

# Does Jordan Want the West Bank?

by Michael Sharnoff

In July 1988, King Hussein renounced Jordan's claim to the West Bank, which it had occupied from 1949 to 1967.<sup>1</sup> In 2010, his son and successor King Abdullah II endorsed that position.<sup>2</sup> But over the past decade, prominent Jordanian officials and commentators have increasingly called for a renewed Jordanian role in the West Bank. Some advocate negotiating alongside the Palestinians or in their place. Others push a more controversial position and insist on the return of the West Bank to Jordan, a clear repudiation of Hussein's disengagement policy and the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty.



*Jordan's King Hussein flies over the Temple Mount, January 1, 1965, while the West Bank was under Jordanian control. In July 1988, Hussein renounced Jordan's claim to the West Bank.*

These renewed claims should not be surprising. Jordanian—and Palestinian—attitudes toward the West Bank have been historically transient, creating uncertainty over precisely where Jordan's borders begin and where Palestinian areas end. Yet, while there is little evidence of significant popular support for reclaiming the West Bank for fear that this would undermine Jordan's demographic balance, Palestinian chaos and disunity and the looming application of Israeli sovereignty to parts of the

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<sup>1</sup> King Hussein, "Address to the Nation," Office of King Hussein I, Amman, July 31, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv), [Jan. 29, 2010](#).

West Bank may exacerbate Jordanian anxieties and drive the reluctant king to reassert Amman's claim to the West Bank so as to preserve his country's stability and national interests.

### Historical Context

In April 1920, the San Remo peace conference, which dissolved the Ottoman Empire and created a new regional order on its ruins, appointed Britain as mandatory for Palestine with the specific task of facilitating the establishment of a Jewish national home in line with the 1917 Balfour Declaration. The mandate was ratified two years later by the League of Nations—the post-World War I predecessor to the United Nations.

Despite these international resolutions, in March 1921, the British appointed Emir Abdullah of the Hashemite family, son of Sharif Hussein of Mecca who had led the “Great Arab Revolt” against the Ottomans, as ruler of the territory east of the Jordan River known as Transjordan. This effectively severed that area from the Palestine Mandate to which it formally belonged. In 1946, Transjordan gained independence with Abdullah proclaiming himself king, and three years later, the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan changed its name to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan following the conquest of territory west of the Jordan River known since biblical times as Judea and Samaria, which had been designated by the November 1947 partition resolution as part of an Arab state. He also claimed the eastern part of Jerusalem, earmarked by the resolution as an international zone.

While these conquests fell far short of Abdullah's grandiose dream of a “Greater Syria” empire, they did allow him to treble his sparsely populated desert kingdom by adding as many as 450,000 Palestinian Arabs

to Transjordan's 225,000 Bedouins, townspeople, villagers, and semi-nomads.<sup>3</sup> On April 24, 1950, the Jordanian parliament with the support of West Bank Arabs, adopted a resolution known as “the decision of the unity of the two banks” affirming

complete unity between the two sides of the Jordan and their union in one state ... at whose head reigns King Abdullah Ibn Hussein, on a basis of constitutional representative government and equality of the rights and duties of all citizens.<sup>4</sup>

Amman thus annexed Judea and Samaria and renamed it the West Bank. This new name, which has since been used almost universally, not only intended to obliterate the millenarian Jewish attachment to this land but also to deemphasize a unique Palestinian identity in favor of a new Jordanian national identity. West Bank Arabs were granted Jordanian citizenship and given the right to vote.<sup>5</sup> Abdullah hoped his new subjects would assimilate into a new Jordanian society and look to him to defend and represent their interests. However, in 1951, Abdullah was assassinated by a Palestinian while entering the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, due to his efforts to reach a peace agreement with Israel.

During the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

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<sup>3</sup> “Stateless Again: Palestinian-Origin Jordanians Deprived of their Nationality,” Human Rights Watch, New York, Feb. 1, 2010

<sup>4</sup> [Jordanian Parliament Resolution](#) Regarding the Annexation of the West Bank, Eng. text, Apr. 24, 1950.

<sup>5</sup> James Lunt, *Hussein of Jordan: Searching for a Just and Lasting Peace* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1989), pp. xxxiv, 67-8.



In 1959, Jordanian prime minister Hazza Majali said, “We are the government of Palestine, the army of Palestine, and the refugees of Palestine.”

The previous Jordanian occupation of these territories had never been internationally recognized (except by Great Britain and Pakistan). In November 1967, Security Council Resolution 242 called for Israel’s withdrawal “from territories occupied in the recent conflict” within the framework of an Arab-Israeli peace agreement<sup>6</sup> and implied the return of evacuated territories to Jordan—with the Palestinians not mentioned by name in the resolution but alluded to vaguely as a refugee population.<sup>7</sup>

Amman thus continued to claim the West Bank despite ceasing to be its occupying force. Yet the outbreak of the December 1987 Palestinian intifada led King Hussein to reconsider. In July 1988, fearing that unrest on the West Bank could spill

<sup>6</sup> “[Resolution 242 \(1967\) of 22 November 1967](#),” United Nations Security Council, New York 1(i).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2(b).

over into the East Bank and destabilize the Hashemite Kingdom, he announced that while Jordan would remain invested in Palestinian affairs and in a solution to the Palestinian issue, it would sever “all administrative and legal ties with the West Bank” and

respect the wish of the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization], the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, to secede from us [Jordan] as an independent Palestinian state.<sup>8</sup>

### Ambiguous Jordanian-Palestinian Boundaries

Jordanian attitudes toward the West Bank have often been ambiguous and confusing. In 1948, King Abdullah asserted that “Palestine and Jordan are one, for Palestine is the coastline and Transjordan the hinterland of the same country.”<sup>9</sup> Five years later, King Hussein said that East Jerusalem was “the alternative capital of the Hashemite Kingdom” and would constitute an “integral and inseparable part” of Jordan.<sup>10</sup> On August 23, 1959, Jordanian prime minister Hazza Majali said, “We are the government of Palestine, the army of Palestine, and the refugees of Palestine.”<sup>11</sup>

Addressing the Jordanian National

<sup>8</sup> Hussein, “Address to the Nation.”

<sup>9</sup> King Abdullah, Arab League Meeting, Cairo, Apr. 12, 1948, in Yitzhak Ben Gad, *Politics, Lies, and Videotape: 3,000 Questions and Answers on the Mideast Crisis* (New York: Shapolsky Publishers, 1991), p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Jerusalem in the Twentieth Century* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1996), p. 254.

<sup>11</sup> Yitzhak Oron, ed., *Middle East Record Volume 1, 1960* (Jerusalem: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), p. 133.

Assembly on February 2, 1970, Prince Hassan, King Hussein's brother and the crown prince (1965-99), claimed that "Palestine is Jordan and Jordan is Palestine; there is only one land, with one history and one and the same fate." Two years later the king himself announced,

**Most policymakers and Jordanians do not want the headache of resuming their former role in the West Bank.**

We consider it necessary to clarify to one and all, in the Arab world and outside, that the Palestinian people with its nobility and conscience is to be found here on the East Bank [of the Jordan River], the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Its overwhelming majority is here [on the East Bank] and nowhere else.<sup>12</sup>

As late as 1981, he declared, "The truth is that Jordan is Palestine and Palestine is Jordan."<sup>13</sup>

For their part, U.S. intelligence reports from the 1950s to the 1970s described the West Bank not as "Palestine" or "occupied Palestinian territory" but as "Palestinian West Jordan" and "West Jordan."<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the international press frequently

depicted the West Bank as "occupied Jordan" and not "occupied Palestine."<sup>15</sup> This description persisted even in the early 1990s after King Hussein formally renounced ties in 1988.<sup>16</sup> Presently, the

West Bank and East Jerusalem are nearly universally recognized as "occupied Palestinian territories" and not as part of Jordan.

### **Renewed Jordanian Claims after 1988**

Most policymakers and Jordanians do not want the headache of resuming their former role in the West Bank.<sup>17</sup> Official Jordanian policy rejects any renewed role, which would violate King Hussein's 1988 disengagement policy and the October 1994 peace treaty with Israel, which affirmed the international Jordanian-Israeli boundary as comprising the following sectors: the Jordan and Yarmouk Rivers, the Dead Sea, the Emek Ha'arva-Wadi Araba, and the Gulf of Aqaba.<sup>18</sup> Through mutual recognition and a

<sup>12</sup> *An-Nahar* (Beirut), Aug. 24, 1972.

<sup>13</sup> *An-Nahar al-Arabi Wa-l-Duwali* (Beirut), Dec. 26, 1981.

<sup>14</sup> "[Disunity among the Arab States: The Hashemite Controversy and Arab Palestine](#)," U.S. Dept. of State, Office of Intelligence Research, Intelligence Report no. 6565, CIA Records Search Tool (hereafter CREST), Nov. 24, 1954; "[Situation in Jordan](#)," CREST, Nov. 24, 1966; "[Proposals for Resolving the Status of Jordan's West Bank](#)," CREST, Nov. 1, 1973.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, *The Telegraph-Herald* (Dubuque), May 20, 1977.

<sup>16</sup> David Bar-Illan, "Israel's Other Struggle Is with Trendy Terminology," *The Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 12, 1993.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, "Ma Ra'yak fi dami ad-Daffa ila-l-Urdun?" *al-Hadath* (Ramallah), [May 10, 2016](#); "Hal ta'ud ad-Daffa al-Gharbiya li-l-Urdun?" *al-Quds* (Jerusalem), [Oct. 31, 2012](#); Raed Omari, "[Jordan is Jordan](#) and Palestine is Palestine," *al-Arabiya* (Dubai), Feb. 27, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> [Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty, Annex I \(a\): Israel-Jordan International Boundary Delimitation and Demarcation](#), Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, Oct. 26, 1994.



termination of belligerency, the treaty sought to end suggestions that Jordan could become an alternative Palestinian state. Instead, the kingdom has supported the two-state solution, whereby Israelis live in peace and security alongside an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as its capital.

This official policy notwithstanding, over the past decade, a number of Jordanians have challenged the view that the kingdom has no desire to regain the West Bank with some even rejecting the disengagement policy as unconstitutional. They have chastised Palestinian leadership as incapable of securing their people's rights and argued that Amman should resume negotiating over the fate of the West Bank. Others have urged that the West Bank be returned to Jordan. Though a minority opinion, these views are not fringe, held as they are by politicians, academics, and journalists. This minority argues that only by doing so can Jordan protect its sovereignty and internal stability while also defending Palestinian rights and national cause.

Thus, for example, in May 2010, *al-Madina News* published an op-ed declaring Jordanians and Palestinians as one people and urging the return of the West Bank to Hashemite rule as a means to enhance the area's legitimacy and capacity to be liberated by an international decision, no matter how



*Photo: Dennis Jarvis  
Bethlehem, West Bank. The Jordanian news agency Gerasa News published an op-ed declaring, "The West Bank Is Jordanian Land and Its Citizens Are Jordanians. Let Jordan Extend from the Ocean to the Gulf."*

long it takes.<sup>19</sup> The Jordanian news agency Gerasa News similarly published an article in June 2010 with the provocative title, "The West Bank Is Jordanian Land and Its Citizens Are Jordanians. Let Jordan Extend from the Ocean to the Gulf." The author Samih Ajarmeh stated that the West Bank can only be part of Jordan because after the 1950 unification of both banks of the Jordan River, this territory became "pure Jordanian land with no difference between it and northern, central and southern Jordan, and therefore its citizens became Jordanians."<sup>20</sup>

In April 2011, Sheikh Hamza Mansur,

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<sup>19</sup> Walid Sabul, "Ad-Daffa al-Gharbiya—Urduniya!" *al-Madina News* (Medina, S.A.), May 2, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Samih Ajarmeh, "Ad-Daffa al-Gharbiya Ard Urduniya wa-Muwatinuha Urduniyun," Gerasa News Agency (Amman), June 25, 2010.

secretary general of the Islamic Action Front, described the West Bank as occupied Jordanian—not Palestinian—land,<sup>21</sup> and three months later journalist Roman Haddad published an article headlined, “I am not a traitor ... but the West Bank is Jordanian.” In his claim, U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338, the internationally recognized land-for-peace formulations, view the West Bank as occupied Jordanian territory, which makes Jordan the only state mandated to negotiate with Israel over the return of this territory.<sup>22</sup>

In April 2012, Muhammad Suleiman Khawaldeh, a writer and legal professor, published an article in which he argued that according to the Jordanian constitution, the Hashemite Kingdom comprised the east and west banks of the Jordan River, which made their residents Jordanians. Therefore, he argued, the 1988 disengagement decision and the Israel-Jordan peace treaty are unconstitutional.<sup>23</sup> In October 2012, former crown prince Hassan dropped a bombshell by telling a Palestinian audience in Nablus that Jordan had never renounced its claim to the West Bank and that the land remained an integral part of the Hashemite Kingdom:

The unity that existed between the west and east banks for 17 years ... was arguably one of the best attempts at unity that ever occurred in the Arab [world] ... I hope that I do not live to see the day when Jordan, or the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan,

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<sup>21</sup> *Al-Balad News* (Beirut), Apr. 29, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Roman Haddad, “Lastu Kha’in ... lakin ad-Daffa al-Gharbiya Urduniya,” *al-Ghad* (Amman), July 25, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> *Al-Balad News*, Apr. 29, 2011.



*In October 2012, former crown prince Hassan (pictured in 2017) told a Palestinian audience in Nablus that Jordan had never renounced its claim to the West Bank and that the land remained an integral part of the Hashemite Kingdom.*

relinquishes the land occupied in 1967 by the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] ... These lands ... including East Jerusalem, were promised to us, and nowadays we speak of them as Area C.<sup>24</sup>

Obviously, the Jordanians lost their physical presence in the West Bank after its 1967 occupation by Israel, but the prince’s comments appeared to suggest that the kingdom was morally and legally obligated to retake the West Bank. Without mentioning the Palestinians by name, Hassan also implied that Amman should achieve this objective even if this meant undermining the PLO.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Almustaqbal-a.com* (Beirut), Oct. 11, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

In May 2015, Hayel Dawood, Jordanian minister of religious endowments and Islamic affairs, emphasized that “Jordan and Palestine are one body with one spirit.”<sup>26</sup> A year later, former Jordanian prime minister Abdel Salam Majali bluntly stated that the Palestinians were not “fully qualified to assume their responsibilities, especially in the financial field” and that a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation remained the ideal solution, though this could only occur after the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.<sup>27</sup>

Also in May 2016, Jordanian parliamentarian Muhammad Dawaima visited Hebron to explore a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation. The initiative sought to strengthen ties between Jordanians and Palestinians in pursuit of a greater Jordanian role in Palestinian affairs.<sup>28</sup>

In October 2017, Jawad Anani, former Jordanian deputy prime minister and foreign minister, argued that since the 1952 constitution forbade the ceding of any Jordanian territory, disengagement could only be interpreted as Amman delegating the PLO “to act on its behalf in legal and administrative matters on the West Bank.” Like Haddad, Anani argued that U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338 designated the West Bank as

**In 2018, a former Jordanian prime minister called for the Palestinian Authority to be dissolved and for Abbas to resign.**

occupied Jordanian territory, which made Amman the only factor mandated to negotiate with Israel over its return.<sup>29</sup>

In January 2018, Kamel Abu Jaber, a Jordanian senator and former foreign minister, told Jordan TV that King Hussein’s disengagement was a tactical ploy that did not represent a political or religious break with the Palestinians, and that Jordan “did not give up sovereignty over the West Bank.”<sup>30</sup> This assertion was echoed two months later in an article by Jordanian writer Nermeen Murad, claiming that while Hussein’s decision to provide the Palestinians an opportunity to regain their rights might have been correct at the time, the Palestinians failed and sidelining Jordan had proved a major blunder.<sup>31</sup>

In April 2018, former Jordanian prime minister Taher Masri called for the Palestinian Authority to be dissolved and for its leader, Mahmoud Abbas, to resign.<sup>32</sup> Three months later, Jordanian MP Muhammad Zahrawi argued that King Hussein’s disengagement decision did not invalidate Jordan’s legal claim to the West Bank. Indeed, despite amendments made to the original constitution as recently as 2016, this clause has not been amended, which

<sup>26</sup> The Islamic Jerusalem Conference, al-Quds University, May 24, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Abdel Salam Majali, “Ra’is Wuzara al-Urdun al-Asbaq: al-Kunfederaliat ma’a Filastin Sataqumu ba’da Iqamat ad-Dawla,” *Asharq al-Awsat* (London), May 22, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> “Dawmiya: Milyun Khaliliyun fi-l-Urdun,” *Ammon News*, [May 8, 2016](#).

<sup>29</sup> Jawad Anani, “[Jordan’s ‘West Bank,’](#)” *The Jordan Times* (Amman), Oct. 23, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> “Former Jordanian FM Kamel Abu Jaber: [Jordan Did Not Give up Sovereignty](#) over West Bank, Should Reverse Disengagement,” Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Washington, D.C., no. 6394, Jan. 22, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Nermeen Murad, “[Should Jordan claim the West Bank](#) on our behalf? An old yet new question,” *The Jordan Times*, Mar. 31, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> *Middle East Monitor* (London), [Apr. 13, 2018](#).

challenges the legality of Amman renouncing all ties from the West Bank.<sup>33</sup> Ridiculing Palestinian leaders as “juveniles” for having failed to achieve their objectives, Zahrawi claimed that “all Jordanian lands [i.e., including the West Bank and East Jerusalem] must come under the Hashemite banner, which is a source of pride for us all.”<sup>34</sup>

In August 2018, Walid Sadi, a former Jordanian ambassador and former editor of *Jordan Times*, described the Hashemite Kingdom’s legal rights as custodian of the holy sites in East Jerusalem. In doing so, he too invoked Resolution 242. Sadi concluded with a rebuttal to those who claim that Jordan had abandoned its legal rights to the West Bank:

the unity of the West Bank with the East Bank was officially and constitutionally adopted on 24 April 1950. No one disputes this fact. The constitution of the country at the time [of King Hussein’s renunciation of Jordan’s claim to the West Bank] was the 1952 Constitution, which stipulated in no uncertain terms that no part of the Kingdom shall be ceded, period.<sup>35</sup>

**The Hashemite dynasty  
would prefer Jordanians of  
Palestinian descent to leave the  
kingdom for a new Palestine.**

## Jordanian Concerns

Jordanians fear that a political solution between Israelis and Palestinians that does not include a two-state solution and the “right of return” threatens the stability of the kingdom. The Hashemite dynasty and the Transjordanian population would probably prefer to see an independent Palestinian state and “right of return” exercised in the hope that it would persuade the millions of Jordanians of Palestinian descent to leave the kingdom for a new Palestine. Such an exodus would theoretically tip the demographic balance in favor of the Bedouin minority—the Hashemite regime’s main prop—most of whom consider themselves the “true Jordanians.” Rapidly changing developments between Israel, the Palestinians, and the United States have further aggravated Jordanian concerns. In 2004-08, Amman revoked the citizenship of thousands of Palestinians in Jordan and invalidated the passports of Palestinians affiliated with the PLO, justifying the controversial move as designed to fend off potential Israeli plans to transfer West Bank Palestinians to the East Bank.<sup>36</sup>

Today, the Jordanians have even more reasons to panic. After more than a quarter of a century, the Palestinian national movement, through a combination of diplomacy and terrorism, has failed on all accounts. It has failed to destroy Israel, to end Israeli control of much of the West Bank, and to establish an independent state. A two-state solution

<sup>33</sup> “Jordanian MP Muhammad Al-Zahrawi: The West Bank Must Come under Hashemite Banner; [The Plundering Jews Are Prophet Slayers](#),” MEMRI, no. 6682, July 18, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>35</sup> Walid M. Sadi, “[Jordan’s Role over Holy Sites](#) in East Jerusalem Legal and Sovereignty-Related,” *The Jordan Times*, Aug. 12, 2018.

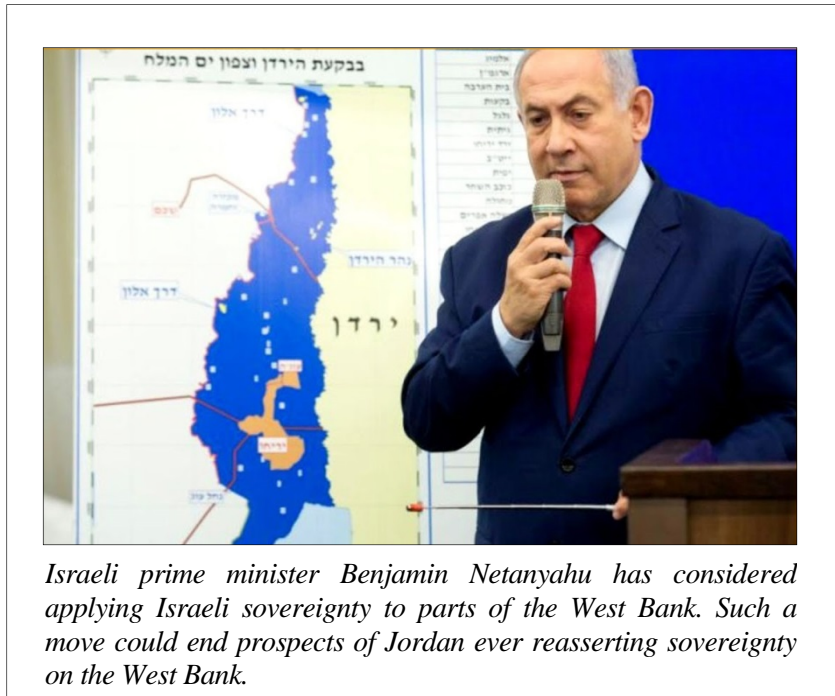
<sup>36</sup> “Jordan: Stop Withdrawing Nationality from Palestinian-Origin Citizens,” Human Rights Watch, New York, Feb. 1, 2010.



increasingly appears out of reach, not least since the Palestinian insistence on the “right of return”—the Arab code word for Israel’s demographic subversion—is a nonstarter for the Israelis.

Recent Israeli proposals regarding the West Bank have also reinforced Jordanian fears. In the run up to the September 2019 and March 2020 parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged to apply Israeli sovereignty to the Jordan Valley and the West Bank’s Israeli neighborhoods if reelected, stressing that Israel had the “full right” to do so even in defiance of international opinion.<sup>37</sup> Such a move could end prospects of Jordan ever reasserting sovereignty on the West Bank and may drive Jordanians of Palestinian descent to insist on full equality in the kingdom, particularly in the public and education sectors, even if a Palestinian state is established in part of the West Bank. Such a scenario would severely challenge Hashemite rule.

Several policies by the Trump administration have further exacerbated Jordanian anxieties, including recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, closing the PLO assembly in Washington, and announcing the “Deal of the Century” that sanctions Israeli annexation of parts of the West Bank within the framework of a Palestinian-Israeli peace. Amid all this, some Jordanians may assert that they can no longer remain passive on the sidelines



*Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has considered applying Israeli sovereignty to parts of the West Bank. Such a move could end prospects of Jordan ever reasserting sovereignty on the West Bank.*

and should resume a greater role in the West Bank to protect and defend their interests in an increasingly unstable and uncertain region.

Some Palestinians are also frustrated with the Israelis, Palestinian disunity, and U.S. policy and have called for the restoration of Jordanian citizenship to all residents of East Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup> And while it is unclear how many West Bankers would want restored Jordanian citizenship, this request reveals a preference for Jordan over Israel. Amman does not currently seem eager to accept this request. For one thing, if Palestinians in East Jerusalem receive Jordanian citizenship, it may undermine claims for an independent Palestinian state west of the Jordan River.

However, by renewing claims to the West Bank, Jordanians seek to reinforce the perception of the historical unity of both

<sup>37</sup> *The Guardian* (London), Sept. 10, 2019; Associated Press, Dec. 5, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> *Al-Monitor* (Washington, D.C.), Dec. 30, 2019.

banks of the Jordan River. As one Jordanian journalist wrote, this unity did not “end in 1967 with the occupation, not with the decision of the Rabat Summit in 1974, not with the disengagement in 1988, not with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1993, and it continues to exist today.”<sup>39</sup> Renewed Jordanian claims may thus serve as trial balloons to gauge Palestinian attitudes toward the kingdom, as well as a handy tool for promoting a narrative that Jordan—not the PLO—has the best shot at ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and allowing the Palestinians the right to self-determination. This right could be expressed, perhaps by a referendum, through a reunion with Jordan as it existed before 1967, through a federal or confederal system, or through an independent state. Accordingly, Jordan may also seek to cultivate pro-Jordanian Palestinians in preparation for major political developments on the West Bank, be they initiated or imposed by the Palestinians, the Israelis, or Washington.

## Outlook

Jordanian flirtations with reclaiming the West Bank or resuming a diplomatic role in place of or alongside the Palestinian leadership were unthinkable just over a decade ago. But this should come as no surprise. The kingdom has always been intimately intertwined with the land west of the Jordan River, and it will continue to seek a stake in any future settlement between Israelis and Palestinians.

**It is unlikely that Arab leaders will switch allegiances from Abbas to King Abdullah.**

Indeed, some Jordanians believe that restoring their pre-1988 role in the West Bank is a strategic national interest and the key to preventing the kingdom from becoming an alternative Palestinian homeland.

Yet while Jordanian frustration with the PLO may be genuine, it is doubtful that Jordan would seek to replace the organization and overturn its recognition by the 1974 Rabat Summit as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians. Given decades of Arab support and overt commitment to the Palestinians to determine their own fate, it is unlikely that Arab leaders will soon switch allegiances from Mahmoud Abbas to King Abdullah. As such, the official Jordanian position is likely to remain support for the PLO and a two-state solution.

It is also unlikely that Jordan, even if it wanted to, could regain the West Bank. The kingdom lost this territory the last time it embarked on a fully-fledged war with Israel. It is simply not a viable option. And after decades of failed negotiations and several large scale bouts of violence and terrorism, there is little evidence to indicate that a renewed diplomatic effort could convince Israelis to abandon land they have controlled for more than half a century. Thus, renewed claims appear to be symbolic and not a reflection of a change in government policy.

What is clear, however, is that such claims will likely upset the delicate balance of Jordanian-Palestinian relations and force King Abdullah to assuage reawakened Palestinian suspicions about Jordan’s interest in dominating their national movement, regaining control of the West Bank, and preventing the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Hence his exceedingly sharp response to the extension

<sup>39</sup> Yasser Abu Hilala, “Al-Daffatan Tawaman?” *al-Ghad*, June 24, 2011.

of Israeli sovereignty to parts of the West Bank for fear that such a move would drive Palestinians to flee into Jordan and destabilize the kingdom.

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