

Jordan on the Brink

Islam Hassan, Farah Al Qawasmi, and Zarqa Parvez

Abstract—The Jordanian state is believed to be on the brink of failure. Many structural tensions has been escalating over the years; thus, weakening the state, making it more vulnerable, and pushing it closer towards the breakout of a crisis. The purpose of this essay is to examine early warning conflict signs present in Jordan. The paper alerts that the escalation of tensions in Jordan leaves it standing on its final threshold before the outbreak of a conflict. This paper aims to encourage policy makers in Jordan to try finding solutions and policies to contain these tensions and prevent the expected eruption of a crisis.

Index Terms—Structural tension, signs of early warning, failing state, state inefficiency.

I. INTRODUCTION

As the domino effect of the Arab spring has struck Jordan, it is evident that tensions and protests are rising. These tensions are pushing Jordan closer towards the breakout of a crisis. By applying the general framework to early warning signs of conflicts, three main conditions to structural tensions and escalation become apparent (Please refer to appendix 1). The three conditions are the socio-economic and political instability, the prevalent Palestinian question, and the dominance of tribes in Jordanian politics. These three conditions will be used in the following paragraphs to demonstrate the escalation of tensions in Jordan leaving it standing on its final threshold before the outbreak of a conflict.

This paper starts firstly by presenting Jordan's historical context; secondly, highlights the structural tensions in Jordan; thirdly, introduces the first threshold; fourthly, underlines the escalation of tension; and finally, discusses the final threshold.

II. JORDAN IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It was after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire that what is known today as 'Jordan' was created and the 'Jordanian' identity came into being. Britain in the mid 1940s placed King Abdullah I as the first king of Jordan. As Jordan was considered a part of the greater Syrian nation before the end of the World War II, Jordan had no strong constructed identity. What existed in the area that Jordan was given was a group of tribes. It was through those tribes that King Abdullah I begun forming the Jordanian national identity that still prevails until this day. In addition to the Jordanian tribal

identity, comes the Palestinian Identity [1]. Due to political reasons, there existed a large emigration movement of Palestinians to Jordan. Palestinians currently constitute a substantial percentage of the Jordanian population.



Fig. 1. Map of Jordan.

Map from <http://www.britannica.com/place/Middle-East/images-videos>.

The Jordan-Palestine history and the creation of Jordanian-Palestinian identity date back to Jordan's annexation of a portion of Central Palestine by King Abdullah I. As it became the West Bank of Jordan, Palestinians were granted Jordanian citizenship. This was the beginning of the integration of the Palestinians into the Hashemite Kingdom [2]. This event was followed by influx of refugees from 1940s until 1967. An updated law of Jordanian Nationality in 1954 was put in place to "ensure that Palestinians who entered the Kingdom after 1949 were also offered Jordanian nationality" [2]. This change had various demographic implications for Jordan. There was an increase in the population as well as an addition of about 500,000 refugees in East and West banks. At this point, Jordan's population was around one and one-half million and almost less than half a million were Transjordanians [2]. This demographic setting laid foundation for disparity between the minority tribal Jordanian population and the majority of the Palestinian population, and future social problems. After the Israeli invasion and occupation of West Bank in 1967, the relationship between Jordan and Palestine transformed. As about 400,000 displaced Palestinians moved to East for security reasons, this added to the population pressure. The new group of Gazan Palestinians was not granted Jordanian nationality. (Please refer to appendix 2 for detailed table on categories for Palestinians in Jordan) [2].

III. STRUCTURAL TENSIONS IN JORDAN

The purpose of this essay is to examine early warning conflict signs present in Jordan. By looking at several background conditions, one is able to draw out structural tensions that preexisted. One of the conditions for structural

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tensions stem from the merging of the Jordanian governance with the Jordanian tribes. Since Jordan is a kingdom that is based on a civic myth, meaning that there is no traditional nor religious roots that act as a source of legitimacy to the monarchy, the country's three kings have always made sure to grant tribal Jordanians privileges to act as the backbone of the monarchy [3]. In return, tribal Jordanians have always been the supporters of the King until the Arab Spring and the changes that this paper sheds light on later.

The Jordanian politics still function by the 1952 constitution that "stipulates that authority be jointly exercised by the king and a bicameral legislature (Majles al-'Umma) [1]. For decades, the monarchy has not allowed for any other political party to be represented in the parliament besides those of the tribes. The tribes became the only form of communication between the people and the monarchy [4]. Cultural, religious and tribal values were promoted by the tribal parliament. The parliament did not include any liberal, communist, Baathist or Islamic representatives, except for the 1993 elections that the Islamic Action Front (IAF) won [1]. This created resentment in people towards the monarchy as several other groups amongst the Jordanian population, for example the communists, socialists, Islamists, Baathists, and Palestinian Jordanians, were not fairly represented and stripped from their political rights. However, limiting the parliament to the tribes benefited both tribes and the monarchy to a certain level.

The Jordanian monarchy has found it beneficial to assign most parliamentary seats to tribal representatives to secure their power. With a fixed ideology exerted by the tribesmen in the parliament, the monarchy assures centralization of power, a fixed ideology, and a fixed domestic political agenda. However, relying on the tribesmen in the parliament has come at a cost to both the monarchy and the State. As the monarchy has granted the bedouin tribesmen too much power in Jordan, the tribesmen increasingly demanded more. [5]. It was not just political power that the tribesmen obtained from their loyalties to the king, but military power as well. The tribes in Jordan control almost all forms of policing in the State that include the secret service at the Jordanian General Intelligence Department. Due to this immense power, the monarchy is forced to comply to their demands. In the case that the regime fails to meet the demands of the tribesmen, tribal killings, blockades and robberies take place [5]. This relationship between the monarchy and the tribes has come at a cost to the rest of the Jordanian population that are ruled by the tribesmen and suffer from insecurity in case that the tribesmen decide to retaliate against the State.

A second background condition to structural tensions in Jordan comes from the contemporary political and economical structure of this artificial kingdom. As modern Jordan is a product of the imperial machinations that divided up the Ottoman Empire, many political analysts argue that Hashemite Monarchy's good relationship with the West is rooted in the process of creation of this artificial kingdom [6]. The Hashemites have been always loyal to the alliance that brought them to power. One can see this through King Hussein's attempts of creating institutions that would make the Western great powers see Jordan of a geopolitical and geostrategic importance [6]. The monarchy's relationship with the West and Israel played a role in the structural tension.

Many Jordanians have seen this as a sell out to the Palestinian and Arab causes.

The most important change in the machinery of the Jordanian government began with the initiating of The Program of Limited Political Liberalization in 1989 [6]. Since the application of this initiative was only exclusive to the national legislative and municipal elections, the power of appointing the Prime minister and the cabinet remained in the hands of the King [6]. One can claim that the Judiciary system in Jordan has been improving slowly by the training and increasing of salaries of the judges; but still the Higher Judiciary Council's members being royal appointees highlights the monarchy's control over the Jordanian courts [6]. The Royal family's control over the "elected" Legislative and "independent" Judiciary has always been a cause of structural tension. The opposition has always believed that the King has stripped from his people their political rights.

A third condition to the structural tensions could be derived from Jordan's hollow economy. The kingdom entertains only limited arable lands and problems of water supply, scarce resources, and small manufacturing base [6]. Jordan has been considered a semi-rentier state as it depends on foreign aid and its nationals' remittances as the country's main source of income [7]. This has caused a huge disparity between people living in rural areas and those living in urban cities as the State has not been able to provide same services in the rural areas.

Jordan's debt crisis has triggered IMF restructuring reforms since 1989 [6]. King Hussein introduced the "New Liberal Bargain" that, until this day, shapes the behavior of the Jordanian policy makers who try to maintain "budget security" and "regime security" [7]. The Gulf War had also a huge impact in deteriorating the economy. Queen Noor in her book *Leap of Faith* discusses how the 400,000 "returnees" from Gulf countries have put more pressure on the country's resources [8]. After King Abdullah II came to power, the regime has emphasized on "economic development, continuing privatization, expanding trade, and luring international investments" [6]. These investments and business mostly run by Palestinian businessman has widened the differences between Palestinians in Amman and original Jordanians of rural areas; hence, putting the structural tension through one more challenge.

Jordanians of Palestinian origin constitute majority of the population. Contrary to what Jordanian authorities claim, it is confirmed by several sources that Palestinians represent the largest ethnic group in the country [5]. The majority of the population in Amman, capital of Jordan, is Palestinian. Despite their large numbers, the majority group, Palestinians, is discriminated by the minority tribal group of Jordan. This is unlike the common trends where majority usually controls the minority. Palestinians are not allowed full political representation; this is evident in the fact that none of the twelve governorships of Jordan have a Palestinians governor [5]. This explains the friction and hostility between the two groups in Jordan. There is a clear disparity between the two groups, Tribal and Palestinian Jordanians, in terms of their activities, benefits, political participation, and power. Palestinian Jordanians are limited with "tariffs up to 200 percent for an average family sedan, a fixed 16-percent sales tax, a high corporate tax, and an inescapable income tax" [5].

At the same time they contribute strongly towards the Kingdom's economy; however, they have almost no State benefits, no access to power, and fewer academic opportunities. The tribal Jordanians specifically the Bedouins mostly work in military, intelligence services, and government positions. This group enjoys State benefits such as lower prices at government-subsidized stores [5]. They enjoy stronger political power, academic and employment opportunities. Their political powers and benefits are far greater than their contribution towards the economy.

IV. FIRST THRESHOLD

The first threshold that surfaced the structural tensions to the escalation mode was the 1967 war. The flow of Palestinians into Jordan added to the population pressure as about 44 percent of the population was Palestinian refugees and displaced persons [9]. This aggravated social problems of poverty, unemployment, education provision, and resource distribution. A research conducted on two refugee camps in Zarqa and Sukneh by Ibrahim Hejoj indicates that the refugee camps suffer from strong economic and political problems [9]. He argues that these problems are due to political policies as "within the Jordanian society policies operate more on the benefit of some groups than others" [9]. This highlights the societal divide and marginalization of a certain group of people that created social tensions. These existing problems were heightened by King Abdullah's rise to power in 1999. He lived in Britain most of his life, hence, his lack of knowledge of the Jordanian society and Arabic language disconnected him with the Jordanian society. He depended largely on the Bedouin-dominated Jordanian Intelligence Department to maintain control and communicate with people [5]. As a result, these conditions weakened the pillars of Jordanian State.

V. ESCALATION

It is fair to say that the State in Jordan is a weak, inefficient, and hollow. One might claim that the state is failing to deliver its citizens' basic needs. This failure comes as a result of the scarce resources and workers' remittance being the main source of the State's income, corruption and mal-functioning of the State's institutions re-emphasize the State's inefficiency [4]. Government policies, decisions and actions are soaked in corruption and nepotism. Thus, favoring the close circle of the royal family and political elite over the rest of the population by giving them more privileges and services [10]. This has led the opposition in Jordan to question the royal family's credibility and the regime's efficiency. Jordanians facing poverty and high unemployment rate that hit 13.1 percent in 2011 is another variable contributing towards the State's failing economic equation [11].

The State's responses to the tribes' demands by helping them control the parliament and appointing them in the military, state intelligence, and government positions reflect the hollowness of this regime. The King has dissolved parliaments and amended the constitution to appease his loyal tribe supporters [12]. This accounted for the incredibility of the state and the deficiencies of the government's *modus operandi*. On the one hand, one can see

how the tribal Jordanians were not appeased by these decisions and still asked for: more power; less power to the king; and real reforms to end corruption [13]. On the other hand, the IAF has been inspired by the rise of political Islam in neighboring countries, and started organizing protests against the decisions of the monarchy; especially at the time the State Police has not been able to oppress the opposition as before [14] and [15]. This rise of the IAF does not only signal a threat to the single dominant tribal ideology the state has been sponsoring for decades, but also a threat to the current Jordanian political elite as Palestinian Jordanian businessmen dominate the pool of supporters of the IAF. This might cause a significant change in the demographics of the Jordanian politics.

For the first time, on 5th of October 2012, protesters demanded the King to step down announcing that their loyalty is for God and the land not the royal family. The protests reached another level after the death of one of the protestors in the tribal province of Irbid. The fact that this protestor was from a tribal province threatens the state even more; especially as we can see how the tribesmen reacted by killing the gunman and injuring 12 policemen in the attack on Al Wasatiyyeh police station in northern Irbid [15]. This does not only reflect the political instability in Jordan. At the same it underlines the weakness of the Police apparatus that has always been able to crush the oppositions in Jordan [16]. The State becoming hollow and corrupt—at the time Jordan lacks a charismatic leader like King Hussein—has caused an escalation of the structural tensions that pre-existed King Abdullah's coronation.

VI. FINAL THRESHOLD

In light of the political, social and economic tensions, it comes as no surprise that Jordan is vulnerable to the regional unrest. In the case of Jordan, The Arab spring is the threshold between escalation and possible crisis. The Arab Spring did not only put regimes into question, but it also gave room for opposition groups to rise. This has exactly been the case in Jordan. Inspired by the regional revolutions, the peaceful protests of the opposition groups in Jordan represent Islamists, leftists and tribesmen [15]. As the tribes' power has been difficult to control by the monarchy, the tribesmen have been asking for extended power in the regime and decreased control by King Abdullah II in the State. Despite the fact that King Abdullah has repeatedly attempted to appease the tribes by amending rules and dissolving the parliament, the increasing revolutions in Jordan appear to be yet another threshold for an escalating conflict between the monarchy and the people.

After years of misrepresentation and oppression, the Arab Spring has finally given the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood a chance to rise and demand reform. The Jordanian Islamic movement calls for higher representation and more democratically elected parliament members that will allow them to practice their politics and ideology [15]. However, the rise of the Muslims Brotherhood does not only threaten the single dominant tribal ideology that the monarchy in Jordan has strived to maintain, however, it could possibly empower the Palestinian Jordanians that have constitutes a large percentage of the population. Although the Muslim

Brotherhood is a Jordanian group, the majority of their support stems from the Palestinian population. With the Muslim Brotherhood's support, the possible empowerment of the Palestinian business elite will come as a threat to the Jordanian political elite who are currently controlling the matters of the state. With the empowerment of previously marginalized groups of people in Jordan, the country seems to be heading towards internal group clashes putting the country's safety and stability to question.

One should also put into consideration the spillover effect of events happening in neighboring countries like Syria and Iraq. There is no doubt that the escalation of events in both countries has a huge impact on the situation in Jordan. According to the UN Refugee Agency, there are 747,360 Syrian refugees in Jordan, and this number is projected to increase to 937,830 refugees by the end of 2015. This is in addition to the 58,050 Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers [17]. This definitely puts pressure on the country's infrastructure and resources, and thus highlights the government's inefficiency. It also adds to the social tension in the Kingdom.

Type of population	Origin	January 2015		December 2015	
		Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR
Refugees	Iraq[2]	58,050	22,830	57,140	21,920
	Syrian Arab Rep.	747,360	747,360	937,830	937,830
	Various	2,480	2,480	2,480	2,480
Asylum-seekers	Iraq	700	700	700	700
	Various	2,480	2,480	2,480	2,480

Fig. 2. UNHCR 2015 planning figures for Jordan. Data from <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486566.html>

One should also put into consideration the Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (known as ISIS) on the state of Jordan.

ISIS controls much of the Anbar province that stretches from the borders of Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia all the way to the Iraqi capital Baghdad [18]. This has put a lot of pressure on the Jordanian state, especially after ISIS claimed an attack on main check point at the crossing between the Iraqi and Jordanian borders, and burned a Royal Jordanian Air Force fighter pilot Moath al-Kasasbeh alive [18] and [19]. King Abdullah II of Jordan has went far with his rhetoric on ISIS to claim that the war with ISIS "is our war. It has been for a long time [19]".

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Jordan fits into the general framework of the model of early warning signs in a conflict. There exist in Jordan many background conditions for structural tensions that are the foundation for tension and political upheavals. These problems range from its tribal loyalties to the political and economical structure of the kingdom, and its large population of Palestinian refugees affecting Jordan's social and economic foundation, to the social division between tribal Jordanians and Palestinian Jordanians range. These structural problems were further escalated by the influx of large Palestinian refugees into Jordan after the 1967 war. This created an identity crisis and exacerbated the issue of poverty, unemployment and resource competition. It also highlighted the flaws in political policies such as favoring a certain group of people in the society over others, poverty, high unemployment, nepotism and corruption; and therefore, contributing towards social imbalance and discrimination. Taking the socio-economic imbalance further in Jordan was the eruption of the Arab spring. The Arab Spring provided a platform for opposition groups, citizens with grievances and the deficiencies of the state to all come to the surface. This is in addition to the spillover of conflicts and influx of refugees from the neighboring Iraq and Syria. Whether Jordan will be able to contain the situation, or whether it will fall into a crises such as neighboring countries will be determined in the near future by the unfolding events.

APPENDIX

Origin	Residence	Kind of passport	Family book*	Card of crossing**	Accessibility to services
Jordanian-East Banker	Permanent residency in Jordan	Five year passport with the national ID number	yes	-	Full access
Jordanian-Palestinian of 1948	Permanent residency in Jordan	Five-year passport with national ID number	yes	-	Full access
Jordanian-Palestinian of 1967	Permanent residency in Jordan	Five-year passport with national ID number	yes	Yellow card-family reunification	Full access
Jordanian-Palestinian of 1967	Permanent residency in the West Bank	Five-year passport without national ID number	No family book	Green card	Work needs a work permit, university education payment in foreign fees, ownership with the approval of a ministerial council
Jordanian-Palestinian from Jerusalem	Permanent residency in Jerusalem	Five-year passport without national ID number	No	Green card	Work needs a work permit, university education payment in foreign fees, ownership with the approval of a ministerial council
Palestinians of Gaza	Permanent residency in	Two-year temporary	No	In case of family	Work needs a work permit, university education payment in foreign fees, ownership

	Jordan	passport		reunification -blue card	with the approval of a ministerial council
Palestinians of the West Bank of Gaza Strip	Permanent residency in West Bank or Gaza Strip	Palestinian authority passport (LP)	No	Permission to enter	Treated like any Arab in Jordan: as long as there is a valid residency they can access services permitted for foreigners

Notes: * Family book: this registers the civil status of the members of the family (birth and marital status). ** Crossing card (or card of cross (the bridges)): a card given by *El Mutaba wel Taftish* (the inspection and follow-up department affiliated with the Ministry of the Interior in Jordan). The yellow card indicates that its holder is a permanent resident in Jordan and s/he is able to go to the West Bank because of the family reunification card s/he holds. The green card indicates its holder lives in the West Bank and his/her visit in Jordan is temporary (one should usually provide a reason, i.e. work permit, education certificate justifying their stay). The blue card is for Gazans who live in Gaza or in Jordan. It indicates that they were included in family reunification cards as being able to live in Gaza.

Source: <http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo025/fmo025-3.htm> (accessed June 23, 2009)

Appendix 1

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