the diplomatic crisis by refraining from making any comments or pronouncements in the post-crisis phase and making a choice not to get directly involved in the Gulf spat while extending support to Kuwait's peace efforts. Perhaps the King was reminded of the grave consequences faced by Jordan by having sided with Iraq during the Kuwait crisis in 1990–1991 and asked for an Arabian solution to solve the disputes through negotiations.

Since September 2011, when the GCC formally invited Jordan to submit a bid for membership of the regional forum, speculative reports have been doing rounds in the national and international media about Jordan joining the GCC. As a member state of the GCC, Jordan would receive much-needed financial support and concessional supply of oil. On the other hand, the Gulf States would benefit from the Kingdom's military expertise, competitive workforce, and diplomatic ties to Western powers. Jordan is regarded as a strategic and geopolitical partner by the GCC member states (*The Jordan Times*, 5 November 2017). Once the GCC wriggles out of the diplomatic crisis that erupted in early June 2017, further progress on Jordan's membership of the GCC can be expected.

## CONCLUSION

Under the rule and leadership of King Abdullah II, Jordan has pursued a foreign policy that partly has been the continuity of the rich legacy of the past left by King Hussein and partially it has been characterised by the change that is perhaps required by the prevalent geopolitical compulsions occurring at regional and global levels. Unlike his predecessor's emphasis on "Arab First," Abdullah has emphasised on "Jordan first," a phrase which perhaps has found favour with American President Donald Trump. The adage in Jordan that king is the fountainhead of Kingdom's foreign policy perhaps finds its best articulation in Abdullah's diplomatic acumen of frequently visiting important nations which are significant politically, economically, and strategically to elicit necessary support for Jordan. He possesses appropriate acumen of transforming challenges into opportunities.

Initially focusing on foreign policy, working hard to cement Jordan's relations with many different nations and travelling to visit heads of Gulf

Arab States and the US and other relevant countries, Abdullah took advantage of the “beginning of his reign to make a ‘meet and greet’ tour of many different nations, using these visits as opportunities to strengthen or build new relationships with a number of countries” (Wagner 2005, p. 87).

Jordan under his leadership has come to regard its alliance with the US and its burgeoning relations with the European Union as crucial strategic interests and sees itself as in sync with both on most foreign policy issues. According to Ryan (2014): “Jordan even views itself as a model for the region regarding policy areas of deepest concern to Western governments and Western-led global institutions: supporting neoliberal economic politics, pursuing domestic political reform, combating militant Islamism and terrorism, stabilizing Iraq, bringing an end to the Syrian civil war and restoring the Arab-Israeli peace process.”

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